

Sundays at Cafe Tabac Interview with Uli Schackmann

[00:00:00] **WANDA:** Welcome to Sundays at Café Tabac, the podcast. This podcast series is an extension of our film's mission to firm and extol the courage, strength and joy in our LGBTQ plus community through the perservation and sharing of our personal stories and the collective histories we live through and change. I'm your host, Wanda Acosta.

[00:00:21] **WANDA:** I am happy to welcome Uli Schackman to the newsstand studios at Rockefeller Center. Uli is a cyclist, an activist, and an adventure seeker. And in this episode, we're going to take you on a journey, a journey that Uli herself took in May 2017, when she and her loyal canine companion, Jackson, took off on a 6, 000 mile solo bicycle trip from Alaska to Key West, Florida, to raise awareness to the cause of HIV AIDS. What began as a daring dream come true, quickly became a physically and emotionally challenging adventure. She is with us today to share her story. Welcome to the studio, Uli.

[00:00:59] **ULI:** [00:01:00] Well, thank you for having me.

[00:01:01] **WANDA:** Where do we start? This is such an incredible journey. I know that you've been touring with your book.

[00:01:09] **WANDA:** You did write about your journey. And, uh, I'm sure you've encountered all kinds of questions and have been retelling your, your incredible story. You know, I think about you because I recently watched that movie, uh, Nyad, about Diana Nyad and her quest to conquer that swim. And it reminds me of your journey.

[00:01:29] **WANDA:** First of all, why did you decide on taking this long? Well,

[00:01:34] **ULI:** I've been engaged with the HIV AIDS community and the bicycle community for over 20 years. And we have been supporting and fundraising for local HIV AIDS agencies in Florida. And I got to a point where I needed something bigger for myself. I had a good job and I made good money, but I needed a change.

[00:01:55] **ULI:** And something just clicked and I wanted to take something
[00:02:00] on for myself, but also, um, something for community. And then I came up with riding my bicycle from the most northern point to the most

southern point, uh, which was first Tallahassee and then it extended to the next. Um, stayed and then when I was done, I was in Alaska and then I said, that's what I'm going to do.

[00:02:23] **ULI:** I'm riding my bicycle from Alaska to Key West to raise awareness and support, financial support for MFAR, the Foundation for AIDS Research. So

[00:02:35] **WANDA:** When you said you needed to do something for yourself and community, were you looking for a challenge for yourself, but also obviously, wanting to give back somehow.

[00:02:47] **WANDA:** That's correct.

[00:02:48] **ULI:** I needed something. Uh, I don't know if it was called midlife crisis, a break, a getting away. Something was calling and I had to follow it.

[00:02:59] **WANDA:** Now, had [00:03:00] you been cycling before this? How did you train for such a, a long trek?

[00:03:04] **ULI:** Yes, I have been and the rights where Miami to keep us every year we have been doing this.

[00:03:11] **ULI:** So every year I would train, but there was no way I could train for what was facing me. I was training in Boynton Beach in a development with paint cans and books in my saddlebags, Jackson in my trailer, and I wrote, you know, longer and longer days. But when I face Anchorage and I left Anchorage, it was overwhelming physically.

[00:03:36] **WANDA:** Now, I know that some of the rides that you were doing, you've been doing for 17 years maybe or so, you were doing the rides that were affiliated with HIV AIDS awareness. Then you train, like, you know, I think about, like, the long distance runners that train, train, train, and they run up hills and down hills and keep going farther and farther in order to be able to do [00:04:00] those long, long distance marathons, but they're certainly not tagging along a dog and saddlebags and a bicycle. This is quite a feat.

[00:04:11] **ULI:** Yes, it was. I, I never was a fast rider. I was always one of the last ones to come in. And I also had the AIDS memorial. bicycle flag on my bicycle, which

[00:04:23] **WANDA:** is a lag for wind and all.

[00:04:26] **ULI:** Yeah, it's a steep pole that's attached to my bicycle with a flag that's about five by three feet long and it has a red ribbon on it.

[00:04:35] **ULI:** So I brought little red ribbons with me for people who wanted me to carry their loved ones in memory. They pinned the red ribbon on the flag and I carried their loved one with me.

[00:04:47] **WANDA:** Why did you decide to do the journey? In support of AMFAR and in support of HIV AIDS, were you connected somehow to, did you lose people?

[00:04:59] **WANDA:** Were you [00:05:00] somehow impacted by HIV AIDS?

[00:05:03] **ULI:** Not directly. And yes, it affected us all when we saw the 80s, 90s, and how it affected, especially the gay community. I got involved because I started as a rider rep for a bicycle ride from Orlando to Miami about three days. And we had over a thousand riders, full crew, it was a mobile city that was moving along the road for three days.

[00:05:30] **ULI:** And just the presence of love, nurturing, caring, people could be themselves. was very powerful and I worked for them for two years and then I got involved in the next ride. So the ride changed from the Tangeray rides to the Walgreens ride, the Clear Channel, Beyond Grind and then it became the Smart Ride.

[00:05:54] **ULI:** So I was very much involved from the beginning and because the riders would come back [00:06:00] year after year, you develop really great friendship and community. And it was almost like family. And so, um, people were looking forward to the next ride. Now I

[00:06:11] **WANDA:** have to ask you, this was most of the riders, uh, that were affiliated with these rides, did they identify with the LGBTQI plus community?

[00:06:19] **ULI:** Most of them, but it was a straight, I mean, it was such a mix of community that you had old and young, uh, white, African Americans, um, Asians. I mean, it was, everybody was on this ride and that, that was what made it so beautiful that it was such a mix of people and everybody got along and it was so supportive and just very, uh, caring and

[00:06:42] **ULI:** loving.

[00:06:43] **WANDA:** And it was like this camaraderie that happened between all these people that were there for the same cause. It

[00:06:49] **ULI:** Yeah, and everybody supported everybody, you know, people were tired and couldn't go and people was cheering on like you really can do this because that was the goal for themselves to [00:07:00] challenge themselves, that they would be able to finish these 264 miles and most of them did so it was powerful.

[00:07:08] **WANDA:** Yeah, I can imagine when you come together with with like mindedness and community. It is very powerful when you go to these.

[00:07:17] **ULI:** I chose AMFAR because they shared the same vision as I did. And that vision was that we have a cure by 2020.

[00:07:25] **WANDA:** So your mission and your goal for this ride was to raise awareness, raise funds for The potential of a cure by 2020.

[00:07:36] **WANDA:** That's correct. Yes.

[00:07:38] **ULI:** And what didn't happen?

[00:07:40] **WANDA:** It did not happen.

[00:07:42] **ULI:** No, it did not happen. Yes. That doesn't mean you can stand in a powerful vision.

[00:07:46] **WANDA:** Exactly. But I think there's been incredible strides moving forward. towards the, the, at least the research and some of the advances that have been made for HIV AIDS.

[00:07:58] **WANDA:** Can you talk a little bit about [00:08:00] what were some of your encounters along this ride? You have your dog and which was, I guess, it's twofold. It was incredible that you had a companion, but also you have a responsibility for something else too besides yourself.

[00:08:14] **ULI:** Huge responsibility,

[00:08:15] **WANDA:** yes. Can you tell me a little bit about what that journey was like in the beginning?

[00:08:20] **WANDA:** What started happening that you were like, Oh my God, what did I get myself into? Or did you not ever think that way?

[00:08:27] **ULI:** Oh boy, a couple of times, but it started off right away. I went from Alaska to Fairbanks, so I went even further north than leaving Anchorage and heading south. I went through Denali Park or just past Denali Park.

[00:08:45] **ULI:** As soon as I left Anchorage, it was just cold, windy, and inclined right from the beginning. And I couldn't write more than 22 miles the first day. I was totally exhausted, bleated by the afternoon, [00:09:00] and said, what have I gotten myself into? I had a couple of spokes who broke, and I had to deal with that. I left Fairbanks, and I had to push a couple, I couldn't write, uh, Inclines or hills.

[00:09:13] **ULI:** I had to push the bike. It was way too heavy and there wasn't a low enough gear to get me up these inclines. So I left Fairbanks and had a really good ride. It flattened out and I had a little incline. I got off. I pushed and as soon as I got on to the plateau, I saw a big bear butt in front of me and got really scared.

[00:09:39] **ULI:** It was way too close for comfort and The bear also had a little cup on the right hand side. And, uh, I didn't know what it was, a black bear or if it was a grizzly. I couldn't really see because all I saw was this big butt in front of me. And, uh, I grabbed my bear spray and uncapped it and, uh, [00:10:00] was praying, my knees shaking, turning around, giving Jackson a sign, which was finger on my, uh, lips to let him know to be quiet.

[00:10:09] **ULI:** And I mean, fortunate. Thank goodness he is so well behaved. Otherwise, who knows what would have happened? But they are moved forward. Um, ever so slowly, I was standing and waiting and then they went to the right up a little incline into the woods and that's when I saw there were two and it was a grizzly,

[00:10:32] **WANDA:** a grizzly and two cubs.

[00:10:34] **WANDA:** Yeah. It's not good. No. Not good. Very

[00:10:36] **ULI:** protective. And they told me chrysalis, and it was early May, so they just got out of hibernation. And they told me they are aggressive, they're hungry, they're constipated. What did you do? What did I do? I froze.

[00:10:53] **WANDA:** Were you prepared for bears? Like, did you have like bear spray or, you know, a stick? [00:11:00]

[00:11:01] **ULI:** A little bit that didn't work. So I had to scream. And, uh, you know, when I was writing through out the day, make noise if you want, I can do it, but it's loud. Let me hear it.

[00:11:18] **ULI:** Yeah. So I heard the whole terrain. new. Okay. Somebody's coming through. That's how I let the bears and tigers and nobody else was out there. No, I'm coming through. But yeah, that's how I wrote all day. And I was very tense because I had to pay attention behind me in front of me to the sides. Um, yes. Cross the road.

[00:11:45] **ULI:** Buffalo came across. It's not fenced in. So that's the terrain. Right. I'm right in the middle of it.

[00:11:51] **WANDA:** Did Jackson, your dog, react to any scents or other animals along the way? Like to give you like a heads up?

[00:11:58] **ULI:** Yes. At night, I [00:12:00] was very uncomfortable sleeping. First of all, it's very cold, uh, snow on the ground.

[00:12:04] **ULI:** So I could feel the cold in my bones. Then the rustling outside, tried to make a fire, which was more of a smoke than a warm fire because everything was wet. And Jackson would, you know, if he heard something, he would growl a little bit, but if something would have come closer to the tent, he would have definitely barked.

[00:12:24] **ULI:** And I didn't use my sleeping pad back because I was afraid it would be. Stuck to my sleeping bag. So I left it open, which added another layer of, oh, I'm cold. Oh, my gosh. To cover Jackson and me.

[00:12:39] **WANDA:** Now, how did you find or decide where you would sleep? Was that really not a decision? Was it basically when you just got exhausted and you just plop somewhere?

[00:12:49] **WANDA:** Or did you kind of have a sense of the lay of the land and you knew where you were going to stay night after night?

[00:12:56] **ULI:** I was always spontaneous. I really didn't know where I would be [00:13:00] staying. I didn't know which route to take. I said in Alaska, there's

only three routes, which are the three main highways. So I had to ride on the highway.

[00:13:09] **ULI:** I made it up as I went along. And I learned very early that the journey is my life. You, you think you're going this way, but something happened, the road is flooded and you have to go back and take a different route. And I started to look the right as my journey in life. Mm

[00:13:29] **WANDA:** hmm. turns and obstacles.

[00:13:32] **ULI:** And be open to whatever comes.

[00:13:36] **ULI:** You know, I didn't get that till much later, um, like recently the last year where I got man, this, um, this journey was like a vision quest. I couldn't find the answers or the insights and I feel like I'm getting all the insights. So

[00:13:54] **WANDA:** you were able to kind of think about it after, after the fact and [00:14:00] realize. What the journey may have meant to you or what it was for you as a, um, symbolic of life or a metaphor for life.

[00:14:15] **ULI:** Yes, it gave me many metaphors for life.

[00:14:19] **WANDA:** Wow. I mean, it sounds like it was many, many different things and you could probably talk about, you know, so many different aspects of emotions and life changing experiences along the way.

[00:14:32] **WANDA:** What kind of encounters did You find with folks that you would come across or they would come across you because they must have been like, what is this woman doing on the highway with a dog and a AIDS flag?

[00:14:44] **ULI:** The encounters with all kinds of types of people, you know, I would always say I encountered Trump people, the Hillary, the Bernie people, the working class and the rich people.

[00:14:56] **ULI:** I mean, it was such a diverse encounter with [00:15:00] the people I met from very well educated to very poorly educated. And before I would have may stand in judgment, you know, and say, Oh, no, I don't want to have anything to do with them. Or I don't want to have anything to do with these people, but doing the right.

[00:15:17] **ULI:** First of all, I was so vulnerable on the road that I was much more open to the encounters. And I was also eager to talk to people because all day I'm very quiet and then myself or totally attention to the road and Jackson that. I was open to this conversation and encounters, and it was so enriching and powerful.

[00:15:39] **ULI:** I met this gentleman, Craig, uh, after I encountered the, uh, grizzly bear, and I was so paralyzed. I didn't know if I should move forward or backwards because I couldn't see which way the bear was going. went forward or backward. Is he coming back or is she coming back? And knowing they have a very good [00:16:00] sense of smell, I decided that I better get my butt out of here.

[00:16:04] **ULI:** And thanks goodness, a gentleman came with a big Ford 350 and picked me up. And during our journey, he lost my trailer. Oh God, how did that happen? Yeah, so we, we had to go, uh, and return and trove for another two hours to find now my beat up, scratched down and ripped trailer. Thanks goodness, because I wouldn't have known how to transport Jackson in my camping gear.

[00:16:32] **ULI:** And Right from the beginning there were very intimate sharing with the people I met and he shared some encounters he had with his son and you know, you sit next to a grown man sharing something that's really intimate and sensitive and caring and his relationship with his son and crying and I'm sitting next to him crying with him.[00:17:00]

[00:17:00] **ULI:** Because I got how much it affected him and how moved he was by that experience. So I started to pay attention very early to the encounters I had.

[00:17:10] **WANDA:** Yeah, there's something really powerful about strange encounters and strangers encountering each other. But, because I feel like they're more adept to talking about, at least in my experience as well, talking about personal things.

[00:17:26] **WANDA:** Because they feel like, well, what have I got to lose? I don't know this person. They don't know me. I'm never going to see them again. Or so you think, you never know, right? But they open up. And it's a really powerful experience. I feel of like, you know, just two humans coming together and allowing themselves to be vulnerable with each other.

[00:17:45] **WANDA:** And I love, and I, one of the stories that made me laugh in the book was of one of the encounters, I think his name was Dan. And um, He also gave you a lift and, and, and at one point and you needed a place to stay, [00:18:00] he offered his place and you weren't sure if that was safe to do, but you know, you needed a place and then you went over and he was engaged to be, he was engaged, he had a fiancée and the fiancée called and he had to kick you out. It was like, you don't want to get into fights.

[00:18:20] **ULI:** It was a funny story, and he picked me up, I was, uh, it got late afternoon, I was, um, I forgot the name of the town, but he drove by and had a whole band load of dog food because he was treating Malibu's, the, uh, Alaskan, um, uh, They don't care. And he used to bike and he stopped and he said, Hey, you need some help.

[00:18:44] **ULI:** And I asked where the nearest campground is. And he said, well, they're all closed because the Aurora season is open. They're not open for the summer season. So no luck. And he invited me to come to his house. And while we were sharing, I trust my gut [00:19:00] instinct and I said, okay, I feel pretty safe. He told me he's engaged.

[00:19:03] **ULI:** You know, he just bought the house, et cetera, and I felt pretty safe. So I went with him but in the meantime I had to reorganize his whole van, throw my bike, my saddlebag, everything in there and drove to the house. Now we're in the house and um, he's renovating it because he just bought it and he want to make a really nice bathroom for his future wife so she doesn't have to take a shower in the cold cellar.

[00:19:29] **ULI:** So he asked me if it would be you, what would you do and I told him, I said, well, if it's my house, my bathroom, I would put the bathroom here and the sink here and I already decorating it. Okay. So he cooked dinner. I washed my clothes and was sitting by the fireplace warming up and the phone ring and it was his fiance.

[00:19:49] **ULI:** And she and he said, I have this writer and uh, so they had their conversation and then he said, but all he said. And I [00:20:00] know we are in trouble. I just looked at my bed and I was like, well, I don't think I'm going to sleep in there. And the living room, they had, um, skinned, um, wolves, all the fur hanging there. loving.

[00:20:14] **WANDA:** Oh Lord.

[00:20:18] **WANDA:** Yeah. And he told me when he came back. So he had, he moved outside with his conversation and I don't need to be skinned here alive. Yeah. Right. That's exactly what I thought, but he came back in and he told me she is in the bush. She is taking a bush plane. And if I don't get rid of you, she's coming to get you out.

[00:20:37] **WANDA:** And I just looked at the furnace at all. I better move before she comes and skins me and puts me up there. I think that was a good move.

[00:20:46] **ULI:** loving.

[00:20:46] **WANDA:** But it sounds like you, um, so when you, when you needed to make a stop along the ride and needed to find some place to sleep or something to eat. You were encounter folks that were willing to help [00:21:00] you out, either to give you, point you in the right direction or offer a warm, warm space.

[00:21:05] **WANDA:** Is that true?

[00:21:07] **ULI:** Most times, yes. Sometimes I had to manage and improvise. Sometimes I didn't eat, especially in the morning in Alaska, Yukon. I didn't eat because I was too scared that my wonderful, tried food, uh, you know, lasagna and whatever I had would, uh, attract all the bears and get them able to join me for breakfast.

[00:21:31] **ULI:** So yeah, there were days, mornings I didn't eat. I hit the restaurant or a little diner and filling up my fill.

[00:21:41] **WANDA:** Now, once you get out of Alaska, now you're, you're in the U. S. and you're traversing many states. And we know that America is very diverse in their politics and in their homophobia. And as a queer woman, riding with a big flag, uh, [00:22:00] in support of HIV AIDS, did you, uh, what kind of reactions did you encounter?

[00:22:05] **WANDA:** Like, what What were people, if anything, saying to you about being queer or your, your journey, your wanting to do this? Did they question you? Did they ask you? Did you encounter any, uh, resistance or any homophobia?

[00:22:20] **ULI:** Yes, but very little, thanks goodness, because that was one of my fears I had. As a gay woman, I have my breasts removed, I have no breasts.

[00:22:32] **ULI:** And was that by choice? Yes, pre cancer, and then I choose not to deal with, you know, future cancer. So

[00:22:40] **WANDA:** it was a preventive measure you had a mastectomy yes, preventive.

[00:22:43] **ULI:** choice. Yes. And I didn't didn't want to deal with what may come. So my encounters where I trust in my gut instinct when I encountered people that If they were open, I would tell them, this is the AIDS flag, I'm writing for AIDS.[00:23:00]

[00:23:00] **ULI:** If I could sense something, I wouldn't say anything about the AIDS flag. And many, because they looked at me and they saw a female with no breast and the red ribbon, they thought it was the breast cancer flag. So I left them with that, I didn't correct it, and I left them with that. I didn't have to get to detail.

[00:23:22] **ULI:** Yeah, so I did have one encounter where I was in a restaurant and a whole group of about eight men with the red hats were sitting on the table and they were talking and I could overhear the whole conversation and it was all about the faggots and the immigrants and we are just here taking and destroying this country and I'm listening and each bite got harder to swallow.

[00:23:52] **ULI:** And my knees are shaking under the table because the symbolism of that red hat coming from Germany is [00:24:00] like the symbolism of, you know, what the Germans are. And I was so intimidating. I mean, it took me all my guts and courage to get up after I pay, walk over to the table and I gave him a thumbs up. Down first and I walked over to the table and I said, excuse me, but I couldn't tell, but overhear your conversation.

[00:24:23] **ULI:** And the person you're talking to, talking about is me. I am that immigrant. And let me tell you, I didn't take a penny from this country. I worked. And as all the immigrants who come here, I'm not here to take anything away. They do the work you don't want to do. So I, I left them shamed because they were all looking at me.

[00:24:46] **WANDA:** Pretty brave though. It takes a lot to like say that to a group of, you know, MAGA wearing. Men as a single woman with a dog on this trail, who's also gay. So that was a [00:25:00] risk.

[00:25:00] **ULI:** It was, but I couldn't, I couldn't hear it anymore. And I mean, even if I talk now, my heart is pounding.

[00:25:08] **WANDA:** Did they say anything? Did they say anything back?

[00:25:11] **ULI:** I don't remember. Maybe I didn't even give him a chance because I turned around and I walked out and when I was out of a sec, man, you are powerful. That was courageous girl. My knees were still shaking, but my head was really high. You were so angry. I'm really proud of that I stood up to it.

[00:25:30] **WANDA:** Yes. What surprised you?

[00:25:33] **WANDA:** What was unexpected about the journey? Did you have any expectations about this journey and did those come to fruition? And what? Was unexpected that left you like, wow.

[00:25:52] **ULI:** So my expectation was that I would have a wonderful time and I see the country and would be absolutely gorgeous. I [00:26:00] didn't expect the pain that came with it.

[00:26:02] **ULI:** My knees were hurting, my hip, my neck, the elbows. So I had a lot of physical challenges to deal with. Um, mentally, I had to deal with things, but I got so much out of trusting and so the more I did that, the more things flew. Um, it was almost like this person carried me over to this and this journey got me over to this and this one got me over to this.

[00:26:31] **ULI:** Everything was just in flow when I was not in resistance. Another thing I learned was if you're in discomfort or out of your comfort zone, that's where you grow. You're not growing when you're comfortable. And that was a really big, big eye opener that. Yes. You know, and I got to see my own strengths. I got to see my own [00:27:00] reliance, which when you're in your daily life and work and in your life, you, you don't get really to experience because you always have somebody do this, go there, manage this.

[00:27:13] **ULI:** No, don't do this. But out there, you are the one that's fully in charge of it. And you are responsible for the choices you make out there.

[00:27:24] **WANDA:** Now, I read in the book that sometimes when you were on the journey and you were feeling these moments that you just expressed, you sort of positioned yourself in the shoes of somebody that might be HIV positive and what, you know, that might feel like for them, you know, in that vulnerability and that unknown in the, in, you know, the having to maintain your strength and your integrity in order to move on.

[00:27:56] **WANDA:** And I know that some of, some of this path [00:28:00] for you, uh, cause we talked a little bit about this off screen, uh, with, with having encountered cancer and, and feeling those unknowns about what, what that might mean like for someone and, and, and then moving on in the future that this ride also had a lot of metaphors for the, of that for you.

[00:28:23] **ULI:** Absolutely. Yes. Can you talk a little bit? Sure. Uh, especially when it got hard, um, going up hills, uh, being slowed down by the storms and couldn't go anymore and had to push through it, I really got present to people living with something that's terminally ill, AIDS, um, cancer, depression, and in the past there would have been.

[00:28:49] **ULI:** Impatient and hard and I've been always hard with myself and also expected a lot from us to Be more caring and be more [00:29:00] gentle with oneself and have more empathy for ourselves. And it was a powerful, um, experience and I'm not saying you have to ride 6, 000 miles and expose yourself to, you know, mountains.

[00:29:14] **ULI:** But, uh, for me that was the awareness and, um, it left a big mark to be present to that and, and, and have my empathy and saying, Oh, that, that's for that moment, it was just a moment. That's what it must feel like when you, uh, have the desire, you want to move on, you want to, you know, go shopping, you want to do something, you want to meet your friends.

[00:29:40] **ULI:** And then. Whatever it is, the disability that you have, you can't, and how frustrating that must be. And I felt that frustration and I had to say, okay, this is all you can do. It's okay.

[00:29:56] **WANDA:** So there were life lessons of, um, Learning to be more [00:30:00] empathetic, life lessons of allowing yourself to be more gentle with yourself.

[00:30:08] **WANDA:** And also, was it difficult for you in the past to allow people to be gentle with you? To, was it difficult for you to embrace generosity from other people? Um,

[00:30:24] **ULI:** not really. I have embraced it. I wouldn't seek it and look for it or ask for it. If it was offered, I would take it, but I wouldn't have sought it. I was too proud, too independent, too strong, too stubborn, um, to ask for it.

[00:30:43] **ULI:** But if I received it, I would take it. Yes. And it's a nice change, yeah, to, to ask for it and also return it. But yes,

[00:30:52] **WANDA:** right, right. How did this ride ultimately impact your life and what was the ultimate outcome [00:31:00] for you and for your support of Amphar?

[00:31:04] **ULI:** It has opened myself up. to newness. I'm going down a different road now, a gentler road, a road with more love and compassion, empathy.

[00:31:18] **ULI:** And of course we all face our challenges if you're stuck in traffic or whatever, but recognizing it and, and shifting behavior and attitude. I'm in the process of writing a new book and that will be another journey. But it's a journey within, it's a journey on the red road, uh, indigenous people. So that is where the bike ride brought me to.

[00:31:46] **ULI:** And then also I had a closure with the right, um, with the AIDS flag. I had the AIDS flag for all these years. I just donated it to the World AIDS Museum and, uh, I think the AIDS flag [00:32:00] has a Perfect home now, where the memory and what the A. H. Memorial Bicycle Flag stands for can be honored at the, um, A. H.

[00:32:13] **ULI:** Museum. So there's a completion with that and something new is definitely, uh, starting.

[00:32:19] **WANDA:** Was AMFAR involved in your ride at all? Were they aware of your ride?

[00:32:23] **ULI:** Yes. And I got a little bit of support, uh, did it, um, uh, post and a print and, uh, share with people that I'm on the right. And if they want to support in my own, I can make a donation.

[00:32:40] **ULI:** And I also, uh, had a GoFundMe for Amphar so people could make their donation directly to Amphar. Oh, great.

[00:32:49] **WANDA:** And how did that go?

[00:32:50] **ULI:** I was disappointed. My goal was to raise 100, 000. I got 10, 000 sticks. Chuck from [00:33:00] Sticks, the music band, donated a signed guitar to the bike ride. So I used that as a raffle to anybody who donated.

[00:33:10] **ULI:** Oh, they donated a guitar? You said? Yeah, electric guitar. Oh, that's cool. All signed. Yeah. But we didn't have a winner. The winner didn't

want it. So I donated the signed guitar also to the World AIDS Museum where it is right now.

[00:33:27] **WANDA:** Okay, 10, 000 is amazing. Yes, it is.

[00:33:30] **ULI:** So, uh, it wasn't, I didn't, uh, you know, didn't get the cure, uh, that I said I would write for.

[00:33:37] **ULI:** And then also, uh, the 100, 000, but it was, I think it was 11, 000 or 12, 000 altogether. But they were powerful lessons in the right and, um, reflecting now, it was. You know, when you have a vision to share your vision powerfully with others, I know others will stand in fears and, and tell you [00:34:00] not to do it because different things could happen to understand that they come from a place of love.

[00:34:09] **ULI:** Because for me, it was always a place of telling me what to do. And it took me a while to understand that why they're actually coming from a place of love and concern and saying, Hey, this shit could happen out there. So be, be careful. But I had to tell them that this is something I needed to do. And I'm not taking on your fear.

[00:34:31] **ULI:** But I get that you're caring and you're concerned about me.

[00:34:35] **WANDA:** Did anybody ask you, like, that were Unaware or uneducated about what HIV and or AIDS was. Did anyone ask you that? And if they did, what was your response? Did you have conversations around it with them?

[00:34:51] **ULI:** Yes. Yes, I did. And that was very, very rarely.

[00:34:54] **ULI:** Most people were affected either personally by family members or [00:35:00] in their close, close net community. And then also they were educated to know what's happening in the world. But I did encounter, um, two people and I shared that it was HIV AIDS because they asked me what's the flag and I would share about the impact AIDS had, especially in the 80s and 90s, how many millions of people have died and how many millions are still affected with it and how important education and testing is.

[00:35:32] **ULI:** And I didn't have a bad, um, uh, experience. I just had, um, are and not knowing and, uh, left them with, you know, with something, but not a bad experience.

[00:35:51] **WANDA:** Well, that in itself, I mean, just knowledge and awareness, you know, so just you coming through a town and having conversations with people, having them [00:36:00] be aware of what the flag means, having conversation around HIV AIDS and how it's still, how it impacted and is still impacting our communities.

[00:36:08] **WANDA:** globally is a big deal because, you know, you've walked away and these, whoever that person was or those people were now have some knowledge around this issue, which can affect any of us.

[00:36:23] **ULI:** I also would videotape people and ask them if. Especially the ones that had encountered, uh, HIV in their families or in their close knit community.

[00:36:33] **ULI:** If I could videotape them, if they could speak. And they allowed you? And they did, yeah, and I posted it on YouTube. So, yeah, I talked to a lot of people about, uh, HIV and AIDS.

[00:36:46] **WANDA:** Well, I was looking, I mean, according to AMFAR, there are still 38 million people living. with HIV in the world. And they have made some strides with stem cell research and, um, immune [00:37:00] research.

[00:37:00] **WANDA:** And it's been interesting that, you know, folks have been having to take the, um, You know, the pills, uh, in order to be able to survive or to live long term and not have not have the virus be active in their systems, but between all of the research and some of the, uh, the cell research and the gene therapy and all of these things, they're actually finding that maybe you can survive without the pills, you know, and they're I mean, there are making big strides,

[00:37:36] **ULI:** right?

[00:37:37] **ULI:** That's correct. Yes. Definitely. I mean, compared to by the bars and with the cocktail of us demonstrating,

[00:37:43] **WANDA:** I lost so many friends. I lost so many friends in the eighties and the early nineties and those. In the 80s, the, the, um, the medication that was available was devastating.

[00:37:57] **WANDA:** Killed. [00:38:00] Right. So, I mean, we've made incredible advances.

[00:38:05] **ULI:** Right. And there's people from that time who are still alive today. They say, Oh my God, I'm so thankful for, you know, the research that has been done because I, I, I survived.

[00:38:18] **WANDA:** Yeah. Exactly. So, if anybody's interested in reading more about Uli's journey.

[00:38:24] **WANDA:** Her book is available on Amazon and it's called Uli's U L I apostrophe S Journey, Angels Along the Way. And the website is Uli, U L I journey dot org. Uli's book is, is wonderful. It's by Middle River Press and it is full of anecdotes and stories that she encountered along the way. The hardships. There are some photographs in there.

[00:38:54] **WANDA:** And it's just a wonderful read of all the folks and all the things that happened while she took the [00:39:00] 6, 000 mile trip from Alaska to Key West, Florida. Thank you so much for being here. I can't wait to hear about your next adventure and, uh, have a great time and, and good luck and keep moving forward with, um, your life's, uh, journeys and, and, and compassion and empathy and.

[00:39:24] **WANDA:** All of that. Thank you.

[00:39:26] **ULI:** And for you too. An amazing journey filled with adventures and spontaneity and enthusiasm. Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. Thank you. And you will be the first one to know when it comes out. Okay. I hope so.

[00:39:40] **WANDA:** And when we'll have another

[00:39:41] **ULI:** podcast.

[00:39:44] **WANDA:** Wow, thank you, Uli. That was an incredible conversation and so wonderful to hear about this journey.

[00:39:51] **WANDA:** To donate and learn more about AMFAR, the Foundation for AIDS Research, log in to amfar.org. And to [00:40:00] purchase Uli's book, visit Amazon and look for Uli's, U L I S, Journey, Uli's Journey, Angels Along the Way, published by Middle River Press. Or visit Uli's website at ulijourney.org. Thank you for listening.

[00:40:16] **WANDA:** For more, subscribe to Sundays at Café Tobac, the podcast. You can also learn more about us and our film at cafetobacfilm.com and at cafetobacfilm on social media. Please share your thoughts with us and if

you have a coming out story that you'd like to share, reach out to us. This episode was recorded at the Newsstand Studio at Rockefeller Center here in the heart of New York City.

[00:40:40] **WANDA:** Special thanks to Joseph Hazen and Karen Song for their support. See you next time.