

“HIV in My Day”

Interview #62

Participant: Roger Miller

Interviewer: Ben Klassen

BK: Great. Uh just getting started talking to Roger today. Thanks so much for being here.

RM: You're welcome.

BK: Uh, just to get started, could you tell me a little bit about your connection to Vancouver?

RM: Uhhm, basically I don't have a connection. I just was raised on the island and I just—this was the logical place to be, like I'd come over here for concerts and work was the main thing. Saw like Nanaimo's so small, and I've been here since I've been probably sixteen. So quite a few years. But I did go to Alberta for a few years. But my connection to Vancouver I've just always been home to me. I've got family in North Van. Some relatives, and that's about it for that. Like, just home.

BK: So when did you first come here?

RM: Uh forty years I guess, forty years ago. Maybe forty two, yeah. Like we used to come over for concerts and stuff when I was growing up, right? And then we just end up moving here.

BK: And uh, I guess you've seen the city probably change a lot over forty years?

RM: Yes, yep. I have seen the city change like it's—I spent a lot of time in the east end, and that's probably my lifestyle how I got HIV. Like I wasn't a living a healthy lifestyle, really. I'm kind of ashamed that I got it, but I can't do nothing about it 'cept treat it, you know do the best I can. I don't know, maybe ashamed isn't the right word. Kind of sorry, put it that way that I got it. It's like just for relationship wise, if you wanna meet somebody new you gotta go tell 'em oh I'm HIV and lot of people don't take that so good, right. So I tend to go for the people that are already like, maybe got it themselves or in my lifestyle type thing. I guess you would have to say. That's how I uh, choose to pick my friends type thing.

BK: So did you kind of settle in the downtown east side then when you came to Vancouver, or?

RM: Well I lived in the rooms down there for so long and it was always addicted to crack right. So there was just part of the—part of the—it just felt like this is where I'm supposed to be. Like when I'm in the addiction of crack and that, it was scary 'cause I never seen a way out. And then with the HIV I got housing and stuff, that was the one good thing about HIV like I did get the housing. I did the legwork for it though, like I didn't—everything wasn't just handed to me I had to go get it. And once you got—there's enough services and that I think out there to—you just gotta know how to get 'em, to get 'em. To get them services and I think a lot of people don't know how to do that. And that's what I kind of—I don't know if it hurts me but I'd like to help them people. Especially with the young kids and that I don't even see any reason why they should be getting HIV anymore like there's enough—you don't have to share needles. There are condoms everywhere. It almost is like neglect I would say, of somebody's own personal safety, would—like for to get diagnosed nowadays? I don't see any point of people doing that,

getting infected. It's kind of hurtful. Like that's still—but HIV when it's done I think they're gonna find some other disease. Right? Something else is gonna come up that's gonna be just as, if not worse. I don't have a lot of faith in the world anymore, personally. Like with Trump and all them guys, like the world's gone crazy. Scary. It's no hope. Personally I don't care if I live or die, like I've lived my life. And it's getting to the point where it's just rich or poor. And I'm definitely not rich. Like even just in the stores around here, I noticed like—I don't know if everybody else notices like I'm noticing, but just the way they treat you and—I have a problem with that too. Like I get angry about it, and I can't go yelling at people 'cause it's just not. I'm fifty-seven I used to do that. It doesn't get you nowhere. But personally I'd have to say that would be my worst nightmare is there's no hope right now. For the youth, for me. That's all I had to say about that but I—I'm not suicidal though. I've had a tough life but nobody's to blame for anything that happened to me except me. Like I take full responsibility for myself, right. But I wish things could be better, that's all. Just like everybody else. It's not about me owning anything or having much as my neighbour or something, it's not like nothing like that. It's just I get—I already got a couple of marks against me for one that I'm native, like in this world. And that's why I'm so happy about getting paid for this 'cause I've—I've taken all the bullshit that goes along with the racism and stuff, and never been paid. It just seems like everybody else has been paid 'cept me. Like at residential school, I grew up since I was three in the program in the government. And it was—it was hell when I was kid I can't even—I chose to block it out like the sex you know, in the group homes and stuff. I don't even—I just block it out how I deal with it. I think that would be part of why I'm so angry. Do I look angry? Kinda?

BK: Not really. But I believe you. I believe.

RM: I'm not trying to make anybody feel sorry for me, I'm not. Like—but—just the way things have just in the last little while it just seems like eve—the walls are closing in. And I just don't see a way out.

BK: Did you experience a lot of racism when you were in Vancouver in those earlier years?

RM: Yeah, uhmm through the—even through work and stuff like that, yeah. Even at my building I still like have it. It's just part of life I guess, but it shouldn't be.

BK: No, no.

RM: No. But it wouldn't do me any good to be angry to everybody else, 'cause they're treating me like that. You know what I mean? It won't do me no good to go be bad to somebody else, like I'd be part of the problem. So I mean I gotta thank myself that I know the difference of that nowadays. Before I used to not give a shit, right? What happened if I go to jail or I just lose it because somebody's bothering me right, and I assault them or—I've had a lot of that in my life. Like jails and stuff like that. And in jails, in the court systems, like it's all racism. I know for a fact because I've had people go up on the exact same charges as me and I get eighteen months in jail and the other guy gets three-month suspended sentence. And very same charge. We both did it together. Like, you know that's just in the court system. But for HIV I wouldn't say there's any racism around that for me. Like I haven't said you're a fag or anything like that to people, like people saying that to me. I've had no racism but I've had quite uhm, most people are kind of loving, comforting like about it, I've dealt with. Like places that I go, like VIDUS, eh? And Doctor Peter Centre, and they're all, they're just very helpful. And that's like why I go there because it does make me feel good. Have you heard much about Doctor Peter Centre?

BK: Oh yeah, yeah for sure.

RM: Have you heard lots of good things?

BK: Yeah. What kind of support do you get at Doctor Peter these days?

RM: A lot of support, actually. I go up there and eat, not just eat but I go up there and they have art studio, they have music therapy. And I have a kind of a counsellor there like with the art that's been through addiction and stuff like that, and doesn't look down on—like he's—he's not really he's a counsellor but he's a art therapist but I go there as a counsellor to him when I'm really having a rough time of things, say maybe at my building or something. And I go there and talk instead of acting out. And he sets me down and—and not babies me, he talks to me you know—he's just has a way of making you feel good when you leave and not so mad. 'Cause I am angry person I—I find. I float off the handle quite easy. I'd like to work on that. I try to, like I try to think of what I'm saying before it—'cause sometimes you open your mouth and say things that you didn't mean to say maybe, and you can't take back. And I used to be real good at that. And now I uh, I have to look at myself, you know what if I got so many problems and I'm always picking on somebody else that's just kind of putting my negativity on that, and I really want to work on that. 'Cause I don't want to hurt anybody like I—but I can honestly tell you like some of these mass shootings and that, I can see how they go nuts. I could see like people—society sometimes is like that, and maybe even worse in United States where all them—people don't wake up and say I'm gonna go shoot people for new reason. Or maybe in this day and age they do. But I don't wanna be one of them people. But sometimes I feel that way! Like I honestly, like I don't think I could live with myself if I hurt somebody really bad like, let alone kill them.

BK: So there's some community there for you at Doctor Peter these days.

RM: Very much so, I'd have to say. And it's—I don't always feel the best there because there's lots of gay people and that, and I think they're more gay-oriented. But they—I think sometimes they do forget that there's straight people there too. Which they—you know what that's just maybe that's just that staff member and that. But overall they're just great people there and like, they don't judge you. They're there to help you, right. And I just have to say I'm grateful. Truly grateful.

BK: Uhm, do you remember when you were first hearing about HIV, do you remember when that was?

RM: I always heard about, I didn't take much—'cause you always heard about it, it was in San Francisco or way far away, you didn't think it was right here. And back twenty years ago, you couldn't—you didn't have the needle exchanges and that around like they do, right? So it was basically if you had a rig you shared it. That's how I end up getting it, like I went to a few drugstores back then to try to buy rigs. They wouldn't sell them to me. Like I said, what if—what if I share a rig with your daughter, man. You want that? Sell me the rigs. Like I'm not a diabetic, what do you think it's for? And I'd have to go to the manager at London Drugs and that just to get rigs, to buy some. I really thought that was really stupid because the epidemic was starting there and those people were basically letting it happen, like not giving out clean rigs to somebody that want to buy 'em so they wouldn't infect anybody. You remember them days?

BK: Not really, no. But that's why were talking to folks who were around then, right?

RM: And then well once the needle exchanges they got really better. I think they've come a long way like it's almost—they've almost got it where it's not a health risk anymore, basically. You can have kids and that on 'em now. But it's still like—still always in the back of your mind. I could never go out with a

girl and tell her after I just slept with her that oh by the way, even if I had a condom like, you know. I couldn't do that I got too much of a conscience that I would never do that. God forbid that's—and it's against the law I think now too, but it never used to be I don't think, right?

BK: Yeah those are not easy conversations to have.

RM: No, no. It's really tough even when you're drinking and stuff. Like it's—I just gotta get up and go like move and you know get away from the situation if you find yourself in that. And I—I've found myself lots with hookers, like just a lot of hookers 'cause of that. Couldn't have a good rel—like I've had in twenty years I've had maybe three girlfriends for like four or five years. One for four years, one for five years and maybe another one for three years in there. And none of them have HIV. So, then did accept me. Like, but we always just had safe sex and stuff right. But you could tell it was hurting them. Like I don't thing any of them ever really thought of marrying me or settling down type thing, right. That's all I have to say about that part. Anyway, what else do you want to know?

BK: Well just thinking about these earlier years again, uhm was there information within your own community about HIV that was going around at the time? Or was it kind of still like gay men talking about gay men or?

RM: Well it was—like you heard on TV and stuff about HIV but nobody really knew like what it was or if—like when I first got it I thought I was gonna be dead in a month right. It was really—I almost threw up when I found out. And was really—I was really scared like, it was a tough thing especially by yourself. I kind of cried a little bit by myself, then I put on my tough face and just carried on, right. I didn't tell nobody for a long time. And I uh—I got treatment right away so that's—maybe that's—I got on the pills and that. I'd have to say my heal—like the pills have basically saved my life. I take 'em everyday I don't miss. I just take one pill. And, I think I'm pretty healthy. Like I'm always non-detectable when I take my bloodwork. But I got hep C too which, that's probably gonna kill me before the HIV will. But there's a thing, you can get that looked after now too. Which I'm thinking about doing that, but we'll see what happens because I don't—like I said I don't have any long term plans. I'm basically just staying alive until I get my money out of spite. And that's only because I just I think I went through enough shit for that money. I want it. At least even if I got it for a day and I give it to my cousin or my family right. 'Cause I know this other guy he just got—he got ninety-seven grand he—three months it was gone. He was in limos and throwing his money up in the air, he got robbed for seven grand. Like at a bus stop. Passed out. Seven grand in his pocket, gone. Isn't that awful?

BK: That is awful.

RM: Kind of serves him right though. Well you know, walk around with seven grand when you're drinking. Doing drugs. Not sure I wouldn't took it off him. [laughter]

BK: It's an awful lot of temptation right there.

RM: Isn't it? I'm just trying to be honest with you man.

BK: So when you were diagnosed, do you remember what the doctor said? Did the doctor say actually hey, there's treatment now?

RM: No they didn't say a heck of a lot. They just said we got bad news for you man, you gonna sit down. And he said you came back positive for HIV. And I just kind of what. In my head I totally wasn't real

surprised right. 'Cause I was living a lifestyle like hookers, downtown, you know drug—lots of drugs and shit. It's just how can you care about, like if you don't give a shit about yourself how're you gonna worry about uhm, not getting it like you know safe. And that's where I think like a lot of people think still it's your own fault that you got it. It kinda is. But it could happen to anybody man. Could happen to the cheatin' father that comes home you know, out cheating like at the hookers or whatever right, in the suburbs. Like it does—it does and just maybe it's not so in the papers and everything. Like downtown east side is notorious for like blame it on the east side well it wasn't the east side that brought AIDS to—to the forefront. Those poor souls. Lotta poor souls down there. And still to this to day it's so awful like it's almost heart wrenching going through there. I just chose to stay away from there. It's too sad, too dangerous. People don't give a shit no more.

BK: And that's probably part of the reason why you moved out of the downtown east side?

RM: Yes totally. Living in hotels like—yeah but a lot of people been evicted out of my housing and that. At McLaren. I don't know it just—I just chose to just be—be all to myself type thing and I don't associate. And I been there and I don't have too many problems there right. 'Cause housing's just so—it's the top of the precious, it's almost precious now. I don't wanna ever be on the street like if I was out begging in front of seven eleven I would hang myself, I would. If that's the way I had to live, like from day to day I wouldn't do it. That is hell, for me. That would be literally hell. And who's to say the other side isn't better man? Eh? I'm sure not scared.

BK: So how did you get connected to care I guess after diagnosis, you said you started treatment really quickly?

RM: How did I? I end up going through I think native health actually got—got me hooked up with St. Paul's, Doctor Montaner. And then there was—I think a lot of it was Vancouver Native Health, because I was a client there for twenty years. And they kind of set me on the right, 'cause I had housing through them too. When I told you I lived in another apartment? I was paying three-seventy-five out of my money and they were paying eight something. And I had like a one bedroom over here on Harwood, indoor swimming pool. It was good. But I got to where I couldn't afford to live there no more even with the subsidy, because it went up forty bucks—or four percent every year. I was there for three years. So even my end went up a hundred and fifty bucks, on my end. So I had—I had to move. But then my girl she passed—passed away. And so I went to the island for a couple of months and I gave back my subsidy, and then I could never get it back for some reason. Or I could've but it would'a took a long time, so I had to go through all the rigmarole for housing again until I got into uh—I got into the Worwell Hotel and the manager there was—they were just opening this place and she became the manager so she got me into this place. And now she just quit, like six months ago. The manager? And now we don't have any manager. But she got me into that housing there, that's how I got there. And I've been there since. And I'll probably be there 'till I die. But it's very—sixty people have died there since I've been there. Sixty. That's a lot. That's not dying from HIV that's dying from OD'ing. My neighbour went, the guy across the hall all in the same month. I felt like I was surrounded by death. And then there's a lot of spirits in that building. I've had quite few, like I've woken up big bruises all over me. Yeah my cat, they really bug my cat, the spirits. I've smudged and I've asked them to leave, like you can ask them to leave right? But I had to get an elder in there to smudge, and he came in and then they came back again, because there's so many people passing. I don't know who it is or what was there before then but—I know I believe in the spirit world. 'Cause I actually seen a spirit walk right through my wall. Like half a

person, that was a trip. And I wasn't stoned or nothing. That would be the only thing I'd have bad to say about my building, other than like the spirits. But that's uhm, can be fixed if I smudge and can do the right things right? You can ask them to leave and then if they ain't leaving then—you got—I ask just no negativity spirits right? I don't want no dark cloud.

BK: It must be a lot easier to look after your health when you have a nice place to live, opposed to like you were talking about those rooming houses in the downtown east side.

RM: Yeah I got my own bathroom, kitchen. It's small but it's nice, I got mine nicely—it's cozy like we get free cable but I pay for internet, and then I got free lights. So I got a couple of—like summer's really hot—so I got couple of air conditioners that—I got everything I need. I'm very happy there actually. Not super happy but I'm—enough to just close my door and let things go on outside, right. I don't need to be a part of it and get all bent out of shape over my neighbour, like I was saying my neighbour telling me about the addiction and that, he's got his—I can't. I can't go back to my old ways of being ornery and out to get him, because it ain't worth it, if you live like that, that's not living. Like being angry like that, or hateful. But I'm not one to take—uhm somebody doesn't know me saying something like that, like who are you are you better than me you live in the same place I do buddy. You got HIV too, why are you so much better than me. And that's what he told me, he's better than me. And then they wonder why a guy gets violent. I know there's no violence in my place and I know that so it's right in my face, like forefront. If I gotta be a wimp and then say nothing I gotta do that, right. 'Cause I like my house. It's not worth losing my house over. But other than that, I don't know I have my—my life's pretty alright I guess. My cat would have to be a big part of that, like just bringing my caring part out in people. I never had a pet before so it's really hard—like different for me. But I love my little cat.

BK: When did you get the cat?

RM: Uhm, maybe eight—well it was about eight months ago I guess, nine months. She's coming up a year. She'll be—yeah she'll be a year in another month or so. I gotta get her fixed though, I might—like it's hard to get her to the SPCA because she wouldn't get in her bag that I take her out in, and then the neighbours will say that I'm—if I get her in the bag and she's squealing they'll say that I'm abusing my cat or something, I don't need that. That's why I let her—she didn't go to her doctor's appointment, but it's my job to get her to that too, isn't it? Like her health is not me just feeding her and making sure she's alright, her health is part of my duty too, right? Because I gotta get her to the doctor. But she's not around any other cats so she's not gonna get pregnant. But she's squealing and everything like that. Yeah I know.

BK: That's a good reason to take them to the vet. Sounds like a good reason. After you got diagnosed did you have any sources of support at the time, like did you connect to any organizations or have any—

RM: Uhm yeah I did actually like Native Health pop—was a big help. Then I got hooked up with Doctor Peter's Centre maybe fifteen or ten, twelve years ago maybe. I got hooked up with them they're doing great. And uhm that's about the only ones that I really, uh VIDUS which they're just kind of like a study group, VIDUS. But they're like about HIV and that too like that's their main thing right. So they're—I'd have to say just them three would be what I've had for support.

BK: What kind of support did Vancouver Native Health provide?

RM: Uhm counselling they have counsellors there, they have just the pop—pop [inaudible] drop-in centre where everybody else is HIV and they have outings and they have lunch and they have you know, a TV room and arts and crafts and all sorts of stuff. But they're closing down here in April I think, or another month or something. They lost their funding. But I think the doctors are gonna stay for awhile, I'm not exactly sure but I know they're closing down in a month. You didn't know that?

BK: No I didn't know that, that's really too bad.

RM: Yeah but they seem to think that there's enough other places for people to go, that's what they're saying. I don't know, I hope they'll get something for the people down there 'cause they need it.

BK: Well especially for indigenous folks right, because there's not—are there are lot of other places for indigenous—

RM: I can't—no. But they might open up, who knows another one, something. Because they—I can't see them, there's a lot of people that go there. I don't go there I'm not really a member too much anymore, but it still kind of hurts me for the other people that it's closing down for the other people. I'm not selfish, other people need help and support just 'cause I don't go there, other people, lots of people do.

BK: Folks down there.

RM: And where they really need it. They're the bottom of the totem pole them people like and then they take that, they'll have nothing. But I don't know, people have resilience and they always end up getting by. Like something else comes up or—that's how I've always been actually. Maybe lucky or, I've always had enough to get up and get on my feet and do what I got to do. And I feel sometimes I had to give this guy ten buck on the street 'cause he was laying on the street, it was thanksgiving. And I just—I said how about if I gave you ten bucks if you get up off the sidewalk and just put one foot in the front, you know front of the other and go get a meal. Or something right. I didn't have lots of money but I wanted to give the kid a chance to get up off the ground because he just—it was sad, man. Seeing a kid like that, a young kid. On the street. Sidewalk. So I know I got compassion. Which, I never used to.

BK: And resilience, too.

RM: Yeah, I think so. But even from my own family I get kinda shunned you know, like my sisters and that. She just—they're educated and they don't live my lifestyle, that's all. And so I don't hardly talk to them. But it's uh, it was kinda hurtful. It was—it would be my biggest thing I think would be loneliness, like with this. Sometimes I gotta talk to myself. It's easier now that I'm getting a little bit on the internet and stuff. I'm just learning, right. But I get around pretty good on it. Like I'm learning, like everyday I spend a little bit of time. And I pay for it, that's why I'm doing it. It's quite a lot of money to put out every month if I'm not going to use it. So that's kind alright, you can go on it, you can find anything you want on the internet. But I—I—that's where I get my guitar lessons and uhm—I don't want to be one of them people walking down their street looking from my phone though. Because that's an addiction too. Everything's addiction, but I think like if it's in uhm, moderation, right. I think people just tied up too much in the internet. I don't know what the big thing is about it. I—I try not to judge people without looking at myself first. Because I got—I'm the first one to say I got lots of bad traits type thing, like addictions and if I could do it all over again I'd do it different, put it that way. But it—what's done is done too, I can't change things, right. I can change my attitude and my way I treat people. But I'm tired of hurting people and hurting, I just wanna live a nice quiet existence. You know for my last few years

and I don't want to be on the street. I'm quite comfortable in my little place like—I don't have a lot to look forward to though, like I just don't really give a shit about like, next year at this time. Is that bad? I don't know I just find it's no hope for me. I'm not gonna ever get a job, like a good job. This is it, for me. But it's not the worst, not the end of the world, not yet. I think I'm coming off as I'm feeling sorry for myself, no. I don't want you to think I'm feeling sorry for myself because I'm pretty happy with, with me. I try to think of other people before, right. That's all I can do. And for the HIV I've had it for so long I know what's up with it. And we don't ever have to go through what them poor other people went through, like the past already back in the eighties. I seen it on like just the documentaries, oh it was awful like all them spots all over you. Like that's what really terrified me about HIV, just the end. Where it's like—you ever seen Philadelphia and that where the guy's laying in the bed? I don't ever want to be that way. I think I'd rather go for an OD or something and just be done with it.

BK: But now you're undetectable?

RM: I have been undetectable though, the whole time. I got it but I'm undetectable. But nowadays you could even have kids and that, if you wanted. If you found the right person right? Because I think they drain errr I don't know what they do but I know it's possible now. It's just come hundred—hundred-and-fifty-percent I think since the eighties, like the care and the pills. I'm not even sure if they're helping people in Africa now like the pills and that, 'cause I know it's a big thing over there and they don't have near what we got. And that's really sad, for me. Like all them other poor little people, kids and stuff. But I think we gotta help our own people before we help other people like—I don't know like that kind of chokes me about inviting all these people come to our country and you just have to look at our streets and see how many of our own people are on the sidewalk man, and how can we afford to do that, to bring all these people. Humanitary. Well no I think they should start by picking some of these people up off the street—off the sidewalks here first. And get them housing. Before we started whipping in—because that really pisses me off sometimes you look and then you see these people coming, sure they came from war-torn countries and that but they're all in brand new apartments and they got businesses, they got brand new cars and our people are on the street. It just doesn't make sense to me how—how—I know we gotta—we're a compassionate country, Canada. But I think honestly we gotta look after our own people first. And I know if that's selfish. Not me. Our own people that are on the street and need help. Like I think we should look after that first.

BK: We've got a lot of poverty in our own backyard still, right.

RM: Very much so. But then again you gotta feel for these people that come from war-torn countries but we didn't start that war. That's kind of sounds selfish from my part but I gotta be thinking about the people here man. There's so many people here that need help. Where's this money coming from? And then another thing with the government! Them people there—actually write our cheques for disability—them people scamming off the like—just got caught them—sergeant arms and that, like in Victoria. Millions of dollars they just take right. And what's gonna happen to them? Nothing. But I raise my voice at somebody I'm going to jail. You know? And that's the reality of it. If you work for the government you almost got a ticket to jail. [grunt] me jealous 'cause I'm not a government worker, but it's pretty sad. Like what those guys get for lunch money, man. That's what they're giving me for all the hell I went through for nineteen years, and they got that for their lunch. In a year. You know? Fifty grand okay it's a lot of money but it's not that much money. But I'm gonna spend it wisely. Actually I probably

won't spend it wisely. I'm gonna go to England for a couple weeks. Maybe a month. That's my—that is my only goal.

BK: Sounds pretty nice.

RM: I hope so. I'll be able to afford it. You know this guy I told you that was going around throwing up his money and that, you know where he cashed his cheque for ninety-seven grand? At Money Mart. You know how much they took off that? Probably five grand, six grand. That's crazy eh? I could hardly wait till I get mine. Fifty's—that'll be the most money I've had, like at once. I just hope I don't go nuts. I know it's coming and that it's not like it's burning a hole in my pocket or I'm like—I don't go out spending all my money when I get my cheque or nothing so it's nothing—I think I'm mature enough to just do things right. Like I'm not going to spend it all on dope and shit. I've already tried to quit dope. What else do you want to know?

BK: Well we were talking a little bit about stigma earlier, did you experience a lot of stigma around HIV?

RM: Stigma how do you—what do you say stigma is?

BK: Well like people reacting negatively to you because—

RM: Well I didn't go around saying that I had to everybody. But like my family and that when they found out, yeah I would have to say it was stigma. It was like eww like type of thing. Yeah, but not so much more. But I don't go around advertising that I have it either. Like I don't go to somebody I don't know or if I just meet 'em and say oh by the way I'm HIV. Like it's really none of their business if—right, it's not like I'm sleeping with 'em or nothing. So I don't—I don't go around advertising it and I try not to—I'm not ashamed to talk about it, but like I said I don't go advertising it. Everybody like basically my building's HIV so everybody there is—it's not a big thing. There's a hundred units in my place so it's kind of like I feel at home because so many other people got it around me, it's not a—it's not out of the norm at my building. And with the problems, 'cause most of them have the same kind of problems like addictions or—so it kind of feels like part of there, I would have to say. In a good way. That would be the big stigma about that. Yeah I would have to say I feel pretty happy about where I'm at, because that's why, because everybody else has got it the same as me. So if I'm around my own kind it feels alright. But for me to like go to say an AA meeting or something I wouldn't go up oh by the way I'm HIV or you know. Doesn't come up like that. But I think there's people just—it's not a big thing anymore like HIV like it was in the eighties. Because you don't see people dying. Like going through the trauma and that stuff that they went before. Think it's pretty well accepted now. Well not accepted but—I don't think people like brush it under the rug or nothing but if they don't see it, it's out of sight out of mind I think. I wouldn't feel comfortable going up to a group of people saying oh by the way I'm HIV. I would probably feel pretty uhm, I wouldn't say ashamed, I'm not ashamed but I'd feel uncomfortable. Put it that way though. Because it's nothing to be proud of, that's for sure. But it is what it is, man. It's not—I'm glad I'm not the only one that has it, put it that way. And I've learned a lot from other people too, like that have had it for a long time and dealt with it, just talking to other people that have it makes me feel comfortable. And alright with myself about it. And I'm glad I've never infected anybody, so.

BK: You talked a little bit about in the past, when you were in Smithers the reaction that you got there around that.

RM: That was—that was horrifying though. When it was—that was shameful—that was just—felt like I was being shamed in front of the whole town. It was one of my cousins that went around blabbing it. To make her feel better. To make me feel like a piece of shit or whatever I don't know. But I did not just—didn't deal with it very good I left town—I left there and that was enough after the cops came and seen me. I just that following week I came back here. Yeah that was—but that was quite a long time ago and it was—maybe they were just worried about me coming up there infecting everybody or something. I don't know what their problem was, I didn't ask 'em. But that was kind of very shameful, I would say. I felt ashamed then. When the police came and even just them talking to me man, it was very—I wasn't crying or nothing but I was—I was very kind of hurt. I said what can I say to you man, I'm not doing nothing wrong. And it was a woman there too, like a guy and a girl cop. I don't know I just—I knew I didn't do nothing wrong so I wasn't too worried. But I like I say I was ashamed. About the only time I was ashamed though. And that was only 'cause, I think it was a hurtful thing that was being done to me. Like it was—nobody had anything to gain from it. And I—I wasn't doing anything illegal like having sex with somebody without them knowing, or not with a condom and that. I was doing nothing wrong. Yeah it was a hateful thing I'd guess you'd say. And then to walk around a little tiny town like that it was just almost impossible. I watched a thing on North of Sixty, you ever see that show? It was like a native show way up north of sixty and there was a guy that came in there that HIV and that whole little village was just—'cause they didn't know nothing about it. And they kicked him out of the village. And it was a very—it was a powerful episode. And then—'cause this guy he was a gay guy but his rich boyfriend or whatever got him a helicopter out of that little town and brought him back to Edmonton or whatever. It was a good, it was really touching but it was—that was kind of the same thing I went through. Like going back to a little town and your own people. Oh okay we gotta burn everything like the sheets and that. And it was kind of how I felt, I would have to say.

BK: Yeah you hope that that doesn't happen anymore.

RM: I hope it doesn't happen to anybody else, yeah. It's never happened to me again but it's—I'd hate for even anybody else to go through that. But people if they don't know they're gonna—if they're not educated about it they're always gonna think the worst, right. It's not a—I don't think anybody went out planning to get HIV. It's awful, actually. I don't know, like I said I'm fifty-seven I've lived a pretty full life.

BK: What else have you done to look after your health in the last, you know since becoming positive you talked about getting housing, you talked about going on medication, anything else?

RM: Well just my exercise that I do and my mental health I been basically working on with my counsellor and that. Like I don't have a lot of education and that so it's—I could only go through like the places that I go through for help. Like Doctor Peter's is very, very helpful. And pop or uhm positive outlook yeah, would be the—they've educated me on what's up and they've helped me. Which I'm very grateful for. But I you know, I wish it was never around any of this, like—but if it wasn't this it would be something else too. I think once they've gotta get a handle on the HIV and get a cure for it, something else is gonna pop up. Hopefully not, I think I'm more worried about the chemical like Trump and them, than dying from HIV. The world's crazy right now, like I've—I've been around a long time and I've never been scared for people. Not for me. But for other people the younger generations that've got a—I'm scared for them. Like look at this city how there's no—like the affordability, for housing. There's no way any of these kids are gonna get housing, like be able to buy a house. Where are they all gonna go? That's what I

kind of like, I think about a lot. The younger generation and—I'm scared for them. I think we gotta, we should be scared for them. Unless nothing comes up and everything gets rosy again, we can only hope.

BK: I sure hope so. Because it is looking pretty—it is pretty scary out there right now.

RM: Yes, yes. Like I said I've never been this scared, like for people. Well things are just—you gotta know that bubble's gonna burst sometime, like for the housing prices and that how much—how much can they go up and up?

BK: Yeah. Well yeah and when you saw Vancouver when you were younger it was not an expensive city.

RM: No, nope. Like I used to work with lots of guys like in masonry man they bought their houses for like thirty grand, or thirteen-thousand-dollars and they're selling them for like half a million, a million back, way back a few years back. Now they're way over that, but I don't know, I've never owned a house, so. But if I ever did I think I'd probably go back up to my res, and get a house. But I would never do that. But if I wanted to, like if that was the only choice I would, like for housing if I was gonna be on the street or something. Because my res, if I went up there I could probably get a house if I had to. But I don't know I'm—I'm kind of a city guy, not a country bumpkin. It's not my cup of tea up there.

BK: Well it sounds like you have a lot of nice supports here in Vancouver right?

RM: I do, everything's here for me.

BK: Whereas there, there might not be those same supports.

RM: Nothing. Yeah. Even in Nanaimo like they didn't have too much support, like and that's a fair sized place. They had a little bit though they had uhm, an HIV place where you can go. Like it was kind of like a pop thing, it wasn't nowhere as big. But they got a few programs on the island. But not near as—I don't think they got near as much help as they need, over there. Because there are lots of people with HIV, right. I don't think a lot of people go around saying they do, but there's—I surely I know I wasn't the only one up in Smithers. And they were making out like I was the epidemic of it up there. It was actually when you think about it's quite funny. But it's not. Not when it's happening you. Yeah but to think we were back in the green—like in the old days people. It just it kind of blew my mind. But that's enough about that part, because that was depressing. And I can't blame 'em, but I can blame 'em. I can blame them just because they didn't know. Like what there's a word for it stupid because you don't—or because you don't know enough about it or something.

BK: Like ignorant?

RM: Yeah, yeah that's the word I'm looking for. That you don't know enough about it to—you've heard what you think and right. I don't know.

BK: But it's still very hurtful.

RM: Sure it is. But some people get off on that, like hurting other people. Like making me feel shitty so it makes them feel better. Something wrong with them I think. That's where you have to—I have to mark my like, that's where my friend Scott comes in where he you know what, why are you even worrying about that Rog. He just puts me on the right path. Like it's just, don't even give that guy a nickel of your space in your head. It's not worth it. And that's what I just love about this guy man like he's just that, rock. I guess you'd have to say. Or I would have to say. And not personal like a friend. But he's just

someone that like I talk to and every time I talk to him I feel good. And that's worth lots to me. And he doesn't judge. Because even knows that he is way better than me he doesn't act like it, you know that means a lot. He's like an equal and he's—he's just a good person all around and I'm very grateful that I have that in place. Because there's lots of time on a daily basis that I just—too much stuff adds up and gets me angry and gets me in that little space where I don't like, I don't want to be. It's just good for nobody. Including me. You can answer that if you'd like.

BK: Oh no, it's not for me. Yeah what advice do you have for—we were talking about younger generations right, earlier—what advice do you have as a long-term survivor for those younger generations?

RM: I would have to say just be safe sex like use condoms and don't use drugs and you don't have to worry about getting HIV. Because it's not fun and they might, you know some people got it because they get extra money on the welfare and they went infected themselves so they could like—oh yeah that was happening for awhile. Didn't you hear about that? People were infecting themselves so they can go on disability and get—like that's awful. Because disability's paying pretty good—like not pretty good but a lot better than single person. So people were getting infected on purpose. That's crazy eh? But that's how desperate people are. They want housing, they want homes. I would never do that. But that would be the advice is just don't use drugs or you know, don't share needles. Have safe sex and you don't have to worry about it. It's no fun. But I think they got enough education out now like even in schools and stuff like that, they got people that go around and they got—they're so free with their—the uhm—to prevention of around town and everywhere now. Like even with the crack pipes and that they're giving out, that's all prevention man. Or the needles. I think they got lots of, quite a bit of that now the prevention. I don't see any reason why people should be infected anymore. If you just—just have a little bit of common sense man. Just a tiny bit, you don't have to have a lot. But there are you know, back when I—it was way different when I got infected because you couldn't get rigs and stuff. It just wasn't around. And if it was I would've never had it. And I can't say that I've done anything great but I've—I can say I'm a survivor, I've survived a long time. But I'm not proud or anything of myself.

BK: That's definitely an achievement, being a long-term survivor.

RM: Yeah, I think so. It's just goes up to my character though. I don't know we were brought up—we were just that generation where I was brought up, it was—we were brought up kind of tough like we could get through things. I've always had somebody kind of like that I could talk to, like. For guidance and stuff like that. But for the majority of the part I've just, you know you face things alone. And that's tough sometimes. Because you wanna talk, sometimes talking is that the—it just helps so much. I used to be so nervous about coming to things like this and that's how I started feeling better about myself talking. 'Cause it's just like being in like a psychologist type thing some of these. It is you get things off your chest, I never walk outta these things feeling bad I always feel pretty good like that I've—maybe somebody can get something out of this, right. I don't know what else to say.

BK: Well I think that's kind of it for my formal questions.

RM: Alright.

BK: So is there anything that you wanted to add or anything that we didn't touch on that you thought I would ask?

RM: Nope. I've had enough of questions for today.

BK: Well then I'll just say thank you Roger and I'm going to stop these recordings.

RM: Thank you.

