

“HIV in My Day” – Interview 81

April 23, 2019

Interviewee: Darrel Chaput (DC); Interviewer: Ben Klassen (BK)

Ben Klassen: Just sitting down with Darrel this morning. Thanks so much for being here and agreeing to share your story with me today. Just to get started, can you tell me a little bit about your connection to Vancouver?

Darrel Chaput: I moved out here when I was thirteen years old. I actually got kicked out of the house and I hitchhiked from North Bay to Toronto and lived there for a couple of months. And when summer came along, I hitchhiked out to Vancouver, and I've been here ever since.

BK: So, when did you end up in Vancouver roughly? What year was that?

DC: In 1973. And I've been living here since 1973. I kept on going to school till I graduated, and then after I graduated, the first year out of school, I owned a club called The Dance Machine, and it was kind of like a zoo – it was a gay, straight, whatever type of club, anything went type of club, right? It was really popular, and it went until 1981, and so that kept me busy for years, for those few years.

BK: Where was that club?

DC: It was on Seymour Street, right downtown Vancouver here, Seymour and Smyth, where the Orpheum is now, there used to be a hotel there called the Commodore Hotel, so we leased the whole building and opened up the club there, and it was really popular. But it's gone, the building's gone. And that's how I got into Vancouver, right? I graduated, I lived out here, I had the club, and then after the club, I went into the garbage dump business. You know the blue boxes everybody puts in front of their – for recycling? That was my idea. I went to C-Span and the District of North Vancouver, and we started putting these green boxes all over the place in North Vancouver, and that's what got it kicked off. They're big companies and they took my idea and ran away with it, but it's all over the world now, so that's kind of, I got that – there's a couple of books with my name in it, knowing that I did this, that it was my idea, right? Because I went into the dump and I went to their planning department, told them that they should have a contract for somebody to recycle here, and they didn't know what I was talking – the District of North Vancouver didn't know what I was talking about, recycling garbage. Like, it was all industrial garbage in there, and so I made a really good living doing that for five years. And then, I had a store on Granville Street. I've always worked for myself. It was fun.

BK: What was Vancouver like in the late '70s and early '80s.

DC: Oh god, it was so – that was the sexual revolution, and it was full-blast. I was hooked up to the night clubs and all that. It was way different back then than I imagine it is now. I don't go to clubs anymore, but I don't think they – they had clubs with back rooms and all that sort of thing. They were fun though. It was fun a time, the music was really good – it was a lot of fun. It was a lot more freer than it is now. Like, it's too serious now. But it was really a lot of fun, and it

seemed like – well, I was young, so I guess I was better-looking, hey, but I always had company back then.

BK: Yeah, I don't think there's many clubs with back rooms now.

DC: No. There was a club right across the street from my club that had one. I didn't have one in my club because there was too many – my club, it catered to both crowds, not just gays, but there used to be, you know – some guy would get a sex change, and he would lift up his dress and show me how he got a sex change. That would happen quite often. I was also the DJ there too, hey, so that kind of put me front and centre.

BK: Which club was across the street from you?

DC: It was called the Playpen.

BK: Yes, we've heard about that place.

DC: Well, there was the Playpen South, the Playpen Centre, and the Playpen North, and they were all the same [laughs]. There used to be an after-hours club I used to go to called Faces, and that was a lot of fun. I could talk about the night life forever back then. It was a lot fun. It was a good time to grow up, especially when you're seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, right through to your thirties almost. But after the '80s, towards the – you know, '85, '86, it really changed with the AIDS coming into play. And I got it. I didn't know I had it then though. Like, I went to get checked for it, but I was too afraid – it took six months to find out an answer. Like, they would check your blood, but it had to go to San Francisco or something like that, and I guess through the mail and all that, or however they got their answer, but it was a six-month wait period. And so, I kind of knew I had it, but I was too afraid to find out the answer, so I never went back, so I just started, you know, like... It didn't slow me down from having too much sex, but I always used condoms and stuff after that, because that was a way to protect yourself. And just in case I didn't have it, I didn't want to get it either.

BK: When did you first hear about AIDS or HIV or whatever it was called back then?

DC: Well, because I was tied in, I knew a lot of gay people and stuff, and being bisexual, I heard about it as soon as it came out, and I would say – because you know, up to that point, I never even got crabs or VD or anything like that, you know? A lot of my friends did but I never did, right? I always thought that I was really careful. That's not how I got AIDS, HIV. I got it because somebody left a needle – it was in a laneway, it was a really hot day, and I guess somebody shot up, and it was a glass needle. I dropped some plywood over to these rich people over in – what's the name of that part of town? I forget the name of that part of town, it's just by Point Grey there. They bought a whole bunch of finished plywood off of me, and I was waiting for the man to come out and pay me, and this older lady asked me – there was a couch in the laneway that she saw, and she asked me if I'd throw it on my truck and bring it back and we'd throw it in the basement, and I did. And so, I'm waiting for this guy to come back to pay me, and there used to be video games back then, like Pac-Man and whatever, and so I had a roll of quarters in my pocket, but it was loose and in my coveralls, and all my quarters fell into this

couch, and so I was digging out my quarters and something kept on picking at my fingers, but I used to work pretty hard back then and my hands were pretty calloused, and so I just thought it was a piece of glass or something like that, until finally the needle just poked me and hit the bone of my finger, and it really hurt. I pulled it out and it was stuck in my finger, and I could see blood going down my wrist because the person must have shot up and saved half of it for later on. And because it was in the sun, right, this was done and the sun had incubated it and kept it alive. That's how I figure I got it, because that test did come back positive, right?

And I drove right to the hospital, but I was kind of frantic and I kept on screwing up and taking the wrong streets because I was kind of in shock, because the thing that was going through my head is that the easiest way to get this disease was through a needle, right? And I never used a needle in my life before that. I did a lot of drugs, but I never used a needle. I was totally against it. And so, I went to the hospital and got checked out, but I never went back for the answer until one day, I'd never been sick before, and I got really sick one day, and I just stayed around... This is when I had my store on Granville, and I was so sick, and they finally called an ambulance for me, because somebody said to me, "You look terrible. How long have you been sick for?" And I thought I was only sick for three days, but I was sick for three weeks or something like that, but I lost all sorts of weight. They said, "It looks like you got AIDS or something like that." So, they called the ambulance, and sure enough, they found out within minutes if I had it or not, or they already knew when I showed up there that I had it, right? And then I met Dr. [name] and everything. That's how I figure I got it, but I don't know. I never went back for the test, but they did have a record of me having it, so that's the only time I went and got tested, and they tested me the day that I went in too when I went in with double pleurisy pneumonia. I was in the hospital for, oh, over half a year. Yeah, I was really, really sick. I almost died. I've been in that hospital many times, almost died. But for some reason, I always come back, you know. I even had near-death experiences and I remember them, right?

I've seen a lot of bad things happen towards me. Like, I had friends, and I've always been really open that I had it, right. The only people that I wasn't open about it was my family, because I wasn't close to them to begin with – I got kicked out really early and all that. The reason I hitchhiked out here to Vancouver was because they were always talking about moving out here, and my dad owned a dairy, and he sold it and he was going to move out here, and they moved out years after – like, I had already graduated by the time they got here. And my sisters came to visit me one day and I was going to tell them, and the first thing she said, came out of her mouth was, "Oh, I bet you got AIDS. You got AIDS, don't you?" And I looked at her and I said, "No, I don't." And she even asked my doctor – my doctor wouldn't tell her. Just the way she asked me – it was like, "I got you" or whatever. But I lost a lot of friends too – like, a lot of friends. Like, you couldn't touch people back then when you had it. Ambulances – I remember there was this guy who got into a fight on Davie Street, and this guy hit me with nunchakus, and he pushed my nose on the side of my face, he broke it. And the ambulance was called, and the first thing I told them was "I've got HIV," and they didn't want me in the ambulance. They put on gloves right away, they didn't want to touch me. And I said, "Look, I'll just walk to the hospital. It's just right around the corner. Sorry for bothering you." I went to the dentist to get some dentures because I threw up and I drove over mine, and it was on Davie Street just up the street there, and I booked an appointment and stuff like that, and at the very end I said, "Oh, by the way, I'm HIV positive." And the waiting room was full of people, and the receptionist made every excuse to

break that appointment that she could think of, and I said, “Don’t worry, I got it. I won’t be coming back.” And so, I even made my own false teeth for years and stuff – like different things like that. It affected me in a lot of ways.

I had this girl that I used to go out with and I really loved her, and when she found out I had it, she came to visit me twice, and the last time she comes to see me, she says, “I don’t want to ever see you again.” And I tried to go visit her twice since then, and one of the last times wasn’t that many years ago, maybe two years ago, and she still is the same. She doesn’t want anything to do with me because I’ve got it, right? You know, my sister, I have a sister who wants nothing to do with me, because she figures why get close to me because she doesn’t really know me. She was born after I left home and she doesn’t want to get to know me because I’m just going to die of HIV anyways. It’s not a death sentence anymore, you know? Like, I could live to be a hundred for all I know.

BK: And you’ve been living with it for thirty-five years already.

DC: Yeah. And I feel more of an affect from smoking cigarettes from that period – has a harsher effect on me than anything else really, I think. There’s other things that are wrong with me, but I don’t really think it’s the HIV’s fault, it’s just lifestyle things and stuff. And I got into car accidents and stuff like that, and so sometimes when you get hurt, it takes years for something – like, I get really bad headaches because of these car accidents. This car accident, I got rear-ended by this girl going really fast and she was going 70 miles per hour when she hit the back of my truck. I was at a red light and she pushed her motor right into the passenger side of her car, and it pushed me into the middle of the intersection, and I was in a three-quarter ton truck. But I was fine because I was healthy, and nothing – I went to see a physio, but I even stopped doing that because it was a joke thing because they’d put those little pads, like those Dr. Ho’s things where they give you little shocks, and I thought it was a joke, so I stopped going. Many years later, I started getting these headaches. Now I get cluster headaches and it’s because of this bone growing where my head attaches to my spine and it causes me to get really bad headaches, and that’s why I’m in the Dr. Peter Centre. Like, I get really severe headaches and I can’t function, I can’t take care of myself very well, because they’re really severe. But I don’t have one today.

BK: Good. Yeah, that would not be good.

DC: I can function on them though. I’ve learned to, you know. I’ve had them for so many years. But I sure have talked to a lot of people about me having HIV, because I figure even if it stops one person from going out and getting it through something I said – it might be even something stupid that I said. You don’t hear that much conversation about it, really, in public, and if it is, it’s usually some smart-ass comment or something like that, right? I know people that are twenty-three years old that consider me one of their best friends because they can talk to me about stuff like that. There’s this girl who comes to see me, and she messes around quite a bit, and she’s always telling me, “I don’t know how to say no when it’s the heat of the moment, and if they don’t have a condom and I don’t have one either, I do it anyways. What’s the matter with me?” Stuff like that, right? So, I told her that there’s a pill that you can take nowadays, that Truvada or whatever. Like, I get those too, but I know people that don’t take their pills, and if they have extra ones of those, I just ask them for them and so I give her a bottle every so often of

them. Because I don't want to see her – she's a sweetheart, she really is, she's just a little mixed up. She's out sowing her wild oats, and I had an opportunity to do that, right, where the worst thing around was VD, and I didn't even get that. But nowadays, it's too chancy. But I heard it's turning to a different direction. I heard that if you've been on the HAART treatment for a long time and you show up with no viral load and you have a high CD4 count that you can't pass on the virus anyways, and that's amazing to think that that's how far we've gotten ahead. And my doctor said this to me when I was going out with this girl, and when I used to go to the doctor, I would always bring her with me because I wanted her to know what was going on with me too, and she told her the same thing. It shocked me when I heard about it, because I didn't think they were that far ahead, right? So, I think there's going to be a cure pretty soon. You just get that feeling. I hope so.

BK: Me too. Undetectability, U=U, that's amazing that you can't transmit the virus if you're undetectable.

DC: Yeah, I think everybody should still be careful, you know, because I know at some point, I got it. It was just from a needle left in a couch. And I don't believe that you can catch it from a needle in a couch under normal circumstances because if the virus gets to a certain degree, it kills it if it goes below a certain degree, but it was left out in the sun, and the couch was a black leather couch, and it was hot. We had a heat wave for a while, I remember, at the time, it was really warm out that summer – it didn't rain for quite a few days and it was always hot. So, I've gone over it with doctors, talked about it with different people that are in the know about that thing, and they all tend to agree that it was because it was incubated. I don't know. But if I did get it through sex, I hope I had a good time, [laughs] but I don't think so. I mean, I've had roommates that were Hell's Angels, and they would even ask me how I catch it, and I'd tell them, "Oh, I got fucked by the football team," and I'd look them straight in the face and just walk away. They got a little bit of a joke out of it, but I'd usually tell them the truth afterwards, because I didn't want to leave that in their head, right? But I'm surprised, there's some people that weren't very supportive, but there's other people – I have made such good friends in my life that they're life-long friends, right? So many of them that I couldn't even count them on one or two hands, and I'm a really lucky man in a way because of that, right?

I've made a lot of friends too that have died – like, a lot of friends that have died, because I was right in the beginning of it, and people were dropping away like flies. There's so many people I know who have died, I can't even remember all of their names. There's a wall down on the beach there around the Aquatic Centre, and there's a wall and it's got a whole bunch of names of people that've died, and so many of those people, the names, I know who they were, these people. I have a hard time reading that wall because it really takes me back to the days where... There was this guy – you know the story that sticks most in my mind of anybody dying of AIDS? It's this guy, he looked like an athlete. He was this black guy that was half white and half black, and he was about six-foot-three, he was extremely good-looking, but he was really athletic. He had a body something like yours but all muscle, right? And he must have weighed close to 200lbs, and he looked like he was the top shape he could ever be in. And I watched him come in, and in a two-week period, I watched him go from 200lbs down to about 130lbs, and every day, I had money and he didn't, so I would give him money so that he could phone his mother who lived in Newfoundland, and he would talk, and he was trying to get her out here,

right? It was a big family but they were poor, and there was no way that they could come out. And do you know what he did – do you know how he got it? He went partying one night and he shot up some coke. It was the first time and the only time he ever did drugs, and he shot it up and he shared a needle, and he got it, and it killed him. I only knew him for two weeks, because that's how long it took. Some people, it used to kill them right away, hey?

I have an uncle who got it. He was in the Dr. Peter Centre too when the Dr. Peter Centre used to be over the hospital instead of the building that it's in now, and he died there in 1999. But some people it would just take right away, and I don't know the reason for that, because I was one of the first people ever to get MAC [mycobacterium avium complex] and they didn't know what it was. They were treating me for TB, even moved me into the TB clinic, and I wasn't allowed to go out, I was in lock up. I was there for quite a while, and they found out I didn't have it, I had MAC, right? It's like a cousin of TB, but it's not contagious. I went through a lot of things medically. Anything that could have happened to me, it seemed like it did happen to me, but I always beat it, you know? I've had friends that – I have been friends – the last time I was in the hospital when I almost died was – I have a son and a daughter too, and they both know I have it, because my daughter got cancer when she was seven years old, the same time that I was in the hospital one time almost dying. That's another story – I won't get into that. That's really sad. I don't even really like talking about that because it was so hard on me back then. She was too young for me to let her know what was going on with me, because back then, kids and stuff like that, I had to be careful. I had to tell her when she was a bit older.

My family's been really – my son is so supportive, like even to this day, right? He was sending me over something from the Internet about how they figured – a cure for AIDS. He's always sending me all these write-ups and stuff like that. He gets really excited because I adopted him. My daughter is like my own, but my son, I adopted him because he was an eleven-year-old boy that was hooked on cocaine and he was living on the street and he was with this pedophile, and I recognized the pedophile's face because it was on telephone poles, and I recognized the guy, right? And then it hit me, this kids with – he's probably trying to do this kid. And I was doing some plumbing over at this guy's place, so I told the kid – I gave him \$20 to take my toolbox down to my truck, and I told him I'd take him out for dinner if he wanted to, and he said, "Sure, I'd like that." And he didn't move in with me right away, but within two months, he was living with me, and he had to go to court because he was illegally at large from Edmonton, and he escaped from youth detention or something like that. So, I told him he'd have to turn himself in and I'd get him a lawyer or something like that, because he can't have that hanging over him.

And so, we went to court, and the judge was going over the case and listening to the prosecutor, but I wrote a letter to the judge and I explained to them why he was living with me, and I told her I had a disease, and how he's a big help around the house. Like, when I get sick, there's things I can't do, and he always helps out with them. And the judge was really impressed, because the judge asked the prosecutor to read all the charges that he'd been charged with before, or his record, his youth record, right, and the prosecutor was going on for five minutes. And she told me things that he never told me. Like, he didn't tell me very much what bad things he did in his life. The funny thing was he lived with me for three-and-a-half years before I took him to court, right, and in those three-and-a-half years, the police didn't know where he was, like he didn't get into trouble. Like, he stayed at home. He was FAS, fetal alcohol syndrome, and so I did all the

reading I could on it, and stuff like that, and kept him busy. But we got along really, really well. I was more of his buddy than I was his father, right? The judge asked me if I would adopt him. She said that if I adopted him, she wouldn't put him back in youth detention, because she can't see anything good come out of that. She said, "For some reason, we haven't heard from him in three-and-a-half years, which is a miracle." They heard from him two, three times a week before that. So, I agreed to it. The judge got the papers done up for me in family court, and within two weeks, he was my son, right? And he ended up being the neatest kid that a father could ever have. And him and my daughter get along really good. My daughter is a real sweetheart too – she really is. I've never had an argument with her once in her entire life. She's thirty-three now and my son's thirty-six, and they get along really good. They always got each other's back, and we're a family, you know? But I brought them up myself. So, I've had kind of an interesting life.

BK: Yeah, it sounds like that.

DC: There's other things like that too, but they don't really have anything to do with the HIV, but the HIV affected me my whole life. I mean, I've been – there's times I've had really high CD4 counts, like super high. Like, my right eye, I got an operation done to it because I was blind in it – some virus got in it and it wasted my pupil away, and so there was this operation that they could do, and they replaced the front part of my eye, but kept the back part of my eye, so a long operation. I went to his office and tried to talk him into giving me the operation, and finally I said to him, "I know why you're not going to give me the operation. It's because I'm not worth it, I'm HIV." And when I said that, it must have hit his buttons, right? And he said, "Okay, if you can get your CD4 count up to 300 and have no viral load," he says, "I'll give you the operation, but we'll have to wait for a donor." So, I went in there one day and I told him my CD4 count was up to 800 and I have no viral load, and about three years after that, I got the operation, I can see out of my eye again. So, people that say that they don't do things for people because they have HIV, that's a lie. You just have to be – it's the same as anything in life. You want something done for yourself, you just have to keep on pushing people, right? And even the medical – I find the medical people are the same way – they're the same as anybody. You have to really want it.

BK: You have to advocate for yourself sometimes.

DC: Yeah, you do.

BK: Well, what has your experience with the medical system been as a whole with HIV over the years?

DC: You know, St. Paul's hospital, I can't give them enough praise. I was one of the first people ever to be on 10-C, and that floor, it was and still is something special. The nurses up there, they're amazing. There's something almost angelic about them, you know, the way they care about people. If anybody can tell stories about HIV and stuff, it would be them. There's some of them that have been there since the – I forget when it opened, I think it was '94 or something like that – 10-C, it was turned into an HIV floor. But I've been up there. It's a joke now when I go up there, they think I'm coming in for a tune-up, right? But the last time I went there, I almost died. The reason I was dying was because – what do they call it? Lack of – old people and babies die from it – lack of caring... Like, what do you call it when you just give up on life and stuff like

that? My headaches were really, really bad – like really bad. Cluster headaches are really painful, and they were going on for more than three months, and I just didn't feel like I could take it anymore, and I just – I wasn't try to commit suicide or anything like that, I just didn't care about life anymore. I didn't care if I lived or if I died, right? In fact, I thought that dying would be a good thing – I wouldn't be in pain anymore, but I didn't really want to. But I guess when you tell your body that, it starts shutting down, and my body was shutting down to the point where I couldn't even talk. Like, when I was talking, it was like I was talking in tongues. I could understand people, but even when they'd wheel me down the hallway, they were doing all these tests trying to knock me out of it, as I was going down, on the stretcher going down the hallway, looking into the rooms, and I thought I was the only person in St. Paul's hospital. And everything was really weird, like I was doing the steps of dying. But my son and two of my really close friends just stayed with me overnight, and they wouldn't let me sleep, and they made me eat these chocolate bars and drink this water until I snapped out of it, because I didn't even know I was dying, right? And what really did it is that my son started crying, and he says, "What's the matter with you. You're dying. You don't care." That was kind of hard to take, but that's when it hit me, right? Like, he was serious. But we're all going to die someday, so I don't really worry about dying, I just worry about, like, my kids and stuff, which is normal. But him, I don't know what's going to happen with him if I die. I hope that [indecipherable] if something like that happens. It's funny how you can get so close to your kids. Do you have kids?

BK: No, but I am very close to my parents.

DC: Yeah, you know what I mean then. Is there anything that you wanted to ask me?

BK: Yeah, I have some more questions. It sounds like you have a lot of really good support now. What about earlier in the epidemic?

DC: There was – I had friends that just stopped seeing me. Like, I'd go over to my sister's place at Christmas time or something like that, and the kids would come and run and try to sit on my knee and that, and I'd watch my sister's grab the kids and put them in another room, and just keep everybody away from me, right? That went on for quite a while, quite a few years. That part was really shitty – that plays really hard on you, because you know, we all have feelings, right? But even like as years went – up to about, oh gees, 1993 or something like that, it was pretty bad. There was really – like, I was afraid for my life at different times because – like, I think the only reason I never got killed is because they thought I was going to die anyway. There was some – do you know who were – the nicest people to me were bikers. My friend was a Hell's Angel, and he found out I was in the hospital and I was coming out and I didn't have anywhere to live, and this was around when my daughter was born, right before it. And he found out that I – her mother was pregnant with her at the time, but he came and put me up, and he would take me to the club house. Like, one of the things I had to do is I had to tell him that I have it, because I didn't want anybody to do anything to me or think that – they're pretty promiscuous too, right, and I didn't want anybody getting me girls and stuff like that, because I think for a long time, I didn't even have sex with anybody. It's a miracle my daughter was born without HIV – I don't how that happened. I don't think you can pass it on to your kids, eh? Can you?

BK: I think it's quite complicated...

DC: But I did end up getting this girl pregnant, [name], and she – but she never got anything from me – she was pretty healthy. I was pretty health back then. That was – I'm trying to think if I had it then. It must have been right at the time that I got it. Yeah, it would have been around the time I got it because – so, I don't know if I did have it or not at that time. I forget when I would have had to meet with her to get my daughter, but she wasn't born with anything, but she did get cancer when she was seven years old – she had Wilms tumor, but I don't think that had anything to do with me, I think it was just something that happened to her. And I've never passed it on to anybody, I know that. There's been – I always felt really dirty. Like, I was pretty promiscuous when I was younger, right, and so just because you get a disease doesn't stop you from having those feelings, right? There'd be people coming onto me at different times, and I'd always say no because I felt so dirty. I thought – I looked at myself as a shotgun, that I could kill you slowly, you'd die a slow death because of going to be with me. That's what I thought. Because after a while, when people keep their kids away from you – when people do things like that, after a while, it wears onto you where you think you are, you're dirty and stuff like that.

I know quite a bit about HIV, but I didn't – to this day, I still don't know the answers to a couple questions, like can you get HIV from giving somebody a blow job. I thought that – I never went into a hot tub for years and years and years. You know why? Because I thought because I had HIV, if I went into that hot tub, if I had any sores or any liquids just seeped out of my body, like they do with everybody that goes into a hot tub, then I would contaminate the water, and the water would be hot and it would keep it hot enough to transmit to somebody, so I never went into hot tubs. And I went to a lot of parties where there were hot tubs, but I never went into one. One day, my buddy said that he was going to change the water in the hot tub, and I said, "Nobody's going to go into it?" He says, "No, it's really dirty." I said, "I want to go in to see what it's like." So, I hopped in it, and then I told my doctor about it, that I finally went into a hot tub. She said, "Well, why didn't you go in it before?" I says, "Well, because I didn't want to pass my disease on to anybody." She says, "You can't get it that way. The water would kill it right away." And I didn't know these things. It's funny, for somebody who has had it, there's still different things I don't know about it because nobody ever really sits you down and tells you, you have to find it out through brochures or word of mouth, and stuff like that. I don't trust word of mouth so much. But I try telling people that sexual contact, you can get it through that, but I think you get it more through needles, don't you? I really don't know the answer to that.

I think most of people got it through needles, I've got a funny feeling. It seems to be the case. Mind you, there's a lot of people at the Dr. Peter Centre who are gay – like, for sure are gay. But you'd be surprised how many – like, there's straight guys that are in there too and they get it too. But I think it doesn't matter if you're gay or straight anymore, you can get it. Every variety of person has it. It sure made its way around. A friend of mine just died not too long ago, and he was a good guy, and he was straight. One thing I find in common that most people that have HIV have had a fair run-in with drugs, right? I was one of the very few that never shot up. In fact, I was totally against it. Maybe that's why I didn't get very sick is because even when they have it, they still continue – there's times where it's very lonely, there's times I was very lonely, and you don't feel very good about yourself, so I would get high, right? The only reason I didn't use needles is I really thought it was stupid thing to do, that it would really make you sick. I even

started believing that the drugs I was doing were keeping me alive, right? That's really stupid thinking. There's people to this day that believe that, you know, that they believe that's what will keep you going because it keeps you active. I don't believe that any longer.

BK: Where were you getting information from back then? You said some brochures. Was there a lot of information out there?

DC: There's information out there now. See, the way you can talk to your doctors and your nurses now is way different from when I first got it. It was like you'd go in and get a test and you'd ask them what the outcome of the test was, and it was almost like it was none of my business, or I'm not a doctor or anything like that. Why do I need this? I used to have to go in and get my medical records, because you can go to the hospital and you can have them all, and you have to be smart about doing that too, because if you're going to get your records, get the ones from the doctor, not from the nurses, because those just give the ones for your blood pressure and your temperature, the things they do to you every day in the hospital. But everything else is doctor stuff, and they won't give you that part unless you specifically ask for it. If anybody really wants to know how they're doing and their health is, that's a good way, and that's how I learned some of my stuff. And the other thing is I read books, right? But still, I had an argument with somebody that has HIV the other day that was telling me he thinks he got HIV by giving somebody a blow job. And I said, "I don't think so. I don't think you can get it that way." And I don't know the answer to that because I've never read anywhere where you can or you can't get it. I don't know the answer to that. Do you know the answer?

BK: Again, I think it's pretty low-risk...

DC: Yeah, that's what I think too. I mean, if you just went and got all your wisdom teeth pulled out and the same day you started going around to the back rooms of clubs or something like that, I mean you'd probably get it, but it would have to be some rare circumstance, right? I don't understand why I even got it, because they say to you, even back then when I got it, that even though it was by a needle being pushed into my – drugs being pushed into my finger – that if you were healthy that you should be able to fight it off, that your immune system should be able to fight it. I don't know why I got it. But I remember the first time I ever felt any affect from it, that I got sick, meant that I knew I had it – I knew it. It was like one minute I was fine, then the next minute I was sick as a dog, and I knew something terribly wrong was going on with me and I'd never be the same again. And I waited three weeks before I even went to the hospital. By the time I got to the hospital, I was skin and bones. I have a hard time keeping weight on, that's one thing that HIV does to you, for me anyway. Some people gain weight, but for me, I've never been a heavy person – I've always been around 150, 60lbs, something like that. When I'm really healthy I go up to be about 180, but I can't even get it to 150 right now. I mean, I was down to 124lbs not too long ago, and I'm six-foot, you know. I should be heavier than that. But I'm the type of person who can eat a lot, and I just don't gain weight. It seems to burn off for some reason. You're probably like that too, right?

BK: A little bit.

DC: You're not heavy, heavy. Do you remember when you were younger and you wanted to gain weight and get some muscles and all of that, and you couldn't no matter what you ate? Yeah, I've been like that all my life, except I think the HIV – well, there's different times. Like, I still get sick every now and then, plus I'm getting older. I think my body – I don't know. For the first time, I feel – you don't really notice yourself get old, because I don't think your brain gets old, you know. Your body might get old. The doctor told me, she said to me, "You know when you get up, Darrel, I want you sit there for a minute, maybe wait a minute before you stand up. You're going to fall." And I said, "Why am I going to fall?" She says, "Well, because your blood pressure goes really low when you stand up fast." And she says, "You're going to fall to the ground." And she was right. I was at the – went to the art gallery and I was sitting on a bean bag watching a film, and I got up really fast, and I stood up and I fell right onto the marble floor from a standing position in front of everyone – it was really embarrassing. My head bounced off the floor like basketball – it was awful. They had to call an ambulance and all that because I didn't get up at all – like, I was out. So, I had to go home after that happened to me, and I got undressed and I looked in the mirror, and I thought, okay, I'm not eighteen anymore. My brain still feels like it's eighteen – do you ever notice your brain doesn't feel like you're older? Do you feel that way? Like, I know I'm older, but I still feel like I'm in my twenties. I don't know what age I figure I'm at, but my brain reacts to it, like when I get up and stuff like that.

It's hard to slow yourself down, you know? I've always been a real go-getter, and I've got to learn to slow down. I think I do, anyways. I don't want to fall somewhere. And I have so many medical problems that are wrong with me. I have narcolepsy. Do you know what that is? It's a sleeping sickness and it – before I had friends that used to walk on each side of me and all of that, because if I was walking down the street and somebody honked their horn behind me, or if somebody scared me from behind, or if I got scared or too excited or started laughing and stuff like that – when I was young, it was really bad – I would fall asleep on my feet, right? And as I got older, it got less and less, but it still happens to me, and I have to take these pills so that doesn't happen, because I used to drive and stuff like that too. I just need somebody blasting their horn at me and I'd fall asleep – so that doesn't happen to me anymore, not as much anyways. I fell the other day because a nurse scared me. She came into my room and I had my music a bit loud, and she just screamed out my name, and I was in the washroom, and she didn't know, and she scared the shit out of me so bad, and I hit the sink with my head. But it wasn't her fault because the music was loud, really loud. See, I still think I'm an eighteen-year-old kid. I still blast it, if you play Black Sabbath or something like that, and I'm sixty-two, you know? Is there any other questions?

BK: I've got a couple more. Did you connect with any organizations back then, any AIDS organizations?

DC: Yeah, I went to AIDS Vancouver, I was at PWA, and I used to go there and just hang around just to try to get to meet people, because I wanted to learn more because I hung around with a kind of a straight crowd. I did have gay friends but it seemed as I got older that they were more and more moving out of town and stuff like that – you lose contact with them. And so, I had nobody to really talk it over with. Straight people are different than gay people when you're talking – you can talk about anything with a gay person, they're so easy to talk to. But straight people, they don't mind talking to you about it but "is this conversation over?" type of thing. I

would go to AIDS Vancouver when they were in the same place they are now, but it was a different building. And I would also go to – they’d have these men’s groups through the hospital, and I would go to a couple of those. I tried to keep as informed as I could about it. Like, I was always – you gotta remember, I had a family and stuff and I was always, always hoping there’d be a cure before maybe it had too much of an effect on me that it screwed me up too bad, right? So, I thought that was going to happen, but finally the medication I’m on now, it seems to be really great. Like, I’m doing really good – besides the headaches, I’m doing really good. My CD4 count is so high right now that when I go to the hospital, they can’t believe that, you know – they ask me if I do exercise or something like that, because they can’t believe how high it is. They’ve never seen a CD4 count as high as mine, even for somebody who doesn’t have HIV – I have a higher CD4 count than they do. Like, you would have a CD4 count, everybody does, but like mine gets into the thousands, where a lot of people probably have around 700, stuff like that. I tried to get informed on stuff like that. I understand how it works as far as looking at it as how a virus works, right? I studied up on that, things like that, and how it mutates. Like, I understand why they haven’t come up with a cure right now because it just mutates – there’s a lot to it, there’s really a lot to it. But I think they’re going to have a cure. Do you?

BK: I sure hope so.

DC: I hope that it’s not they have a cure but they don’t want to do it because of money, right, because that could be. I don’t know, but people talk about stuff like that, but I don’t know if things work like that – it could, but I don’t know. But I like to believe that it doesn’t, you know? Because do you know how much they charge for the pills that I take? Before I was in the Dr. Peter Centre, I used to have to pick up my prescriptions, and the government was paying for them, but it would have – this one drug store when I was living in Langley, they would put the price of the pills on the bottles, and for sixty pills – and I was taking about seven different types, eight different types back then – and on the bottle of pills it would say, like... I’d have a month’s supply, but just the one bottle would say \$2300 for sixty pills, and they were all around that price, right? You know, \$1800 to – there’s some even more than that, but I remember \$2300 being the normal price for it, and that was... So, you have to remember, I have to take – there’s only sixty pills, so that means if it’s for a month, there’s another bottle of pills, that was just one of the bottles, right? So, that’s a lot of money worth of pills. I’m sure they’ve spent way over a million dollars on me, because I’ve been in the hospital altogether probably five, six years. Yeah, I’ve been in the hospital quite a bit, because I got really sick at different times. And I got really, really bad pneumonia, cases of pneumonia, like double pleurisy pneumonia – I couldn’t even walk, I was in a wheelchair and everything. It can make you really sick, this disease, but it just never killed me. I guess maybe when the guy comes to get me, I tell him to fuck off – I don’t know. [Laughs] I really don’t know how it works. But I feel good today.

BK: That’s amazing to have the resilience to get through all these bouts of illness. To be living with HIV for as long as you have been is amazing.

DC: It’s a lot better nowadays. People are a lot more open to it. The only person who won’t let me touch them or have anything to do with them is that one girl, and I’m at the point where – it’s just her, she’s the only one. And there’s people who are friends, like, they see her and they see me, they visit both of us. When they see her – well, this is what they tell me – they tell her to

“Fuck off, grow up. This isn’t right.” I didn’t know – in the beginning, I thought – like, I would never kiss any of my nephews or nieces or any of the babies or stuff like that – like I would never have any physical contact. I wouldn’t even touch them, because if their parents didn’t want me to, maybe they were right, I didn’t know. But once I knew – it’s pretty bad when you can’t even get a ride in an ambulance too, you know? They didn’t want me in there, because I was bleeding a lot, and they offered me a bag so I could bleed into it, but there was no way they were letting me in their ambulance. And they were getting in their hazmat suits. It was making such a scene of embarrassment that I just walked away from them and walked over to the hospital. Then the hospital didn’t want anything to do with me. They got the bleeding to stop – they touched me long enough for that to happen, but then they told me to come back tomorrow and they’d straighten my nose out. My nose was lying on the side of my face, right? I said, “I’m not going home. I’m not leaving. Get a doctor that can straighten my nose out.” I said, “I don’t even care if you give me any painkillers or not. I don’t want my nose lying on the side of my face. I look like a retard [sic].” I was really mad. And so, they gave me a shot of something and I woke up and my nose was straight again. Well, it’s still not straight, but I’ve had it broken since again. That was me and my big mouth the second time it happened.

BK: When you were connecting with AIDS Vancouver and stuff, was that mostly for information or were you getting emotional or social support through them?

DC: I was getting – I went there one time because I was in the hospital and my place, because of this drug dealer that lived in the building – they were rowhouses. And the cops really wanted to get rid of him, and they went in, and they got the place condemned. And I was in the hospital when this happened, so I had no way of fighting it, right? I went to AIDS Vancouver, because like I needed a place because of my kids and everything like that. We ended up staying in this motel for a little while. They were supposed to help me get a place and stuff like that, but they didn’t do anything for me. They were always talking about it but maybe it’s because I ended up getting a place and they saw that I could take care of my own business, but I thought they would have helped me because I have kids, you know? That was a bad time in my life, but it wasn’t their fault. It wasn’t my fault either, it was just one of those things in life that happens, right?

I used to go to them – I used to bring people there too because another thing I’ve done is that there’s a lot of people that – because all my friends know I have it – is let’s say one of their cousins ends up getting it, they have me talk to them and get them to go to the doctor’s, and so on and so forth. And a lot of times I’ll bring them to – that’s one of the places that I would take anybody new, because it is good for – they have different programs there. The person who’s got no one to talk to, it’s a good place, because they’ve got kind of everything there. They’re kind of like the Dr. Peter Centre in a way, except more for support. Like, the Dr. Peter Centre also has got a day program, which is fantastic. They really help a lot of people there. Dr. Peter Centre is a remarkable place. I’ve been there – I lived there from, oh god – I was there for four years, then I went home, and I was home for about five years, and I’m back now for three years. So, I’ve been there quite a long time. I don’t know if I’ll ever get out of there again though, because when these headaches strike, I can’t cook, I can’t do anything. I wish I could remember what I almost died from last time. It’s called lack of something. I forget the name of it. It’s like lack of trying or something like that. Do you know what I’m talking about?

BK: I can't think of...

DC: Old people die of it or babies can die from it too. [Long pause] My memory's going. Yeah, AIDS Vancouver's a really good place. I've never been to – there's another place down the hill there, it's called Positive Living. I've never had anything to do with them, but I probably should have, right? But they have a lot of things, the Dr. Peter Centre has too. But I've had massage therapies, I've had where they stick pins into you – acupuncture – I've had all different types of massage therapies and stuff like that. And all that stuff helps a bit, you know? I mean, I got hypnotized to stop smoking, and I was smoking two packs a day, and I haven't quit smoking, but I'll have cigarette maybe once every three days or something like that – I don't hardly smoke at all. I can feel more effects from smoking than I can anything with my health – like, the HIV is nothing compared to what smoking has done to me. That's one thing, if I could campaign for anything, it would be don't smoke. You know, smoking is so stupid. I wish I could have seen that when I was younger or before, even twenty years ago, because my life would be so much different. It really affects you. I remember, I was always saying for years, smoking will never affect me, because even when I was forty years old, I would go jogging and stuff like that – it never winded me. But then one day, it just did. Like, I was carrying boxes up three flights of stairs, and when I got to the top, I was exhausted, I was out of breath, and I knew it was because of the smoking. But I didn't quit then, I kept on smoking for a few more years until it got really bad. I don't think – maybe the HIV doesn't help with it, but I don't know. I've never asked that question. It probably doesn't help, because I think people who have HIV, one of the things that it does is that it ages your insides kind of faster than everybody else's, because you're under more stress, you go through a lot, and anything like that is bound to wear you out. If everybody could just see through my brain, then it would be alright. [Laughs]

BK: Did you want to say anything about any of the early treatments? You were talking about AZT earlier before we started.

DC: Oh, that was terrible. That was the awfulest... There was a bunch of pills. When I first got it and I went into the hospital for it, when I first got sick, I think I was taking over a hundred pills a day, and there was – they were big football ones too, and stuff like that. I remember that they – like, I'd have a blister pack for – I might have three blister packs for the month now, I used to have a blister pack for every day, and there would be like a couple of them filled, right? Like, I used to have to put all the pills in a cup and just – like, I took a lot of pills at first. And I'm telling you, some of them made you so sick. There was more to the AZT – that really made you sick. I wouldn't wish anybody to take that stuff, and everybody, it did the same thing. I remember when I would take it, I would take one of the pills and I would eat a cracker. And then after, I wouldn't take anything else, and it would take me half an hour to take another one, because sometimes – I forget the dosage I was on, but at first I was on quite a bit. And it would take me two hours before I could take all the ATZ [sic] pills, and by the time I was taking my last cracker, I was already feeling it. It made you so – think of the sickest you've ever been in your life and times that by five, and not knowing if it's going to last half an hour or if it's going to last the whole day – it depends how your body was reacting to it. But even a half an hour felt like forever. That's why a lot of people think that people that had HIV back in the early days were lazy and stuff like that – they quit their jobs and stuff like that. It was because we couldn't work. If you took that, there's no way that you could go to work. I know a guy that's had it for as

long as I have, he's never taken any pills, he's never done anything like that, and he's fine – he's healthy, he's fine. He doesn't even know his CD4 count or anything, he's never gone in to get it checked because he says, "I'm not going to go to the hospital until I get sick with it." I don't know. He's lucky. He's one in a billion, you know? I haven't seen him for a while, but I know he's still around – I hear about him.

BK: And nowadays, the meds that you're on now, do you have side effects with those?

DC: No. I ended up getting Hep C, and I couldn't believe that I got Hep C. I was so proud of myself because I was the only one that was ever in the Dr. Peter Centre that didn't have Hep C. Then one day I got bloodwork back and it shows that I have Hep C. What had happened is that there was a guy who was at the Dr. Peter Centre – because of my narcolepsy, like I fall – it's amazing that I haven't fallen asleep on you. Like, I fall asleep everywhere I go. He was a friend of mine and he would come and visit me, but he shaved his head, and when I would fall asleep – because I went and I'd buy the expensive razors, you know, the five blades and all that. He would shave his head and just put the razor back, and that's how I figure I got it, because I mean, when I showed up positive for Hep C, he let it slip out one day that he used my razor, right. And I said, "Do you have Hep C?" And he said, "Yeah." And I said, "Well, you might have given me Hep C, because I can't think of any other way." I don't know how I got it, but that's probably the only way I can think of that I got it, but living at the Dr. Peter Centre, there's a good chance I could have got it some other way too. So, I don't know that's the way I got it – I don't know the answer to how I got it, but I think it's pretty easy to get, hey? So yeah, I don't even know the answer to that. But when I got it, I was lucky because they did some test on me and my liver was really healthy, and for some reason they were able to juggle the numbers a lot, because the doctors figured that I go through so much with the headaches, I've been through so much in my life that if they can just give me that pill that costs \$1000 a day, just give me that, then that would kill the virus, and that's what they did for me for some... I don't know I should be telling you that, but anyways, I got to take that pill, and it didn't cost me anything, but it's 1000 bucks a day for that pill, but it works. I've seen it cure a lot of people. I remember when people, when they didn't have it – what was that other stuff they used to give it when you had Hep C? It would make you sick. I forget the name of it. Do you remember?

BK: I think the new treatment is called the Harvoni treatment, right? I don't know what the one was called before that.

DC: Well, whatever it was, it would make you sick. You'd go through periods where – they'd give you an injection of something and then that would make you sick. I had a roommate that had it. So, I'm cured of Hep C. I didn't have it for very long though. I was so upset when I found out that I had it, because I was so proud of myself being the only one in the whole building that didn't have it, because it seems to go together. Now they changed 10-C into – it's no longer just an HIV floor, it's a Hep C floor now, more so now than... Even though we still go there if something happens to us, we still end up on that floor.

BK: It's no longer the HIV ward.

DC: Like it used to be. But they still deal with us. Those nurses up there are something special, I tell you. I think they are such special people. If anybody should ever be given an award in this world, it's the nurses who have worked on that floor, because a lot of people are just assholes up there. I used to have to go around, because I know so many people up there, and just talk to people when they're starting to be assholes to nurses, and say, "Shut up. What are you doing? Why are you talking to her like that? Who do you think you are?" And stuff like that, because I can talk to them, I can get them to stop, even the tough guys and stuff like that. A lot of people have shown me a lot of respect, because it's people's mindset, you know. When I get visits, the guys come to see me, a whole bunch of Harleys show up and they're wearing their vests and stuff like that, so I don't know if they think I'm some bad guy or something like that, but I'm not. I'm nothing – it's nothing like that, it's just that they're my friends, right? So, when I tell them they should shut up, they're being mean to the nurse and there's no reason for it, you know... I remember I saw this guy, I thought he was going to hit her, hit this one social worker up there, and she was being – I even got mad at her once and jumped out of cab once because she could be really harsh, and I don't know what she said to him, but he was pissed. I thought he was going to hit her, and I just flew in there just in time to stop him, and I made him apologize to her and stuff like that. And then I took them both aside and I said, "You know, you've got to slow down. You can't be talking to people like that." I said, "If you were to hit her, you'd get kicked out of here so fast. You're really sick. What are you going to do?" I used to have to play referee up there – it's so true.

There's these two guys, they both had their hips replaced, they both had HIV – I think one of them had full-blown AIDS, but they were the most miserable old guys I've ever met. They looked like old guys – they were older than me. I think I look pretty good for sixty-two, but these guys looked horrible for whatever age they were. They looked like they were in their nineties. But they had the foulest mouths and they always were insulting each other, and it kept on going on night and day. And they were in the room beside me, and I'd get fed up with it every so often, and I'd walk into their room, and I'd close the door behind me, and I'd say, "If I hear one more sound out of this room into my room, I'm going to come back in and kill both of you. Just shut the fuck up. I don't need this." And I'd walk away and the room would be quiet for the whole day and the whole night, then after the next day, they'd forget about it and start up again on each other. So, you know what they did? They split them up and they moved one of the guys in with me. [Laughs] The worst guy. This guy was an asshole, man. He was the most miserable person I ever met in my whole life – god, he was miserable. I don't know how old he was. He looked like he was ninety – he couldn't have been that old, but he looked really old, and he was a crackhead on top of it, right? He was hilarious. He'd come back to the room and he'd be all long-faced and stuff like that and "I just got ripped off. I don't know what they sold me, but it wasn't the..." I've never even tried crack – I've never tried crack or coke in my whole life. I did a lot of drugs, but I never tried those two for some reason. I've seen a couple of my friends just lose everything they have, like businesses and stuff like that, and their wives, and to me that was a sign not to do it.

BK: We haven't talked about that either, which is what you mentioned before we turned the camera on, which was that you'd sometimes go to the hospital and look after people when they were really sick, right?

DC: No, what happened would be when people – I’d get to know people, and there were people that were from out of town and the nurses or the social workers would tell me who these people were, especially the people from out of town. They knew that they weren’t going to last long, and back in the day, you could tell, because the way – it’s called lack of thriving is what I almost died of. And a lot of people end up like that, and that can kill you so fast, and it will make you lose weight – make you do all sorts of things, right? And so anyways, they would get me to – like, what I would do is I would introduce myself to these people or they’d move them into my room, or whatever would happen, I would become friends with them. And sometimes it wouldn’t take very long, sometimes it would be a matter of two weeks, sometimes it would be months, and sometimes it would be half a year, but I’d become friends with these people and I would just go out of my way to make sure they felt like I was their friend so that when they were dying, because they have no family here, their family would be out of town, I would be in the room with them. And I held many people’s hand as they were dying, just talking to them. The doctors are telling me he’s going to pass away or she’s going to pass away, probably in the next hour or something like that, they’d call me up and I’d always get there in time. They would pass away, just so that they wouldn’t – I think it would be awful to – I guess dying is dying, but I think that everybody should have somebody that they feel somewhat close to, or a friend or some connection to this earth.

Yeah, I’d go in, and I’d always bring some music with me. There’s that song, “Return to Innocence” and stuff like that. I was a DJ and I know the right the type of music. I’d put a Walkman on them or – you know, some type of music with headphones, so they could listen to it as they were passing away. But I’d hold their hands. I mean, I’ve done it at the Dr. Peter Centre, but I’ve done it mostly at St. Paul’s hospital. I was always figured that was important for me to do that because I knew what it was like to be – like, when I first got it, I remember what it was like to really feel alone, totally alone, and that’s an awful feeling, you know? It’s a more awful feeling than dying is, is feeling alone or rejected. I don’t know what these people are thinking, because these are people that are – like, you forget, even if you’re arguing with your family, you’re dying, you forget about all of that, because what’s important is family or relatives or something like that. It’s sad, but since it’s so expensive to travel and that, a lot of people can’t make – like, I could never imagine me not making it to one of my kids, like when they were in the hospital, I don’t care where they were in the world, I’d get there somehow. But there are some people that don’t have it together enough to figure that part out, or they really don’t have the finances to do it. There’s a lot of people who live from paycheck to paycheck, and I understand that, right, that that goes on in life. That was the way that I could kind of help out, because I’ve had so much help from other people – I really have, through friends and stuff like that – but for me to give back to it, that’s what I did, right?

But it was wearing me out a bit. I don’t do it very often anymore because I don’t know how many people’s hands I’ve held – it’s been a lot, a lot, especially back in the ‘90s, like I’d say from ’89 to, god, ’96 or something like that, holy god, people were dying at a rate that was unbelievable. And it wouldn’t take them long to die either. Some people were lasting weeks. This virus can be really deadly to a person, and some people don’t react to the medications right away, and it takes a while. I was just lucky because – I mean, I used to take my medication and I’d feel healthy and I’d stop taking it, because I didn’t know, I wasn’t educated enough about it. I stopped taking it because I thought, well, I’ll stop taking it because I feel healthy now and I’m

good. I just don't want them to ever stop working on me, so I'll stop taking them now, and if I start feeling sick again, then after I'll start taking it back. So, I was getting all this medication given to me but I wasn't taking it, which was a really bad thing to do, because what would happen after a while is that nothing was working on me – nothing. Everything stopped working on me, and so I was going on these different regimes, cocktails – I had to get special drug approvals to take them and stuff like that. That happened to me a few times, until finally a doctor said to me, “You know, Darrel, you can't just stop taking your medications because you feel great. This is something that you have to take for the rest of your life.” Nobody ever told me that, right? I didn't realize that. I'm telling you, before it was like nobody would tell – there wasn't much discussion about it.

Nowadays, it's great. They want you to ask questions and stuff like that. Like, I've been having heart trouble and stuff lately – I went in for some angiograms and all that. I'm telling you, I'm more educated on the heart than anybody should ever be, right? But it's great, because now I know a lot about the heart and been taking care of myself, and it's been getting better – I can feel it. I feel really good some days, and I go why, right? Because I'm getting oxygen throughout my body again where I wasn't before. They put stints in my heart, one three inches long, and the other one two-and-a-half inches, and the other one half an inch – three stints. That's a lot of stints in your heart, because it was like a hose closing up, and there was hardly any blood getting through, right in my heart. I went to put on my coat one day in the doctor's office, and just the act of putting on my coat exhausted me so much, I had to sit down and catch my breath. She says, “There's something really wrong with you. Take off your coat and put it on again.” I said, “No way. That's like a workout.” So, she just put me right in the hospital right then and there, and they gave me an angiogram, and sure enough...

BK: Hopefully you don't have to do that so much anymore because there's not so many people dying from HIV now.

DC: No. The people dying of HIV nowadays or are at the end of getting AIDS is because there's people that have the disease, and this happens not very often but it does happen, and I seem to find it happening a little bit over at the Dr. Peter Centre, whether or not – that's where I hear about it because I talk to some of these people. And the last person they moved onto my floor, he just stopped taking his medication because he didn't – he was tired of living with it. He knew he was going to live there for the rest of his life and he didn't know when he was going to die, and he didn't believe that the best thing for him was to take this medication. He didn't want to be dependent on pills and stuff like that, so he quit taking his medication, and as soon as he quit taking his medication, it was just a matter of a couple months, and then he died, right? But at least he died fast and he didn't die a prolonged death. I don't think I'd want to die that way either, you know? I don't think about dying. I used to think about dying quite often before. I don't think about dying very often anymore. When I first got it, like holy god, I'll never forget when the doctor told me for sure I had it – I was in such denial over it, because it was a really weird day, because they tested me even though they had the answer from the first test I went to, but they tested me that day again too and the answers came back right away that I was positive, but after the lady took the blood from me, she dropped all the vials of blood, the whole basket of it, and she was putting them back in the basket, and I thought, oh, she got them mixed up, right? And in my head, I believed that for years. I believed that they made a mistake, that I really don't

have it, but I didn't know that every time they take bloodwork from me, they check it – they probably have a deep freeze of vials of my blood over at the hospital by now. But they do test for it quite often when they take blood, and I didn't know that. And so, I thought it was just the one test and it was really expensive or something like that, but I was wrong. I do have it.

BK: Did you connect with other people who were HIV-positive pretty quickly after getting your diagnosis formally?

DC: I did, mostly through the hospital. I'd see a lot of guys with their lovers, and one of them would be dying, right? And I got to know quite a few guys that way. The lover that didn't catch HIV, they were really informed people, because their lover died of it, and some of these people, I mean, they really loved these guys and it must have been hell for them. But they really educated themselves. You started to educate yourself when you were sick, and I'm not sure if that makes sense to you, but when you're sick, even though you're in the place where you can get the best answers and all that, the information was hard to get. It was hard to get anybody to talk – the answers you got were – they treated you like a kid, it seemed like. Do you remember when you were a kid, going to the doctor's, you didn't ask very many questions because it was kind of none of your business – he knew what he was doing, it was his job. Well, that's a feeling I got from them then. I was really surprised when one day a doctor said to me, "Do you have any questions about it?" And I had all sorts of questions, right? I finally started asking them, but before that, I didn't know anything. Like, that's pretty stupid – stop taking your pills and you almost die because you figure you want to stop taking them because you want them to work – I thought if I kept on taking them, it would be something like taking an antibiotic, right, where it would wear out its use, and I really thought that. I got that thought stuck in my head and I believed it, right? One time, while I did this, I moved to Aldergrove right across from a pig farm and that was the worst place for a person with HIV to ever move into, because what they do is every day they used to spray the field with pig shit, and I'm breathing this all day long and any sores I have were getting infected. I was always going in for IV treatment and I didn't know why, but it was because of where I was living. It's really, really bad for you to live near a pig farm, and I moved right in, was happier than a pig in shit there [laughs], but I didn't know it was killing me. If it was a hot day, I'd go out and suntan [laughs] – I was an idiot.

BK: What seems really stupid to me is that the doctors wouldn't tell you that, about your meds, about needing to take them consistently and not go off them. That's the stupid part to me.

DC: I actually really didn't know until one doctor started giving me shit for not taking my meds and he says, "I don't know what to do with you now. There's no other meds left. You've been on every type of cocktail there is, and for some reason they all stopped working on you. Are you taking you them when you're supposed to be taking them, every morning?" And I said, "No, I stopped taking them." "Why did you do that?" I said, "Because I was really healthy. Why do I need to continue taking something when I'm healthy?" And he says, "Oh, Darrel, you've got it all wrong. You've got to take them every day for the rest of your life. You have to take those pills or you will die." And thank god they put me on some experimental thing – well, now it's all over the place. That's the HAART thing that's out now. I was one of the first people who was ever on that. I was a bit of a challenge for them over there too – it was just because of lack of communication, right? But maybe I'm one of the people who helped change that, I don't know.

I'm trying to get you to understand why – like, I didn't ask the questions because it wasn't my place to, I felt. But it's all changed now. Now, they want you to be educated about it, the way that I used to think I should have been. That's why I never – that's why I feel really relaxed talking about it and whatever is because I always shared it with anybody who was interested in hearing anything about HIV and AIDS and stuff like that, "Just talk to Darrel. He's got a big mouth. He'll answer you." And I would, because I thought if I could just help one person out from getting it, because I really don't want anybody to catch it because it's...

Like, there's this twenty-three-year-old girl that comes and sees me all the time, and she – I rented this really big house that had so many bedrooms – I don't even remember how many there was – and I used to put an ad in the paper and just rent out rooms. And she was going to college, and she ended up renting one of the rooms, and we ended up being friends. She just came to see me last night. Now, she's pretty promiscuous and she's getting around and stuff like that, and she's doing some things that are dangerous, so I tell that to her – I talk to her like a friend instead of a father or whatever. And I'm really up front about it because I know she's – I know she's doing things where she can get it, because you can still get it, you know? It's harder to get it nowadays I think, especially in Vancouver, because of the pills that we take – supposedly, we're not the same threat that we used to be. But I don't know, it just takes one person who's sick. There's people I know at the Dr. Peter Centre that have a viral load, so they'd be dangerous, you know? I don't care what they're taking, if you're sick, you're sick. Like, last night, I had to talk to her, and she was almost crying. I said, "Look at you." She's really beautiful and she's hot, she's really hot, and I guess she gets guys easy. I know exactly what she's going through, because I remember being that age and being able to get anybody I wanted to, but she's just such a sweetheart too and I don't want to see her die that way.

She's been probably – out of all the people I've talked to, she keeps on coming back, and she knows when she's done something wrong. Like, I've had to take her to the doctor's to go get a test done, because she's not sure if she got infected, or she didn't know the guy, never saw him again, and stuff like that. But she doesn't see me as often as she used to, so she's getting better, right? But she says at the heat of the moment, it's a hard thing to – and she says that if nobody has one... But she says that she's been saying no – if you don't got it, then she'll stop it, but she finds that really hard to do, but she's doing it now, which is really good. My hat's off to her, because it is a really hard thing to do – I don't know. It wouldn't be hard for me to do, because I've known what I've gone through, so I wouldn't want to get it. But a lot of people, I don't know... remember when your parents would try to explain something to you and you felt, oh, I don't need to listen to this, I can learn it on my own. I want to experience things and stuff too. Some people, the only way they'll ever learn is through experience, but that's one experience no one should ever have to go through. Sometimes I have to be pretty harsh with her, or else she would have died before – I'm sure she would have gotten it because she was doing some pretty – some things that were right out there with catching it, and so...

BK: Well, what is your advice to younger folks who didn't live through this? Younger generations of people who didn't live through this period of the epidemic?

DC: Protect yourself. You know, to wear a condom. I mean, wearing a condom will solve a lot of your – don't share needles. If you're going to do drugs, just make sure you have your own

needles, if that's the way you do drugs. If you smoke, even if you smoke crack, you can get those rubber things you can put at the end of the pipe because you can get Hep C or something. I think drugs is the worst way, the easiest way to catch it, Hep C or HIV. And my advice to them is if you're gonna do something that's gonna endanger you, they're not stupid, it's so well-taught today in schools and stuff like that. If you're having sex, wear a condom – like, no matter what, wear a condom. If you're not sure about something, ask. But the younger kids seem to be more educated about it, because I'll be on the bus and I'll hear them talking about it and stuff like that, and they're pretty well-educated about it. They know what the answers are, but they don't – it's just that the heat of the moment is where you have to catch people. I think that's where the problem is with everybody, where me, I don't have that problem, because I know that...

Like, before I thought I was going to kill somebody, and that's an awful feeling. And I lived that way for years. I didn't have sex for the longest time, and there's so many things I put off, but I just didn't because I really felt dirty. Somehow there's gotta be something – I hope [indecipherable] that triggers them so much that when they have that heat of the moment, not that I want them to think about me but I think that I say something to them where... My son, I mean, he's got a girlfriend and all that, but he messes around a lot, and he's a good-looking guy, he gets lots of girls. He's always got pockets full of condoms, it's just a given with him. But he's also lived, watched me and seen me sick, and he knows what happens, what the outcome of it is. Somehow you have to get the message through to them that – like, don't let yourself get to that point where that heat of the moment is – always... I think kids that are anywhere from fifteen to twenty should always be made to carry a couple condoms on them. It makes sense. Like, think about it – when you're that age, you get horny and that's on your mind and it's going to happen. I don't know if kids are as – we were pretty bad when we were kids. I don't know if it's the same way – it must be. I don't know, but I'm just going by my own experience. God. I might have been a bad kid, I don't know. Is there anything else?

BK: No, I think that's kind of it for my questions. We always like to ask at the end if there's anything that you wanted to add before we stop recording or anything that you wanted to expand upon that we might not have asked about.

DC: No, I can't really think of anything. Nothing that comes to mind. Just that you can get really, really sick from it and it's not worth getting it, so just be careful. It's really, really not worth it. I've gone through so much. I've gone through – I've been sicker than any man has probably been ever in this world. I've gone through so much pain and I've lost – there's nothing – I can't say anything really good about it except maybe I made some good friends and stuff like that, but I would have made good friends anyways throughout my life. There's nothing good about it. It's a really bad disease and it should be – I respect it in a sense because it's so bad and I have to. I don't take it, any of it, for granted or think that I can get away with anything with it, because if you give it a chance, it's going to kill you, and so you have to listen to your doctors – you really have to listen to your doctors. And don't be afraid to ask questions. I wish somebody would have said that to me, you know, because there's a lot of little things throughout my life of having it that I lost out on because I was thinking – I was probably more careful than most people are. I remember one time being at a steam bath, and there was this guy that I knew that was a reporter, and he was in there, and we were laying in bed one day, one night, and he said to me, "Are you protecting yourself?" And this would have been back in probably 1983 or

something. He says, “Are you protecting yourself?” And he was the first person that ever told me about different sexual things that you can do to catch it, and I didn’t know any of this, and he was – but he died shortly after that, so he probably had it and he knew it, and what he was doing was that he was trying to warn me. Like, if you’re going to have sex, don’t do this, don’t do that. And he died shortly after – I seen his...

One thing that a lot of people that have HIV do is they read the obituaries every day because especially back in the day, you’d always see people you knew. Not so much anymore, but I still do it out of habit, and I’m glad to see that it’s less and less people that I know. People that are sick are staying alive longer, yeah, so that’s a positive thing. I’m lucky I live in this province and I’m so thankful for St. Paul’s hospital and the Dr. Peter Centre. They’ve gotta be two of the best places there ever were. Like, I’m in good hands, and I’m grateful to them – I really am. I don’t take them for granted one bit. And anybody that’s got anything bad to say about them, well, they’re wrong. Yeah, I’m sorry, but they are. Okay, that’s about it.

BK: Great, that’s a good note to end on, I think. Thanks for sharing all of this with me.