"HIV in My Day" – Interview 2

October 13, 2017
Interviewee: Michael Brian Wicks (MW); Interviewer: Ben Klassen (BK)

Ben Klassen: Alright, we are rolling right now. Thank you so much for agreeing to do this. We're really excited to hear your experiences and your story about this period of the epidemic. Just to ease into things, we wanted to ask how you became involved in the gay community or started engaging in gay life.

Michael Brian Wicks: Wow, that's a really good one. I was late. Basically – basically, I was in a house where sex wasn't talked about in West Vancouver, where everything was just pie, you know, everything was fine. And we were insulated from everything. So, then when I went to university, and, sort of, high school – I think in grade eight I fell in love with a girl and a boy at the same time, in like a white-hot minute. It was like a flash, and I saw her and I saw him behind me, and it was like, "What?" And I quickly didn't understand that and knew enough not to talk about it, so that was the moment when things just squashed. And I remember having nice feelings with my partners on the cross-country team and having fun with certain girls, but there was never anything sexual, while everybody else was being sexual. And I remember one particular thing: there was a very handsome guy and myself, and we used to flirt across the women, but I never realized what was happening. It was just like a threesome without any kind of awareness that there was anything sexual, or what it meant. I mean, I was really – people find it hard to believe that I was as naïve about everything as I was.

And then, in Malaysia – I went to Malaysia at the end of my agriculture degree in 1967. I was there for two years, and once again, I fell in love with this wonderf- - she was so beautiful. She came up on the porch on this Malaysian house singing, and it was like, uh, love at first sight, and for her, too. It was a Malay household, so there was no – and again, it didn't feel sexual to me, it felt like spirit, and everything was just like excitement, but there wasn't any sort of engagement sexually. But I also loved her brother, who was in my class and he and I got along really well. And funnily enough, the whole family knew and I didn't. I mean, they knew I was in love with both of them. They knew I was gay. They were both educated parents, and the community just, like, took me in. You know, but I didn't know that they were taking me in because I didn't know anything about myself except confusion. And when I came back to Vancouver after deciding not to marry her, because something seemed weird, I thought, "Wow, if she comes to Vancouver, it's rainy and she doesn't know English. Maybe I'd better just, sort of…" Then it was just like, sort of, "Okay, no. This is not a good idea." So, I didn't even start, but I was thinking for months, how do I get her – how do I marry, how do I go through the process? And it was just like fantasy land, having a wife. At the same time, I was madly in love with her brother, you know, and everybody knew. It must have been hilarious.

So, then when I came back, I was living in this $50 a month place on 10th Avenue in Vancouver. It was rainy. It was cold. And I was walking down the street and I saw these two guys on the other side of the street hand-in-hand – walking up the street. And it was just like god reached down and just slapped me across the face. And depression hit immediately. It was, like, "Oh. I'm never going to have children. I won't have grandchildren. I won't be married. I won't have

everything that a West Vancouver boy is supposed to do. What am I going to do? Oh boy." So, suicide was the next little affair – head in the oven. You know, I could have blown up the whole rooming house I was in, but I turned on the gas, put my head in the oven. And it was – you know, and people say how to prevent that is to make a connection with somebody. That's the only way, because, you know, preventing it or making it illegal is really crazy, because when you're in that state, you're dissociated from absolutely everything. I understand suicide totally. You're just – there's nothing. And so, head in the oven, and then the gas was on, and then suddenly there was this bright light – like, a big flash of light. And I was looking at myself, down, with my head in the oven. And somebody was telling me, "You have something to do in your life." And then I was back in – head out, gas off – and I got up and I – I just… So, that was the moment when, I guess, I accepted who I was.

And then I put an ad in the paper for "Agriculture graduate wants a warm home for winter." I don't know what made me do that. Put it in *The Georgia Straight* in the classified ads, which was just such a hoot at that time, because people were – it was basically sexual and then there was room and board and stuff. So, nothing happened for a couple of days, and then I was just turning the key to leave the room – it was an awful, awful little apartment. $50 a month. It was painted green – a sick, sick green. It was awful. Sofas that were, like – all the springs were out. So, I said, "Shall I answer the phone or not?" And something said, "Answer the phone." So, I went and this beautiful British – young man's British voice, with some giggling in the back. He said, "We saw your ad. We want you to come up and check out our place on 33rd Avenue." So, I called my friend Patrick and – and it was snowing, it was wet, it was awful. So, I went up there and as I went up to this house, two very, sort of, swishy-dressed, beautifully-dressed man and woman come down the stairs. And the door has opened and they're saying goodbye to these friends. And the friends say, "You must be the new roommate," in these beautiful British voices. So, I said, "Hope so." So, I went up and this beautiful couple – he was like a young Viking, and she was this beautiful, long-haired beauty. And this dog, and they said, "That's Krishna." And I thought, "Oh, boy. How perfect is this." And they said, "Your room's upstairs. When are you moving in?" I said, "Don't you…" "No." They didn't want any references. They said, "We knew from your voice, we knew from your ad – you're the one." I stayed with them for two years, had the best time.

And that's where I started relating to the gay community, because I had a foundation of love and I – now, what did I do? I was involved in the Gay Activists Alliance with Dick Rulens and then I got involved with starting a gay rap group where we – well, there was the – what was the…? There was a group at that time, not the Gay Activists Alliance. This was a lefty kind of cooperative group of guys. I can't remember their name. It might come to me. But they were fantastic. They were just like revolutionaries and co-op makers, and just, you know – just making things happen. And they had a warehouse, so I had the rap group at the warehouse, and we had tables like this in groups, and people came in – I think there were about 150 people, came to the first rap group. I think we had two or three of them. We'd just have a topic and people would discuss things. It was very informal and then sort of drinks afterwards or dance or something – I can't remember. I've got one of the blue meeting notices…

BK: Oh, I'd love to see it sometime.

MW: Yeah. I need to find it in my archives, but… So, I just got involved politically. And then…

BK: And this would have been…?

MW: This was 197- - this was when I came back. When I came back, it was 1970. I was involved with Cuso as their regional director and then I got fired from that job for incompetence, rightly so. And then I got – had a whole bunch of other jobs. Boy, I can't remember. There was a lot happening in those three years. But basically, I was involved with Gay Activists Alliance, politically, trying to change Vancouver politics and attacking Vander Zalm, and all the – all those anti-gay people in government – the Socreds. And then – and then there was – well, basically the Gay Activists Alliance, I guess. And then there was GATE that came and started, and we were – there was real friction, I mean *real friction*, because Dick Rulens was an autocrat. It wasn't a cooperative, it was like very hard-nosed, and because of him, a lot of political change happened. And because of GATE, a lot of other things started to happen. You know, like, each group had its own contribution, but just like gay men everywhere, they form into groups and they fight each other. It's, like, so bizarre. That's not what – well, anyway. That's what I saw happening. So, that is a long answer to your question. I came in it through politics, and then my first lover came through a Gay Activists Alliance meeting, where somebody from Boston arrived, and it was, "Oh, hello." Turns out I was rebound for him, but for me it was like, "Wow, first time."

BK: An awakening of sorts.

MW: An awakening that time. And then the sexual thing started to happen. I wasn't very – I wasn't sexual at all in those political times, and then I discovered baths and bushes and people. [laughs]

BK: And that would have been still in the '70s.

MW: That would have been early '70s, yeah –'70. And then I went down to San Francisco for the 1973 Gay Pride parade, or the pride parade, and then I went to Seattle for a parade. And that was – that was the real coming out. I dressed in a muumuu and a big clown sort of thing, and I was my own parade down the middle of – down Market Street in San Francisco. It was fantastic and I met some really nice people, and that's when I really sort of strutted out. I didn't come out – sort of strutted out. Here, it was kind of, like, political coming out. Oh, I *loved* the street stuff. We did lots of street stuff. Outside the police – the police office there. We were throwing our leaflets inside through the windows that were open, and throwing them into buses, and chanting. Ah, it was fantastic. It was a good way to come out, you know, politically, because I got political training.

BK: So, why was it politics that was the first step into the community for you?

MW: Because I wasn't sexual. You know, I wasn't – I didn't have that libido and I also didn't have any confidence in myself, so it was just… I'm glad, because if I'd come out sexually earlier, I think I probably would have not been here, quite honestly.

BK: Did you want to say anything else about the Gay Activists Alliance? I don't know if there's anything more that you wanted to say, but that sounds like – but maybe that's going down the rabbit hole.

MW: It's juicy. It's juicy. Dick Rulens was a very powerful ex-hustler drag queen, and he had muscle in every – his body. He was big, he was mean, and he was not going to put up with any shit from anyone. And I'll just give you – and he organized the group, you know, and it was Robert's Rules of Order – it was all done properly, and that was really important for me. And there was a library with a whole lot of pocketbooks – mostly porn, but there were pocketbooks and other things, anyways. So, I was in charge of organizing the library. Somebody else was in charge of organizing the sign-making and the protests and… He had everything ticketyboo. He would know when the – when the ministers were coming, who the handlers were. He had spies everywhere. He – I mean, he – because he had contacts. He was a hustler. He knew top-level people, right, through his hustling career. And so, he knew the truth about what was going on. And I didn't realize that until much, much later – maybe even now I keep realizing why he was so powerful. And he would just get up at meetings and take over meetings. You know, candidates' meetings.

And there was one – and I'd love to tell this story right now, because it does have something to do with this. We were at a meeting after we had had about 25 to 50 calls in the previous three months from young people – teenagers – wanting to commit suicide, or just – they'd seen our ads and they wanted to talk to somebody. And that's really why I went – that's why I went, after the suicide thing. That's why I went. I went down there – I mean, I had that lovely place to stay I was telling you about, but that's why I moved into the politics, because I was feeling that I better do something, otherwise it's going to be a lonely life, right? So, he stood up and he said, "I'm Dick Rulens and I'm the president of the Gay Activists Alliance of Vancouver, and I'm really interested in your young men, your boys." And, of course, there was shocked silence, right? And he said, "Because I'm wondering why are they coming to me? Why are you sending your young men – 50 in the last three months – to my phone lines for me to take care of their emotional needs because they're gay and they're locked into these families that can't support them, or they don't know what to do? Why is that happening? Why are you sending your children to me when you're calling me a child – you know, danger to children? You're sending your children to me. What are you going to do about that?" It was like a shot. It was like somebody dropped a bomb. And all these sort of right-wingers said [grumbles] and one or two people said, "Thank you, Mr. Rulens. Your comments have been heard." And they moved on with the agenda. I thought yes, man! Right on. So, that's the kind of guy he was and that's the kind of organization it was. There was no democracy. It was like Dick Rulens' Gay Activists Alliance. It was effective.

BK: And it was very in your face?

MW: In your face, yes. On the street, in your face. We had rallies everywhere. Yeah, it was fantastic.

BK: I would love to talk more about that at some point, because that sounds like a very interesting…

MW: I've got material.

BK: Maybe not on this occasion because we could talk about this for hours I'm sure. If we can take a step back from your personal experiences for a moment, what did the community look like when you were coming out into it in the early '70s?

MW: Well, like I said, I guess there was a – when I came back, '67, Mr. Trudeau said stay out of the bedrooms of the nation. I was in Malaysia. All the hippy things and marijuana and… San Francisco – what's the team of that street?

BK: Castro?

MW: Not the Castro, the one before that. Hippy, rainbow road.

BK: Haight.

MW: Haight. Haight-Ashbury. That was happening. Janis Joplin. All those were happening while I was away, so I wasn't part of that. And when I came back in 1970, I hadn't done any marijuana – you know, I didn't want to do any drugs. I did do some but not a lot. And so, I realized that I went into something once again without – without kind of knowing anything, without any consciousness of what was happening. Those two guys walking up that street, they were the new generation. But that's all I saw. I saw a young couple doing that. And then when I got involved in politics, that's all I saw. I saw the gay activists, I saw all the left-wing – the Yippies? Was it the Yippies? The Gay Yippies? The name's coming. And then there were all these radical revolutionary gay men who were forming co-ops and living in co-op houses in East Vancouver, and doing radical stuff. The Radical Faeries.

BK: I know of them a little bit.

MW: They started at that point.

BK: In Vancouver as well?

MW: From that group, yes. So, there was a spiritual component in those people and the communal approach. And so, that's what I saw. I saw the right-wing Socred government trying to do their best to ignore or attack or de- - what's the word? Dehumanize gay people. The police were – I didn't get much – I didn't get much from the police. I didn't feel like they were against us. Never – I never – there was no kind of head beatings or anything like that from the police. Disgust from people passing by, but then a general sort of change in that as things happened. People would honk and people would wave, and thumbs up. And then numbers grew, and more people sort of came into the group. I remember that. Suddenly, there were – instead of like five or six people in the Gay Activists Alliance…. There were a lot of transsexuals [sic] who Dick Rulens really helped. He became a kind of a… a place for them to get connections in the health field for what they needed. He was very anti-drug – you know, anti-recreational drugs. And then he also – and then suddenly there were a whole bunch of people from other parts of Canada and

the United States, because I guess at that point – I don't know… The Vietnam War. There were a lot of Americans coming to Canada, and my first partner was American.

So, when you ask what society looked like, it looked like a whole bunch of exciting things were happening. I'm not sure when *Angles* started – the newspaper. Really don't know when it started, but I'm pretty sure it was around 1973. And then there was – there was the *Sunshine* – from Toronto. No, there was a group from San Francisco – there was a paper called *Sunshine*. And then there was *The Body Politic* in Toronto, and they must have been around 19- - early 1970s or even just before. Yeah. So, there was a – and I subscribed to all of that. And then, there were literary circles, you know, reading Walt Whitman, and then the person from – Chris – oh, the writer… wonderful writer…. Chris… Well, name's not there. But lots of literary – I know there was lots of literature going on and there was a lot of research going on, too – literate research. In the Toronto *Body Politic* and the San Francisco paper, there was a lot of essays and analysis of politics – deep analysis of social constructs and we got where we are and where we're going. I remember that. There was kind of an elevated consciousness. It wasn't just being gay. And then it was – and then the lesbians started to get pissed off because the men were sort of directing stuff. And so, gay men had to start paying attention and then – but the women set up their own support systems. The men were still pretty much "forget the lesbians," right?

But – so, what I'm saying is what I saw, without being too conscious of it, was a political – political groups, a political enemy, a whole bunch of humanity that didn't care, a whole bunch of humanity that was aware there was some truth happening here – some change happening that had to be paid attention to, particularly, like, healthcare and social welfare people, social justice – like, women's rights and anti-nuclear groups. There started to be gay contingents in each of those, or lesbians in the women's movement, that started to just agitate, you know. And the peace movement, there was – they really had to fight to be allowed in the peace movement. The men were just not interested in having faggots in the movement. And there was, you know, a lot of violent clashes about that. So, a lot of politics. Am I giving an impression of a kind of a seething ants' nest of – it was vibrant. It was really, like, engaging, because every day there was something to fight for, and fight *for* – we really weren't fighting against, we were fighting for something. And there was the lambda sign and then there was the pink triangle that was used to pull people together. And then that became sort of victimization, so the lambda, which was a feeling of strength, that became the symbol. And then people sort of didn't need symbols, and then – I don't even know when the rainbow started.

BK: From your position within the community, it was defined in a lot of ways by politicization and radicalism, I guess?

MW: Yes, radicalism.

BK: Overlapping with a lot of other forms of radicalism. Interesting.

MW: Yeah, that's true. And the spirituality was there, too. I loved the Radical Faeries. The Radical Faeries were fantastic. There was even a – there was a magazine: *Rural Farm Delivery*. It was named *RFD - Rural Farm Delivery*.

BK: I've heard of that, yeah.

MW: And every month, they changed – they changed the meaning of those words to "Rural Faggots Delivering" or "Rabid Faeries Dancing," you know? They would find some way of changing the title. It became kind of, like, a game. I've got all the copies in my archive.

BK: Oh, wow, that would be fascinating to look at.

MW: And it's still going, too.

BK: Yeah, so interesting. There's so many things that I want to talk about, but we should probably fast forward a little bit

MW: I don't want to divert you.

BK: No, this is excellent so far.

MW: It's giving me the mood, actually. I'm allowing myself to really, like, go back there, so it's helping me.

BK: It's good for us too, because we can't talk about this one period of time without seeing what came before and after. So, I guess we can start talking about HIV and AIDS a little, and maybe start by asking when you remember hearing about HIV?

MW: I seem to remember it was 1981, '82, '83 – something like that. And I remember – well, and when I look at the movies I see about this time – I remember that article, that quote that comes out so often: "Doctors are describing a type of cancer that gay men – that is cropping up in gay men in San Francisc- – in New York." And I looked at that and I thought, "Oh boy." I remember – I mean that's just stuck in my mind as the moment. You know, like President Kennedy – where were you? That just went right inside. It was like, "Oh. That's something." And then it was like – I guess it was like 1983, I remember – well, I was living in Nelson. I lived in Nelson at – from 1976 to 1988 with some forays down to San Francisco and Vancouver, and a lot of people moved from the city to the country in 197- - about '76 with me. There was a gay commune beside us in Nelson, and that's why we moved – my partner and another guy. We bought 50 acres because there was 160 acres beside us called Fairykin Farms. And they were – you know, there were several households, and it was sexually promiscuous, and it was exciting. And it was a co-op, you know – a commune. And so, we went up there.

I was thinking we're going to form this wonderful gay community, but my two partners – we didn't – we didn't like each other. I fell out with my first partner and he took off and somebody else came in. We had those four people for a couple of years, like, not liking each other, so there was no – it was a commune in name only. There wasn't any intention. There wasn't any vision. And, you know, we were different gay men that didn't like each other basically. But that commune had a much more cohesive social effect in the area, and because of these two things, a lot of other people came to Nelson, because suddenly there was a community. And Nelson was pretty redneck, but there was one hotel – the Hume Hotel, which had a dancefloor, and there was

no – nobody was beaten up. I mean, you could go and dance, so that was amazing, and that spread. Like, "Go to Nelson. It's cool." And so, there were lots of really nice people that came up in about 1980 – 1978, I guess – around 1978. And then there was West Kootenay Gays and Lesbians started in about 1978. It was – we had all sorts of – a fruit float down the Slocan River. We had dances, we had drag shows. I mean, it was a vibrant community, all the way through from 1978, I guess, up to about 1988.

But, you know, around 1984, '85, '86, '87, a lot of these wonderful people – friends of mine – suddenly were diagnosed and just disappeared. You know, they stayed up as long as they could. They had healthy food. They had a support network. They had a caring network. And then suddenly I'd hear that, "Oh, [name]'s gone to Vancouver. Oh, [name]'s gone. Oh, [name]'s on his way. He's going downhill." All these beautiful people – it just depopulated Nelson. And then, in the commune beside us, there was one person actually sort of left – didn't – he wasn't diagnosed, his partner was diagnosed. He went to San Francisco to help with the quilt and help with all… He started a theatre group down there. He started a safe sex group. And so, all these people went and had their lives in other places, and then I didn't even know they'd died. Nobody would tell me they died, and then suddenly I'd hear, "Oh, [name]'s gone. Oh, [name]'s gone." You know. It was like – for me, it was – everybody divorced me, you know.

It was like – and I didn't do any caring, which is what I told you. I don't know if I'm guilty about that or just recognizing – it doesn't feel emotional. It feels like I was too – well, I was scared, for one thing about myself getting it, because I had been, not hugely promiscuous but I'd had sex with some of these people at one time. And then, all the information about it, you know, is – is oral a problem? Is it only receiving anal or getting it anally? Is kissing bad? All these things, and of course the society was talking about all these things and there was no – no social… knowledge. It was all "if this is so" or "that may be so" or "this must be so," and all from different factions with different agendas, that sort of thing. There was nobody – nobody except maybe there were a couple of public health officials, who were really good. I wish I could remember their names.

BK: In Vancouver?

MW: In Vancouver. British Columbia. They resisted all that bigotry, because they're science- - they're results-based, they're scientific, and they're caring. And I remember honouring them so much. Okay, so he says all the evidence is here with this, so it sort of relieved me. But I was – I was not very social. When I lost my first partner, I was very lonely up there, and I was teaching. I was really busy. I was teaching in Salmo and I had to go 60 kilometers there, 60 kilometers back. I had to feed the goats, look after the garden. I had to chop the wood, you know. And my partner was living in Nelson and going to another school that was like five minutes away from his home, and I was going… So, I was busy. I had no time for social life, and who wanted to come to my place, which was a mess – smelled like goats and all… I mean, nobody wanted to be with me, and I, again, didn't have much confidence, having lost the first one. And then I had – I got involved with one very nice guy there, a local guy. But then he two-timed me with my original partner, and so – you know. I mean, these are normal things for everybody. This is not something where I'm going, "Oh, poor me." That's not it at all. It's like, I went through the

normal stuff that every gay man goes through – doesn't make it any easier to go through to know that.

But what I'm telling you this for is that that's why I isolated myself, because I wasn't very successful sexually or socially. I always had – I always saw the truth in things. I always said what was really happening and people didn't like it. You know, like, a lot of people were into drugs and alcohol. I mean, no big deal, however, I got paranoid on marijuana. I didn't like being in a group with marijuana. I liked to be in an intimate situation with somebody, marijuana is fine – music, dancing, love – fine. But the mood of the group became so that when we'd have our meetings, which were business meetings, I remember one day the people were smoking dope outside and passing beers around. And I just thought – I went into the meeting and I said, "You know what, you guys are drug addicts and alcoholics. If we can't have a business meeting without you getting high, I'm out of here." And I just left. So, you can see why I was not very popular. [laughs] You know, in a small community, you put up with stuff like that. And then I had another partner for eight years and it wasn't a very sort of – it wasn't a very productive relationship, but it was sort of more need – his need and my need. So again, it was very exclusive, so there were no connections. What I'm saying is, it was very natural for me to not be involved in a lot of people's lives. And also, in Nelson, if you don't have a car and you – you know, you don't go out and meet people – everybody's out there, and out there, and out there, and out there – and the people in town have the parties. People in town meet the new people in town. All the social activity happens in town, and I was out of town.

So, when I'm saying I don't feel guilty about not involving myself with my friends who had AIDS – first of all, a lot of them didn't want anything. They just wanted – nobody knew what would happen. Nobody knew how long they'd last, right? And a lot of them fought very hard. They ate well and they lived well and they had support systems – nice social networks, people feeding them, people looking after them. And in town, that's where all those people lived. They lived in town. So, I was outside there, so why – you know, they didn't need me, so… I'm kind of noting this for the first time. Like, that's one of the reasons I came to this, is that I wanted to explore what I said at that meeting, which was "My experience is that I pulled back." But I realize that I didn't actually pull back on purpose, I didn't deny things – I was just too damn busy and other people were looking after them, so what could I do?

There were times when, you know – there was one time, I remember, was one person who really did stick out to me as my reaction of fear. And I can't believe I did this because this person and I had had a very – at various times, intimate relations and very wonderful intimate relations. This person was just the most amazing man – so intelligent and so… And he would just rattle off poetry and philosophy, just like in the – and dance and have sex, and you know. He was just really, really alive. And I remember when he was just sort of – he'd been diagnosed and he was sort of going downhill. And I met him after a couple of weeks – to his place. I was going to stay there the night. And I wouldn't kiss him. Wouldn't kiss somebody that I had – and I knew damn well there was no problem. You know, at that point, it was pretty clear that viral load was not major around here [points to mouth]. So, that's the moment when I realized – that was the fear factor – was one of the things pulling me back. It wasn't just the arrangements in the area, because that was an intimate moment and I pulled back. And I could see the look in his face, and it was like, "Oh, Michael." That hurt him, because what he needed at that point was the physical

connection. And I wanted it – I needed it, too, as a friend – as a former lover, you know. Anyway, that's… I'm glad I said that. That was an important moment because I think a lot of people did that and regret that.

BK: Yeah. There was a massive amount of fear and even when there started to be more knowledge about transmission, there was still a lot of uncertainty.

MW: And there still is.

BK: And there still, exactly.

MW: But selfishness, too. That's what that kind of thing does is it pulls people away from there humanity, from their intimacy. And that's why it's so important, always, to challenge that fear. I mean, now that's what they're doing. They're using fear to separate us from whole groups of people, and all you have to do is give into that once and you've increased the divide. So…

BK: I think fear is a huge part of this narrative – this experience for almost everyone – but it isn't the first thing that we want to talk about as a community. So, I think that's a really important thing to acknowledge. Where do we go from here? You're living in Nelson until 1988?

MW: Yeah.

BK: And so, what brings you back to Vancouver?

MW: Well, what brought me back was… working in a high school. I don't want to say too much about this.

BK: You don't have to say anything about it if you don't want.

MW: Right. No, I do need to talk about the system…

[48:36-52:10 removed at participant's request]

… I got a picture of myself – and I don't want to go into the details of that – but I got a picture of myself actually bringing anger and hatred and fear from the city into Nelson. That I had created all this, because when I came, my attitude was, "Nelson here I am. You better like me." So, I brought all this, because I had not understood my own – myself. I wasn't proud of myself at that point. I came in with attitude, and when you come in with attitude into a small town, what do you expect? You have to come into town and respect where you are. So, it was like god telling me, "Yeah, everything that is coming back to you, you seeded at some point. Even though you can't excuse the behaviour of this person and that person, if you had come in with a different attitude, that would not be happening." And so, it was like – it was wonderful. It was like, "Okay, I don't have to be here anymore, because I'm going to kill someone or someone's gonna kill me. You know, all I have to do is leave these people to their devices. I'm walking out…

[53:55-54:22 removed at participant's request]

… So, I came down to Vancouver and started working at Caper's in West Vancouver and had a wonderful – met lots of wonderful people. And I got involved in private school English as a second language with a wonderful school – wonderful principal and wonderful teachers, and started a union and organized. So, you know, if that kid had not said his truth to me – it was his truth, you know – boom – I would not have… I would not have broken and realized "What the hell are you doing here? There's absolutely no joy for anyone. Release them from the pain." So, I actually gave everybody a gift and left.

BK: It does provide a bit of a snapshot of homophobic sentiment at the time.

MW: It was homophobic, but it was my own homophobia, too. The fact that a lot of gay men – and I think that speaks to now, you know, the new – the new HIV epidemics happening now. Gay men do not – very few gay men are given the support or take the support, or take the responsibility or understand how important it is to be proud of yourself – not as a gay man, but proud of yourself as who you are. You're a person. And everything is – nothing helps us – very little helps us do that, but what I love is HIM [Health Initiative for Men] does – HIM does. Jim Deva does – people like that. You know, they make that happen. Organizations. This – this project is going to help a lot of people establish a center for themselves. But that's what was happening. We were all gay but we were still – we were still, like, eating ourselves out inside about it, or having to deal with imperfectly relating to the people around us, because we didn't know how, or we didn't have the support systems – or the support systems wouldn't support us. So, it's all this, like, human – human need for social connection so that we can feel part of something. So that we can feel honoured, not for our sexuality or our looks or our abilities, even. It's just like, "Okay, that's me."

I mean, I look at the mirror now and I say, "Oh, that's me." You know, I can be not very happy about this, very happy about this, but all-in-all, I'm saying, "Okay. I'm kind of, you know, getting close to perfection here." But in 1973, it was like excitement but no understanding of how – in order to face that excitement, I had to be very clear who I was. And the spiritual people – the *RFD* kind of people – they had it. They didn't – they weren't political. They were personally political. "This is how we treat each other. This is how we create a community. This how…" That's why I was so drawn to them, but I was never there, because I was up in my head or in my politics, or in my physical or in my sexual. Nothing was integrated. And so, that's – I thank that kid. I thank all that corruption, because without that corruption I wouldn't have understood how I was creating it. You can't blame everyone else but yourself for everything. You can say I don't like that behaviour, that's not really ethical behaviour. However… who are you? [laughs] Is every one of your thoughts moving integrated?

BK: It's an interesting thing for us to capture too, because these feelings of internalized homophobia or shame or self-esteem issues I'm sure would have shaped people's reactions and the ways that they were responding to the epidemic. So, I think this is a really interesting thing for us to talk about.

MW: And I – it's still going on. People are chasing the bug. You know, without judgment, how does that evidence self-love? Anyway, I shouldn't be dissing anybody on this, but my – it's like I

see it everywhere. I see it in myself as I look towards the end of life. Every moment you have to figure out who you are and how you're going to face this, and what supports you need and how it effects other people. It's – that's what life is as a whole – every minute you change and every minute you need – as a human, you need that social – that ability to express it and get your needs met and help others meet their needs. Yack, yack, yack, yack. [laughs]

BK: No, this is good. Let's zoom in a little bit on… So, you're back in Vancouver in 1988. The epidemic is in full swing, so to speak. What does the community look like? What does the community response to epidemic look like?

MW: Rage! It was amazing. Especially in the United States – ACT UP. I just loved ACT UP. And then there was – what's his name? John… Um – local?

BK: Kozachenko?

MW: Yes, John Kozachenko. Whoa! He was everywhere. And he was fucking angry. And he was always right on, everything he said. It was like, "Yeah." And because there were – because the people who had AIDS or who cared for people who had AIDS had the truth, what I did was I supported them. When there was a money push, I was there – I put money in. When there was a rally to go to – I don't know – I didn't go to many of the rallies, but I encouraged people, you know, to go, and I wrote letters. You know, I did – from the back, I supported, because I had no right to speak. I had nothing – I had nothing to say.

BK: Because you were proceeding from the perspective that the people with the real voices are the people that are HIV positive?

MW: Right. What can I say? I'd be speaking for them and taking their power away. I'll just – "What do you need? Okay, then that's what I will help you get." And there was so much resistance – this personal, political resistance from the Socreds. And it was so disgusting. And then the religious nuts. You know, "Well, you deserve…" How can somebody that has God's love say, "You deserve it, you filthy pig," when they don't know what that person – first of all, they don't know what the person did to get it, you know. You don't know. And even if they did what you thought was disgusting, are they still not human and have you not made any mistakes? Are you pointing – three fingers pointing back? If you're pointing at someone, you must have done three times what that person did. You know, it was so disgusting, it was so frustrating being in a society where people could say those things. That's what hurt me. It was like, "Come on!" And even if you hate every gay person in the world, it's a disease! It's spread this way and that way. You know how it is and you won't even allow prevention!? You won't put money into prevention!? So, it's like – you know, you heartless, heartless, cold souls.

And then it was, oh… there was another point I was going to make. It wasn't that one, but it was – my scientific – you know, I'm an agriculturist, so I love the scientific method, and anybody with logic could see that viruses do not stick around in one place. They don't go into one community. They have no connection with spirit – well, they do in that if your spirit is strong, it helps you deal with the virus in a different way, but that doesn't mean it's going to stop the virus from moving around. If you want your daughters protected and don't – you know, you have gay

sons that you may not know are gay. You have – your brother might be gay; your wife might be bisexual. And where is your head that you can't see that? You can't see that people are human – people fail? But the failures came from love, from a society where men wanted to love other men, and from all these weaknesses we've talked about, they chose ways that people choose when they're alienated – when they want love, when they want touch, when they don't have anything, when they have an opportunity, you know. And so, judging humanity for the stupid things they do – or one section – is really dumb, because you've made mistakes, too. And so, I could never understand how bigoted they could be and how cold-hearted they could be, because I – you know, my friends. And there was no way I could judge any of those people for what they did, because I'd done everything that they'd done. So, why was I alive and they were dead? And then you were calling them down. You're looking at me and you're saying, "Yes, but those people…" But I did the same thing those people did and I'm alive, so… It's just bloody ignorance about the simple fact, "There's a disease. We know how it's spread. Those people need help. And if you don't want it spreading, you better do something about it." It's so obvious. You did it with polio, you did it with tuberculosis.

BK: Legionnaires' disease.

MW: Legionnaires' disease. So, that's the mood that I was in – 1988. I was, like, bloody angry all the time, and sad that all these people… Then, of course, I'd hear, "He's gone. He's gone. He's gone. He's gone." So, then I just felt lonely suddenly. You know, I was teaching in a school with all these young people and I didn't have any friends.

BK: Because they were all passing away.

MW: They were gone, yeah. So, I just felt empty and lonely, as well as angry and sad…

[1:08:15-1:08:27 removed at participant's request]

We met at the AIDS Walk. No, our first date was at the AIDS Walk. 1991 – September 21st or something. I worked at *Angles*. That's what I was doing. 1988, '89, I volunteered at *Angles*. See, another political place. And so, I just learned how to help them lay out things, and we had – we had feminist sensitivity sessions and learned a lot about that, and how to work as a group, and the mechanics of putting together a paper, and the politics of putting together a paper. That was an amazing thing. So, I met my partner doing something that, you know – as part of a volunteer group, which is what I highly encourage. I highly encourage everybody to do that. Get to a volunteer group, do something you love, and somebody you love will be there.

BK: So, again, the political is where you find the community again.

MW: For me, yeah.

BK: What did *Angles* look like at the time? This is a little peripheral to what we're mainly talking about, but *Angles* was covering the epidemic a ton.

MW: A lot, yes. And John Kozachenko was on the *Angles*.

BK: Taking photos?

MW: He was the photographer, yeah. And he'd fly into that office with his – just yacking away at something that had happened and tell a story about being pushed around by the police, and – you know, doing this, doing that.

BK: Did you see your involvement there as a form of activism?

MW: Yeah, definitely. It's all I could do. Just – I had to support the people who were doing all of this. And finally, we got rid of Vander Zalm and we got rid of a whole bunch of people, and suddenly things changed. And then AIDS – oh, I remember AIDS Vancouver. I don't know when it happened, but the AIDS support groups, and… Again, I didn't have – I had some knowledge, some understanding of – there was a man in Nelson who, I told you, became diagnosed and the women just came out of the network – out of the woodwork, everywhere. All the lesbians in Nelson were busy helping the gay men. Food, clothes, taking them to doctors' appointments, do this massage, you know. It was, like – women were the ones who supported all these guys. It wasn't men.

BK: And you saw that in Vancouver as well?

MW: I saw that in Vancouver as well, yeah. And then the AIDS Vancouver – I don't know if it was AIDS Vancouver, the AIDS network. Then there was Patrick at the Elbow Room taking – you know, you had to pay for any food you didn't eat. It went into – he forced you to put money into meals – meals on wheels, so somebody set that up. And suddenly, there were all these people supporting everybody, and then there was all the medical stuff coming out. And then, I remember, you know, the – I don't know when it was, but it was the cocktail happened. And then I started seeing, realizing that people weren't dying. A whole generation of people were not dying. And then all the steps that have led to non- - you know, some people not having the virus anymore and people studying that. And other people, you know – you have such a low load, you act as if you're not… It's just an amazing – it's been an amazing evolution, but it's all been outside me. You know, I've been supporting it every way I could and it's not – it hasn't been personal.

BK: Yeah, unless you're involved in a certain capacity, you don't notice those changes in the same that someone who is a long-term survivor does.

MW: Okay, I just realized – I gave – I did do some massage. I did reflexology for some AIDS patients.

BK: In Vancouver?

MW: Yeah, at the old Gathering Place. Yeah, I did that. Supported Meals on Wheels. I got a lot of support for the AIDS Walks over the years – walked on a lot of them myself until they got a little too commercial for me – just, like, a little bit too much. There wasn't a community enough for me. And then recently, I've gone to the HIM group 55+ and the yoga, and the drawing – life

drawing. And then the session that you had at the hotel. And suddenly making contact with the people who have – who are still alive. So, it's been a very nice kind of full-circle. However, I notice I'm not involving myself, still. I mean, I'm doing this. It's still not – I'm not connecting with people who are living with AIDS. I'm not spending time with them. I'm not…

BK: Expect in some of those contexts, I imagine.

MW: Some of those contexts, yeah.

BK: And also, by nature of the way HIV is now, you're engaging with people who are HIV positive all the time now without necessarily knowing it, which is totally different than it would have been in early '90s, right?

MW: Good insight. And – we did a lot of active work in the clubs through *Angles* and through – you know, I supported – I would talk to club owners and say, "Where's your AIDS poster?" or where's this, or where's that. And sort of, free condoms, and all that sort of stuff. That was a major push that I didn't have anything really personal to do with. I mean, I didn't organize it but it was one of those initiatives in groups that I was in that we sort of made sure that happened, and I thought that was a rally brilliant move because the commercial – the businesses didn't do all – they didn't do their part. They did not do their part until fairly late in the game. Gay businesses have now, I think, done – are now probably doing a pretty good job. I mean, I really can't speak for that, but…

BK: I think with HIM's condom packing and stuff, a lot of the clubs have at least that amount of engagement, but I don't know exactly either, myself.

MW: So, I won't speak to that.

BK: Well, it's interesting to think about how many ways you were involved. Just in going over this again, you can see all the different ways in which you were actually involved.

MW: Involved, yes. I guess the thing that is probably bothering me more than anything is the fact I wasn't involved with my friends, you know. And again, don't know whether I'm guilty about it. I think I more regret that I wasn't the best friend that I could have been. It does, kind of, go along with my style though. You know, I tend to get involved with people and then, "Goodbye," and then come back. And it's the same kind of intensity, but if I saw them every day, I'm not sure that my personality is one that would really, you know… create a – I'm not sure that it would work to have friends that I see every day. So, you know, that's me.

BK: That's personality or something.

MW: Personality, yeah.

BK: It's interesting to hear you mention lesbians in particular as being so involved in the response, because, as you were saying earlier, in the '70s there was a divergence between gay

men and lesbians, to some extent. Lesbians had to form their own groups, you know, because of sexism.

MW: They had to put up with a lot in the feminist movement.

BK: It's interesting to think about how they were so involved, when it came down to it, with HIV and AIDS. Just a thought.

MW: They loved gay men. They can see – I guess the maternal thing, I think. Or the protective urge. They see that gay men are messed up. Gay men do not have a network that gives them the nurturing that they need, and they won't do it for themselves, so somebody's got to do it.

BK: Yeah, and crisis bringing people together in some ways. I don't want to belabour this point either, but you were talking about the negative right-wing response to the epidemic. How pervasive was that?

MW: Oh, totally, until it started to go heterosexual – until women started to get it, or children would get it. The minute that happened, it was like, "Oh, we've found some money. Oh, let's support that." But it was a diversion of funds from gay men. It was always, like, there's never enough in the pie.

BK: And that's just related to homophobia and stigma. Do you think any of that got taken up within the community? From your perspective, did you see that playing out in the community at all?

MW: What do you mean? In which community?

BK: Within the gay community.

MW: What playing out?

BK: Sorry. That kind of right-wing reaction in terms of sexual backlash – these sorts of things. This was the narrative a lot of the time in the right-wing that this had to do with promiscuity, and this…

MW: Oh, yeah. Sure. And in the gay community, I remember myself thinking, "Well, if you go to the baths every night for three years…" I mean, when I went to the baths, I would get gonorrhea just like that – boom. So, I didn't go very often because it was, like, "Oh, please. Do I need this?" And then I was worried about syphilis, which is harder to deal with or it can be hidden, and other diseases like Hepatitis – stuff like that. And I just – I never really wanted sex that badly to get that. And, I mean, I couldn't understand that drive that people had – "Gotta have sex now!" You know, that's not been my experience in my life, or I take care of it myself because that's… I told you, as a teenager, I was totally – and a child – I was totally in my own sexual world. There was no connection between sex and other people until I was – what, 28, 25, something like that. So, I came out late having all this libido – a strong libido wasn't there. And my analytical and political brain, and my social inability and lack of confidence, didn't make it

easy for me to get into it. And then – and so, there was judgment by many people in the community about, "Well, you know…" Yeah, it was right-wing thinking. If they had not done that, they wouldn't have got it, as if people knew, right? But then after the fact, people kept going to the baths. Then there was, "Well, I have safe sex." Yes, but it's still promoting that kind of activity, and how do you know it's safe. And that's – that's within the gay community.

I mean, what I did is I pulled back emotionally and sexually and socially. Other people pulled back by judging other gay people. So, sure, there was some of that. Some of it was spoken in the newspaper, in newsletters, or in *Xtra! West* or in some of the newspapers. There was, "Well, why are these guys complaining when they are so promiscuous?" There was that. Hateful comments about – but that's all part of the homophobia. Yeah, it divided into groups, I'm sure. And I didn't see it hugely. I really felt that the community came together and stayed together with a few people allowing their inhumanity to flourish out of fear, anger, guilt.

BK: But these debates about sexual liberation and promiscuity…

MW: Oh, they were around, yes.

BK: Did the community reach a consensus about a solution?

MW: Yeah. It was like – kind of like a spiral. Not going to do anything without a condom. And then it was, "Oh, maybe we'll kiss and jerk off," and you know, that will be all we do. "Oh, some oral is fine." And then now, I don't know. There are so many layers right now that I can't make head nor tail out of it, and I'm not sexual outside of my partner and I. So, it doesn't really – it concerns me when I hear the rate is going up, because it's very fucking simple to stop, and so there is an element of judgment for me in my mind. But here, in my heart, I know what those people are feeling that lead them to behaviours that destroy themselves, and I know that some of that's through force, some of that's through manipulation, some of that's through lying, some of that's through innocence. You know, it's through humanity that this is happening, and the key is we're not reaching our young people. It's very simple, and, again, I am not taking responsibility to do anything about that. And that's got me questioning myself.

BK: That's part of the reason why we're doing these interviews, because we think there needs to be some cross-generational dialogue about these things.

MW: Really. Really.

BK: If people had these dialogues more often, I wonder if their perspectives on these issues would be different.

MW: I just feel like folding all the young gay people up and hugging them, and saying, "Look, you are precious. I mean, you, individually, are precious. Anything you do that is – you know – stupid, you have to stop. You cannot make mistakes that we made. You have to be – you have to live your life a different way. Instead of the sexual energy, you have to create social energy, and if you're going to be sexual, you have to create ways that are not dangerous. You just – don't take that chance." And then, of course, there's all this, well now you can have the "pre- stuff"

[PrEP] and the "post- stuff" [PEP], and this stuff and that stuff, so it's fantastic, because I'm all for promiscuity. That's part of the gay community that I think that's the offering we have for the world. I think, maybe, that's a little bit stupid, because straight people are just as promiscuous. They just don't appear to have the clubs that do that.

BK: It's not quite as open.

MW: It's not quite as open. Not quite as expected, really, but it's way more rampant, I would imagine. And ours is a lot more communal. But I just feel like as a community we just have to – every gay boy who comes out has to be able to have the information or the connection. That's why these gay-straight alliances in schools are so important. That's why Out on Screen and Out in Schools is so important to create that social awareness. And your point – the most difficult thing to do is to have the cross-generational, because of all the stigmas involved in that, and the fears involved in being an older man talking to a younger man. And what do I know as an older man about that younger man's experience as a…? I don't have any wisdom for him. I have some experiences. If that person is interested in my experiences and they have some connection with saving his life, that's great. But if I come and say, "don't do this," or "don't do that," or "you should do this," or "this is what it was like for me so make sure you do…" You know, it's really tricky when you're having this seventy years of experience as opposed to three. And it's so delicate. It has to be a mentorship that both parties naturally lean to. It can't be, sort of a, setup system. "Come and listen to a seventy-year-old talk about…"

BK: It needs to be mutually respectful.

MW: Right. Even more so than that, it has to be mutually – um, what's the word? Mutually… Maybe we don't have enough words for this. There has to be a fit that isn't forced. It's not there for a reason. It has to be an opportunity for those people who can get something out of it to meet people. I mean, I would just love to talk to young men without thinking they think I'm coming onto them. Or – and, hell, they're attractive. You know, like, of course – of course older men want to be with younger men – they're beautiful. You know, that doesn't – but that's just the same as if you're a boss and you have beautiful women employees, that's not where you put the energy. You put the energy at, "It's a business, we're working together. What are the needs in terms of this business?" Finish the day's work and you're home. So, you may have those natural human desires. You just transmute them into the proper relationship. Not easy to do.

BK: Yes. That's something that we're going to have to talk through a lot more as this project goes on. Just to switch gears a little bit, you alluded to the way that you responded on a behavioural level to the epidemic, but I was wondering if you wanted to… Did your sexual behaviour change in response to the epidemic or was it already of a certain nature…?

MW: That's a really good question.

BK: I'm not phrasing it in a good way, but…

MW: Yes, you are. Perfectly. I really – that's a question I am really struggling to answer now. As I say, I didn't have huge libido and I didn't do drugs when I went to the baths, and I stayed

away from wild, abandoned sex, which is kind of strange. I like to – I'm sort of more like a voyeur because that's safe. And that's – all my life. It's never been engagement, except with one person. But even then, I'm not – and I'm letting a lot out into the world here but a lot of people have the same thing – my libido was never strong. My desire for connection with somebody was strong. My connection with being in an exciting – relating in an exciting way was important. The sex was a result of that connection. It was never – occasionally, it was – I remember some where it was just, like, hot – just meet the person and that's all it's about. But it was never that for me. It was, if the sex was hot, there was the desire to continue the relating. It was never, like, "Okay, bye." Well, there were occasional, but that's not – that wasn't really the pattern. And so, when I went to promiscuous places, I wasn't involved in a lot of the sharing of juices, so to speak. So, you know, I stayed – like, I stayed out of the pool of virus. And anal was not a really big deal for me, either – not comfortable with that because I did have some forceful situations at the first time, and I sort of – not really interested in developing that part of it. Which a lot of people feel really weird – you're not gay if you don't do anal, but since, I've realized that's not really true. So, all those things helped – kept me away from the main virus transmission routes. Was I answering your question?

BK: I think so. It wasn't necessarily…

MW: So, yes. It was sort of my style, but after the epidemic, shut down. My libido shut down. I didn't want to have sex. Masturbation was the only way for me – pornography and masturbation, that's safe. No problems. And pretty empty, you know, I must say. I shut down and I didn't go to the baths, and I didn't go here, and I didn't go there. I didn't kiss, I didn't go to parties – it was like – sex is not important for me anymore.

BK: This is when the epidemic has started?

MW: This was 19- - I guess around 1984, '85, when I realized it was full swing and friends were leaving me, or going to Vancouver. And it was like a realization that because I hadn't been promiscuous in those years, I had avoided it. So, in order to keep avoiding it, I'm going to make that an impregnable fence. And the way you do that when you're afraid is your body shuts down your libido, right? It becomes – you just – you move the energy somewhere else. So, I've, you know – I would say that my sexual life, even with my partners, is not all that fantastic. The relating is fantastic – we have a wonderful, wonderful relationship and a relating. And sex is not what's keeping us together, and I think that's really sad, because sex is the thing that brings life into everything. So, you know, I'm sad about that.

BK: It's interesting to hear you talk about it, because I think we often have this idea in our heads that in the '70s there was a promiscuous gay community; HIV happens; people's behaviours change, and so on and so forth. But your story is a little bit more, "Well no, this is the way that I engaged in the community and it was different than that, and it was consistent in some ways." That's an interesting perspective.

MW: Yeah. I would say psychologically I shut down and pulled away from the sexual part of being gay.

BK: Relatedly…

MW: It may have been that I was getting older – could be simply that, but I'm building it up into something that is simply physiological or more my own personal health.

BK: Sure. But I can understand the rationale for that way of reacting. It makes sense to me, for sure.

MW: Makes sense to me, too.

BK: If we look at this more broadly-speaking, how would you say the epidemic shifted or changed your relationship to the gay community, or did it? If we look at, starting in 1983 or something, then we look at the early '90s, how has your relationship changed?

MW: Well, it took me from an activist and active member – I mean, sexually, socially, and the activism part. It took me from activist and active to… the hole in the donut – everything happening around me and… Maybe, the glaze on the donut – I'm supporting it somehow, I'm giving it a framework, I'm supporting this, I'm supporting that, I'm emotionally connected. I'm feeling for all these lovely young men who put on these videos on YouTube saying how they came out at thirteen or fifteen. It's just like, I'm going, "You're so amazing. You're so amazing." I write little comments like, "fantastic" or "carry on." I don't want to say too much – they just amaze me. So, I hope that I'm nurturing whatever I can, and if there's some jerk saying something stupid, I'm on it right away. I'm on voting for the people that are human, not ciphers. I'm involved in communication that – you know, when I'm in… Like, the gay pride in Nelson was fantastic. I got involved. Hey, I got involved, totally, in the Nelson gay community. I did all sorts of fantastic stuff, from support at the parade to drag shows, to a political rant to dancing. I had so much fun, so maybe that's an indication I'm wanting to become part of it. And maybe this is an indication – you know, my participation here. I want to become part of it by explaining why – how – I divorced myself from it. So, I would say now I'm maybe not the hole in the donut. Maybe I'm sort of the yeast, working – they don't have yeast in donuts…

BK: Could have fooled me.

MW: But you know, the baking soda, just like – I'm working, I'm working. And I'm totally supportive of gay community, sexually and sort of that energy. It's sort of become more personal. How am I going to be for the next ten, fifteen, twenty years, so I'm becoming more, sort of, personally involved with my – the end of things. How does that work? So, I'm sort of pulling – I'm not really part of the community, but I can see that in the end times probably connecting more closely, because I'll need that support, like a seniors' network or a place to live, or a group to go to every week, or something like that. I can see that happening. So, becoming more that way. This is fun.

BK: I'm certainly enjoying it.

MW: I'm really enjoying your questions and the way you're sort of leading me.

BK: Hopefully not too much leading – just a little bit – because we want you to be able to tell your story more than we want to get any specific things out of you.

[end of video 1, 1:44:31]

[start of video 2]

BK: Did you want to say anything else about what it was like in Vancouver in 1988 in terms of the epidemic, or do you feel like you've covered that?

MW: Pretty well covered that. I was in West Vancouver working at Caper's, living with two women in a duplex. It was very personal. That's where I met my partner – my partner and I spent lots of time there. That's where I met the principal of the new school and then I got hired on as an ESL teacher. So, it was very – those three years, it was a very personal time. I was working with, as I said, the paper and, you know, just sort of – no, I don't think I have anything to add.

BK: That's perfect. We made it through the epidemic as a community in some form. How do you think we managed to do that from what you saw going on?

MW: You have some good questions, because they're not things that I've ever thought about. How did we get through? Okay, one – there were the newspapers and *Angles* and their consistent reporting of political events, social events. John's pictures and actions that were going to be taken, which created a huge effect in the population, which swayed the politicians. *The Georgia Straight* – and I'm not sure when *Xtra! West* appeared – Toronto, *The Body Politic* and I'm not sure when they finished – sometime around 1993, I think. That was the last…

BK: Yeah, I think it may have been even earlier than that.

MW: It might have been. But they were analyzing situations. They were directing people – people's anger to initiatives that were powerful. The medical establishment – as I said, the public health people were really on the fact that this had to be dealt with, and they came up with all sorts of initiatives. They came up with ways to sneak things into the budget or direct money from another budget to a group that was working on something particular. There was lots of jiggery-pokery under the table by very smart people. And things that I never even knew happened and suddenly, there was Meals on Wheels; suddenly, there was this; suddenly there's… It was just – innovation in the face of an epidemic. The gutsy people themselves who were on the street at the actions – thousands of people confronting police, confronting the bureaucracy. And all that led to the elimination of support for the right-wing thinking, because as more people became knowledgeable, the families also became knowledgeable, and then the families became the power. You know, originally, it was like, "Cut them off." The families didn't want anything to do with it. They wouldn't collect the bodies, they wouldn't help, they didn't want to know the partners' names, they wouldn't let the partners into the hospitals.

There were all these things and all these battles were fought and won. And it just built this incredible community that had – you know, something happened and it was just like an amoeba – everybody would just… And then it was like, "What did you say?"… Really quite amazing.

So, that's – that's how I experienced that, and it was a mass understanding and determination, and a collective unconscious, really. There was the conscious activism, there was a collective unconscious that this was shit – this had to change. And that's what I love about Canadians. They'll put up with a lot of stuff, and then suddenly there's a switch that gets turned on. It's like, "I'm not going to say anything but this is going to change," and it does, overnight. Boom, Mulroney's out – just like that, because everybody switched off. Harper, same thing – everybody was so sick of his sour face, they just went "click." And now Trudeau is doing all these stupid things – the switches are turning off. Canadians are really powerful that way, but being a Canadian is frustrating because you don't always see it happening. You have to have faith in everybody else turning the switch. I turn my switch, done. See? [laughs] But you look for signs like that – somebody else has switched off…

[end of video 2, 7:01]

[start of video 3]

How else did we do it? Well, it was the medical establishment, the people with AIDS themselves and their caregivers and their families that shifted the consciousness. It was all the gay people who didn't have AIDS who were supporting and knew – who knew that it had to be stopped. And then it was the heterosexuals that realized, whoops, it's coming our way. There was also that Hep. C – the blood – the blood… pollution.

BK: Oh yeah, with the hemophiliacs.

MW: With the hemophiliacs, that shook the Red Cross and shook all those people up, and realized how vulnerable we all are to bureaucratic bullshit. And I think that was a huge shift, too – like, whoa. What's the possibility of that really making this…? So, I think fear… But from the gay community, it was definitely all the small atoms becoming molecules and then becoming an amoeba. Unstoppable.

BK: It was this resiliency within the community and, like you're alluding to, maybe a shift towards empathy outside of the community? So, it's going on, on both levels. Did the epidemic in some ways make the community stronger?

MW: Yep.

BK: How so, do you think?

MW: Well, that way. You had to deal with it. And the basic thing – everybody sort of – the basic thing that ties us together as gay people – I'm feeling a little bit silly saying this because I'll say the condition later – it's basically we recognize we're "outs" – we're on the outside no matter how… And that gives us strength. And the interesting thing is that as soon as we think we're on the "in," we're going to lose that power, because being on the out links you with everybody else who's an outlaw, no matter what kind of outlaw – you're a promiscuous outlaw, or you're more promiscuous, or you're more dangerous, or you're more revolutionary, or you're too conservative – doesn't matter. You're gay. I know how you're feeling, whatever your politics is.

I know that feeling at night when you just want to hold somebody and it's going to be a man. So, that is the connection with all of us. So, it's love, basically. It's that understanding of that need for love in everybody. Now, in my stage – now, it's like, so, you don't have to be gay to feel that. Heterosexual people need that, children need that, old people need that – everybody needs that, so that's why maybe it's difficult for me to identify. The sexual part is kind of the key that ties me together with this community, but I'm seeing that everybody in the world needs that. So, it's a little hard for me to – you know, I'm becoming like god. Everybody needs love, so why am I focusing here and why do I think that's what ties this community together? So, that's why I'm conditionally saying this – I don't really know, but everybody recognizes that pain of being out – that pain of being an out of mainstream. That's why I can't understand anybody wanting to be in the mainstream. I'm really afraid of that, but that could be just my own lack of consciousness. And that's just fear of not having some revolutionary approach. I'll get over that.

BK: Relatedly, how should we as a community remember the epidemic?

MW: The stories are simply important. It's really important to simply have stories, because when I say Gay Activists Alliance, when I say *Angles*, you go, "Oh, yes. I've heard about that." But you haven't experienced it and you haven't *heard* about it, right? Nobody's made that a connection with your life, and maybe there isn't one. However, if we don't attempt to tell stories and if those stories – those stories fall on the floor and disappear, that's fine, that's legitimate. But this is – going through all this is an amazing story of resistance to oppression, the importance of rebellion, the importance of caring for people, and it's a – it's just a moment in humanity that teaches how much easier it could have been if people had taken care of each other earlier. There was no need for this, or maybe there was. Maybe it's part of a big plan, so we learn this. So, it's important that it be available for the future. I mean, it sounds like I'm just touting your project.

BK: We're okay with that. [laughs]

MW: And I think that is the answer to your question: do what you're doing, collect stories of different perspectives, and then let other generations see it for whatever they can get out of it.

BK: Do you have any advice for future generations of gay men? We've talked about this a little bit, but…?

MW: Well, because I don't know what conditions gay men are going to come into, it has to be kind of an individual… One has to unconditionally love oneself as one is and expect nothing less from everyone else, and settle for nothing less from everyone else. No bullshit to yourself or about yourself, and allow no bullshit by anybody else. And people who are involved with gay people, it's just got to be unconditional – simple. Another human being. Get over it.

BK: It's all about love in a lot of ways.

MW: It's all about love. Just get over it. You see them now, these – kid on YouTube, you know, saying that he had a terrible time talking to his parents. He phones his parents and his parents say, "Well, we knew." So, why the fuck didn't you tell? Excuse me. Why the fuck didn't you tell the child that you knew or invite the child somehow, or bring it in. It's not good enough to just

let this kid be tortured. You know, my parents – when I told my parents – I told them when they were on holiday, I sent them a letter.

BK: That's a good way to do it. [laughs]

MW: Because I knew when they came back, my name would be all over the paper, because that was the activist… I was active – 1978, '76, '78, '80 – I was everywhere, doing stuff. No, it was way before that. That was 1972, '73, '74 – that's right. And it just devastated them. But what else could I do? I was basically going to protect them from hearing it from everybody else. My dad was very interesting. My mother just said – after a while, she just said, "Well, that's the way it is. That's fine, I understand." And she was very supportive all the time. But my dad sort of sat me down and he said, "You may have those feelings. You don't have to act on them." And at that point I realized, okay Dad, you're not real. I can let go of everything you've – like, I understand. You're just in a different place. And he said, "Just straighten your tie and pull up your socks and don't do anything about it." And what I wondered at that point was – he knew more about it than he thought – than I thought, and that's painful. And he made a wonderful life for me through doing his duty, and that's what he… You know, out of love – "You will have trouble," that's what he was saying. Instead of saying, "Michael, I love you. You're going to have a lot of trouble. I'm really worried about you. I've known gay men who hold everything in and they've been successful because they've avoided trouble. I'd like you to do that." If he'd said, you know, "I'd like you to consider that option," then who knows, you know. But it was – anyway, it was… But that's the thing. You have to openly talk about – you openly talk to your children about how they're enjoying… don't you? Don't heterosexual parents talk to their children about how they're developing, how they're approaching things? I don't think they do. I think that's one of the big problems. So, just love everybody.

BK: I think I'm almost out of my main questions, so to speak.

MW: I think I'm out of yacking, too. I don't really have anything more to honour you with.

BK: The one final question I would ask you is how your ideas of HIV – what HIV means and what HIV prevention means – how has that changed?

MW: It blows me away how many ways there are of dealing with the HIV epidemic. Like I say, I'm really concerned about barebacking and all the ways that people put themselves in danger. I don't understand it. I'm really worried about young people thinking that sex is the only way to express your gayness, or that the bars or the life – you know, I would just like them to be… I guess, I put on my form, I said "human sexual." I realize that labelling myself gay has become really strange. I'm just "human sexual." You know, I might be bisexual here, straight there, gay there – basically, I'm on the gay spectrum pretty strongly. However, "human sexual" – if you look at it as "human sexual," then you've got all the choices. But that's – you know, some people would look at me, like in Gay Activists Alliance, and say, "Michael, put your money… Who are you?" Well, I'm gay. So, there's a weakness in saying "human sexual" – there's a way out. Gay means your responsible, so if you're going to say you're gay as young man now and come out, then you have to be safe and careful, and build a community that can support you. The way you

can sort of have no virus load [sic], no – where you can actually – what's the word? I've forgotten. The word where you just don't have it anymore…

BK: Undetectable.

MW: Undetectable. All those things – who knows when there's going to be a new strain or a new way. Viruses are way smarter than humans. Viruses are a higher level of being than humans, I believe. So, I think the world is going to face a lot more than this and it's going to be a lot more general, or maybe a lot more specific – I don't know. But I'm blown away by the way it's no longer, "Oh, you've got HIV. You're going to die." [Then] "You've got HIV. If you do the cocktail, you can live with these conditions." [Now it's] "If you've got HIV, you can live very well." It's like such an extension of where I closed off. I closed off there: you got it, you're dead – soon. Three months, four months, six months. That's where I was. Now, I just see all these ways of dealing with it that – sort of, the evolution – and it's marvelous, the work that's been done by people and the lives that have been lived by people. So, I'm just really in awe of everybody who's gone through it; I'm in awe of myself for going through it my way. And the people who've gone through it, I just have huge, utmost respect for every one of them.

BK: We'll be talking to some long-term survivors who have been living with HIV since the mid-'80s and it's going to be very interesting to see how their perspectives on this have changed so much over time.

MW: And that's one of the things I know I have no idea about that. So, thank you for this opportunity. It's really important for me to have said what I've been able to say. If it's useful, use it.

BK: We absolutely will.

[end of video 3, 18:25]