

“HIV in My Day” – Interview 78

April 15, 2019

Interviewee: Anonymous (P); Interviewer: Ben Klassen (BK)

Interview anonymized at participant’s request

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

Participant: I was brought out to Vancouver when I was a very little girl when my adopted family brought me here, got me hooked on drugs, got me drinking, got me... [sighs] I was made to work the streets. And I’ve been here mostly ever since, back and forth, foster homes, adoption, finally living on my own. It’s been a hard life, but it’s because of so much abuse, and that’s my whole life has been abuse.

BK: And that was part of the Sixties Scoop?

P: Yes. Yeah, which is something that I’m going through now, the Sixties Scoop. I’m having to write my story, and it’s taken a lot out of me. Seriously, it’s been really hard to look back at your life and writing. I don’t mind talking about it and sharing it with students, but to write it out is a lot different. It’s very hard. It gets me very angry and depressed and [indecipherable] like giving up. But I’m still here. [Laughs] I’m still here, which is kind of amazing. After all I’ve been through, a lot of people have been telling me the same thing, “You’re amazing.”

BK: That is amazing. Did you live in any particular part of Vancouver for a long time?

P: All down skid row. I’ve lived in almost every hotel down there. It wasn’t the funnest – hotels down there are not good. There’s a couple that were really good actually, but yeah, then I had my own apartment for a while – well, not my apartment, I lived with my boss. I lived with a boyfriend, but mostly in hotel rooms. It’s not – I never want to go back in a hotel room again. I’m grateful for where I’m living now. It’s secure, I’m safe, I get my meds every day, I get meals. You know, that’s – for the first time in my life, I feel safe, other than when I went to jail – then I was safe too. [Laughs] I know, that sounds funny, right, but I was safe. I wasn’t raped, I wasn’t getting beaten, I wasn’t being abused.

BK: So, now you’re in the West End?

P: I am, and it’s so beautiful here. [Laughs] I lived here one time, not very long, for a couple of months, and then my guy came home with somebody else. I like it here. It’s totally different. I like the fact that there’s so many parks and it’s by the ocean, and you know, I love Davie Street. [Laughs] I love the restaurants – just the people are so friendly compared to downtown. I don’t want to live down there. Nobody should live down there. There’s too much – now especially, now with all the homelessness and that, I didn’t grow up that way. Well, kind of did, kind of didn’t, but back then, it wasn’t called homelessness, it was just out – running away from your life, from your families, living on couch surfing. Yeah, but it wasn’t called homeless at that time, not till now, and now it’s really homeless. It’s not good. I’d like to see it change. It’s not good.

BK: So, when did you first hear about HIV?

P: I was... [long pause] Um, I never really heard until I found out I was positive. I went out with a guy, he was supposed to be my friend, and he got high and drunk, and we were staying in a hotel. And I got raped and I got stabbed with a rich rig. [Long pause] My arm had swollen up and [indecipherable]. And I went into the hospital and I had to take the blood thing, and they did the test, and I didn't know what the heck they were talking about. You know, "What's this HIV? What are you talking about?" Actually, what they were saying was "AIDS." And as I was at the clinic, they looked at me, and the doctor, he says, "[Name], I have to tell you something. You have like six months to live." There was no pills, nothing. It was just, "You've got six months to live." And that really, really pissed me off, because I'd finally got clean, sober – I was clean and sober for a year and a half for the first time in my life. I had a home, I had a great man, I had everything. So, from there, I went to – I left the doctor's office. She didn't tell me to bring anybody either, you know, to support me – she didn't say nothing except, "You have six months to live," and she walked out of the office.

I went down by the tracks and was just looking at the tracks. I just wanted to end my life. How could I only have six months to live? I'm clean, I'm sober, I've got my life together – I've got a life, I have a home. And I wanted to go. I started running toward the track and the train was going to come right down, and I was going to go underneath. Then all of a sudden, some people were like, "[Name], [name], [name], what are you doing? Come on! Come up here. We haven't seen you for so long." Then I looked back and there was a whole bunch of people sitting up on the hill, and I thought, okay, go, [name], go. I turned and I went back up the hill, sat there, and I talked to them and that. "Do you want a drink?" What the hell, I've got six months to live. And the thing about it was that I'd seen those pictures – they looked like skin and bone, you're nothing, but these are all from the States, and it... All you ever – god, in six months, I'm going to look like that. I'm going to die. So, I started drinking, got back into drinking. I went home, I told the guy I was with, I was just like, "I've got to break up with you." I told him I was sick, and I was going to die, and I didn't want him to have it – I knew that much, I didn't want to give it to him, because he was such a good man. He worked, he took care of elders, and helped people out, and he had kids, and I just couldn't do that to him.

I don't know, I just kept staying there, and drinking and drinking and drinking, and getting so drunk, and getting back into drugs, and just, I have nothing left to live for – there's nothing there. I don't remember how long – I kind of – my brain kind of went poof, you know? I couldn't live anymore, all I could do is drink and get high. I ended up in Vancouver – I was so good here because there's so much drugs and so much alcohol and so many people to supply me with what I wanted, right? I did what I had to do to get it, because I couldn't think. I honestly don't really remember a lot of years. I was so messed up, I was fooling around. [Long pause] I hated men – I so hated men. You know what's really stupid though is that I would work the street. It's stupid – I would think that I was hurting them. I wasn't hurting them, I was hurting me. But all my life, I've been so abused. I didn't care anymore, I had nothing to live for. So, what did I do? I lived in these scummy freaking hotels. I couldn't believe I could do that. I tried – on and off tried to get back clean and sober, but it just wouldn't last. I couldn't get it through me to get – I couldn't, you know – couldn't get it. Every day – I had to quit going with guys, I had to quit – I had to quit

a lot of stuff, you know? I couldn't work, I couldn't do nothing, all I could do is get high, get high, get high, get high.

So, one day I was trying really hard to say, [name], you've got to change your life, you've got to do something. I don't really know why, but that six months had passed, I was still alive, but I was – it was like [indecipherable], you know? I got some pills one day from the doctor. It used to be across from Oppenheimer Park, there was a clinic there. The doctor there ordered some pills for me, so the first day I'm going to take these pills, I was so, so sick on them. The doctor, who I have now – she's so cool, she's the greatest doctor in the world – she rushed me into the hospital. Those pills, I was deathly, deathly allergic to something in them – those were the wrong pills for me. After that, I kind of tried to take pills, but I couldn't take them, so I wouldn't take them anymore, I quit taking pills, that's enough. I had that anger again in me. It just seemed like every day was why should I live? My life just became literally to the point where I was literally crawling on the wall to get more drugs into me and then I forgot almost twenty years, I don't really remember.

It was so – funny, one day I got a phone call from my adopted mom and she told me that I was supposed to go up onto the Balmoral Hotel and jump. I just about did – I went out – I just about did it. I was going to go buy some down and go up, just down it, and go. But some drug dealers know me so well, they said, “I don't know what's wrong with you, but there's something going wrong. Have some coke and a bottle, here's a carton of cigarettes. Now, go home, and you're not coming out.” It's funny, you know, drug dealers take care of me. Actually, I tried to leave the apartment and there was a guy there and a guy at the other door, and they said, “Nope, get back in. You've got a week to do it. Stay home. Get your act together. Fuck, get it together.” I came out after the week and they were like, “Are you okay now?” Yeah, but that day when I got that phone call, my friend was working at the desk, I slammed the phone down and I went outside, and I slammed my head into a cement wall – I still have a big thing here. But I lost everything, you know? There was nothing left anymore for me. Then I started going to that Native place on Hastings – that place is a joke.

BK: Which place was that?

P: That Native clinic, you know? It's like downtown there, and how everybody used to lay around and get their meals and they watch TV and they just lay there, and they die. That's all I could hear every day, and those words kept pissing me off more and more. I'm still here, I'm still alive, I'm not going to die. So, I got pissed off and I said, “Fuck you all! You guys get off your fucking asses and do something.” And that's when I finally started to go out and say hey, [name], you need something. I tried going out to different little groups and paid five bucks or ten bucks or whatever, right? I tried to stop, slow down the drugs – I tried really hard to strengthen that, but it was – it didn't seem to matter. You know, I don't know why, but even though I tried to get it together, I kept screwing up, I'd keep going back, I fell back, I fell back, because I've wasted away my life. It's taken me all these years to finally say hey, [name] – and I almost died. Ten, fifteen years ago, I was in St. Paul's, they said – my NA worker was sitting beside me, “[Name].” He comes in, he says, “I think you better phone your family and get your things together. We don't think you're going to make it.” At that time, I was like skin and bone. I couldn't walk – I was so sick.

I don't know, something came over me. Okay, I was there, when they said that my – I was in bed, I got this warm feeling and this voice was talking to me. It said, "Get up, walk. Get up and walk." I can't walk. I'm paralyzed. "Get up. Walk. Have faith." So, I did. I walked to the nurses' station and I collapsed. And after that, it was like I tried, I tried really hard. I walked out of St. Paul's hospital after they told me I'd never walk again, you're going to die, call your family – blah, blah, blah. No, I just kept saying, "No." And I told my husband – well, they guy that I was with at the time, and I said to him, "Take me outside." Like, on the fourth floor, there's some little steps and you have to go by the elevator. I said, "Take me down those stairs." "You can't walk down stairs." "Do it," and I got so mad. I'm going to walk, I'm going to do this, and I fought, and I fought, and I fought. I did it. But boy, did I get shit when I got back inside. The machine was going off. But after that, I used to sneak out down by the nurses' station and I would get out of my chair and I would try walking. I walked out of that hospital, and they're like, "I can't believe you can walk again." Because all I could do was move my eyes. I've been in and out of that St. Paul's hospital so many times with pneumonia, with my body finally just breaking down, and I come back out again. I don't know, I just can't give up – I can't give up anymore. As much as I want to give up, I can't anymore. I have to fight.

I have to fight for other people. I have to fight for the girls. I want to be a counsellor. I need to see a counsellor for me, I need to see an abuse counsellor, I know I need to go to a treatment centre, and I want to go finish that, and when I finish that, I want to come back, I want to go to Steinberg College. I want to become a counsellor, because I'm not going to die, I will not die. I will live till I'm eighty. My mother, my birth mother, who I finally met, they told her she wasn't supposed to get pregnant and I wouldn't have made it – she was supposed to die. You know, she lived to be over eighty years old. I'm going to do it – I'm so much like my mother. So many years, I was giving up, and just 24/7 I was shoving rigs in my arm, doing dope, drinking as much as I could – I didn't care, I just drank it. I fell down so many times and [indecipherable] was trying to pick me up, take me in, and I'm like, no, no, no, no. And I was in and out of the drunk tank, and you know, I didn't care for the meds. So many years, nothing mattered to me.

I think it's my nurses who finally made me realize that I'm a person, that I can be loved, and the guy that I was with, we went to school at First United Church, I got some education. And then he started drinking that – oh, what was it called – salty Chinese wine, cooking wine, and he was drinking hand sanitizers, and oh my god, I've seen so many people die. And one day I was in class and I walked outside and I started to [indecipherable]. The one thing he always told me, "I don't want you drinking this crap. I don't like who you are when you drink. You're not the same person. You need to go to school, you need to get an education. You need to be better than me. You got to be better than this crowd I hang with." That's always stuck in my head, though I kept trying to ignore it. I tried to but some days I feel like saying to hell with it, but I just can't. I keep going on. And you know, it's funny, everybody keeps telling me – doctors – "You're not going to make it, you're not going to make it." This last year, I was in the hospital two or three times – the last four years, I've been in and out, in and out of the hospital. I wasn't taking my meds, I wasn't doing a thing. And I still kept coming out. So, there's something in me that keeps fighting. I don't know why – well, I do now, I do now know why, because of what I want to do. I want to help people, I want to take care of people. [Coughs] When I finally got it together, I opened my own place called [name], a drop-in for people who don't want to drink on welfare

day because everything was closed. It sucks. And it didn't – do you remember Positive Women's Network? That was a super place. I so enjoyed going there and I really miss it. It's very hard. There's nothing around anymore really.

BK: Nothing that's just for women, right?

P: Yeah. It was just down – where am I? It was just across the street on Davie there. It used to be at AIDS Vancouver, and then they moved up here, and now they closed down. I don't understand why they closed them down. They also, I heard, they don't do the bus pass thing anymore. Like, you used to pay \$25 for a year. They don't do that anymore. It's hard. I don't know. I don't go to really any places anymore because I live at Dr. Peter, so I've got everything I need – everything. But – and that's what scares me, when I get healthy, I'm going to end up having to leave, so in a way, I kind of pray that I don't get healthy. Does that sound right? That's kind of sick, eh? I don't want to leave. I don't want to go. They're going to place me in stupid modular housing – yeah right. I walked down the road and they're fixing two doors away from my room, a window there so you can see them fixing – they come out, they're tweaking, tweaking. Just what I really need, you know? I'm glad I'm sick. That sounds strange, but I've got so many things going on with my health right now. I look good on the outside, but my inside, it's crap. If I could just take – I wish I could do something to make it better. I wish I could. I wish I could live in a small town, I wish I could... [long pause]

I wish I never got this. I wish I was never raped. And you know what, the guy that did this is no longer allowed in Vancouver – he's probably dead now anyway, but yeah, I found that out, that he had raped a lot more women. You just didn't tell anybody. The guy that I was with in [town], I guess that guy went too, went and partied with him, because I went to Union Gospel Mission for lunch one day, and here he came in, and I'm like, "What are you doing here?" And he told me that he was positive. "How did you do that?" I'm just like, "How did that happen to you?" And he told me that he partied with the guy that raped me, and he didn't have a rig, so he said they shared rigs. He took his life – he was the best man ever. I thought he was the strongest man I ever met until he took his life and I got pissed right off – it pisses me off that he could do that, because I left him so he wouldn't get sick, you know what I mean? He was such a great guy. I didn't want him to get sick. Sometimes life just is not fair. Anyway, do you have any more questions? It's a long day.

BK: It's a lot to talk about. A lot of pain.

P: Yeah. Some days I feel like going downtown and shooting every single drug dealer and smacking people out of it, you know? I'm open about the fact that I'm positive, and I've lost a lot of friends and family that way. I'm in [name] magazine, I go to that and I go to high schools. I gave my daughter up for adoption, and my adopted mom – my daughter tried to find me, and my adopted mom, she's such a – "Oh, you don't want to know your mom. Your mom is just a prostitute. She's just a drug addict and alcoholic, and she's positive, she's got AIDS." My daughter didn't care – she didn't care. She wanted me, she needed me. She looked for me and we finally got in contact, and you know, I was on Hastings and we were walking around, and finally I just looked at her. I said, "Look, I have to tell you something." I told her that I was sick, I told her what was going on with me. "I know that. Your mom told me that. And I don't like her, she's

really mean.” [Laughs] And I told her what she had done to me. My daughter’s a great girl. She graduated from school, she’s got her own business, she builds houses – she’s a great girl. My grandson lives in Calgary – I’ve never met him because his dad said no because I’m just a squaw and just a drug addict, and blah, blah, blah, blah. So, I haven’t had a chance to meet my grandson. I met my granddaughter, and I’m really worried about her – really worried, because she’s been abused too, and her – actually, my grandson’s father abused her. And she went to go talk to him – she finally got strong enough, she was going to go to Calgary – he went swimming and he drowned. She never got a chance, so it ate up at her, and now she’s – I told her mom she should go into the hospital. She needs to go into the psych ward because she’s not doing really seriously – and that really scares me. I’m scared for her.

I don’t know how many times I went there over the years, how many times I went to the psych ward. OD, OD, keep trying to take my life. And now, I want to live. [Laughs] I don’t want to die, I want to live. Some days though, like what’s going on with me, I’ve got to go back to the hospital today, the women’s clinic. The last three, four days, I’ve been screaming, crying, haven’t been able to walk. I went off my meds for four days, and then I go back on them for another three days. It’s hard though, so tough. And now I’m on the Hep C meds now – I just started that, which is not bad, but they have to – they just took and we’re going to find out what’s going on, if it’s working or not, so I don’t know if it is or not. I’m hoping it is. And then I found something in my heart, so I gotta find out and wait for that test to come back. I don’t like this disease. I don’t like it at all. I would never, never, never wish it on even my worstest, worstest enemy. Nobody should have this. There’s gotta be a cure. You know, just one shot or one pill would cure you. That’s what I want. [Laughs] That would be the most greatest thing ever.

BK: I have just a couple more questions for you. Where did you find support during...? Like, you talked about Positive Women’s Network, so what kind of support did they give you?

P: They used to – we used to get our lunch, our groceries, they would take us places. They took us to – always taking us to doctors, always there with you, talk with you, cry with you, hold you. I miss that place. I miss the workers. Those workers were so great. My nurses, I have two nurses, they are the greatest – they’re so great. They’re coming to see me tomorrow. They’ve always been there for me, you know? And when I was drinking and drugging, they’d find me in the alley. “Come on, come on, you’ve got to get... We’ve got to get you...” [Indecipherable] But they were there, you know? It didn’t matter to them whether I got high or whether I was drunk – it didn’t matter. They just wanted to take care of me, and they kept telling me, “[Name], you’re beautiful, you’re a good person, you’re going to do it, you’re working, you’re amazing, you’re this, you’re that.” [Coughs] I’ve done [indecipherable] for them. When I got out of St. Paul’s hospital, I couldn’t really move around a lot, and so I’d lay on the couch and just watch TV. They would come and see me every day and make sure I took my pills, make sure – they’d do my hair, they would clean me up, they would cut my nails, cut my toenails, do whatever, right? They would bring me treats.

And then when I finally got better, good and healthier, I ended up working at First United Church – well, volunteering, and the guy that was in the kitchen who was – when we first started doing it, it was only peanut butter sandwich and water, and this guy who was there was like, “These girls are working girls. They need food. They’re on the streets for hours and hours, and

they need food.” So, he went out of his pocket and bought food, bought roasts, got steak, got everything – hams, chickens, everything. And nobody wanted to help in the kitchen, so I did. And there was one day, he said, “Hey, my wife is coming. Do you want to meet her?” And I said, “Yeah, sure.” So, I said, “Okay, I’m going to go take this tray out here, then I’ll be back.” And I get out there and there’s my two nurses, and then he walks out, “What are you doing hugging my wife?” Small world, small world. Yeah, we’ve been friends – I call my nurse Mom, the older one, and the other one, I call her my sister. And him, I call him my boyfriend, and we’ve been friends, and they’re the ones that are like the tightest for me. They’ve been there for me, they never give up on me. You know, on my birthday this year, they took me out, and I was all dressed up and everything, and they took me out for steak dinner. It was so nice. And they bought me this huge cake. And then I have other friends from Salvation Army – I stuck with them for a few years on and off, and they followed me around. They wouldn’t let me go, they knew what was going on with me, and they’re still with me. One of them keeps coming to Dr. Peter’s to visit me. She’s been there almost every day, and when I was in St. Paul’s.

Yeah, that’s the kind of support I love. These people are so, you know, right there. They don’t care what I do – they don’t care if I go out and get high or if I drink or if I do anything, they always want to bring me back up. Dr. Peter’s is a great place. I haven’t been to AIDS Vancouver for many years. I haven’t been to any of the different places anymore. I don’t go to that Native place anymore. I did some – well, at St. Paul’s, I got on the tenth floor and I see the nurses – those nurses are so cool. They were really, really good. Like, I just went to see one the other day, and she goes, “I’ve known you fifteen years, [name]. You were supposed to die. You weren’t supposed to make it.” And she just gives me the biggest hugs. And that’s the kind of support I like, when people say that I can make it – “You’re going to make it, [name], you’re going to make it.” My name is [name] and I took the [part of name] out of my name, because that’s what I was like – I was full of anger, full of depression, full of not caring. Well, now I took the [part of name] and come to [name] – I’m number one. And because of being number one, I have to keep going, pushing myself to keep going. I also say that I was positively positive. [Laughs] I’m also a B.I.T.C.H. – I’m a babe in total control of herself. [Laughs] I like that one. And the reason why – those ones there, those things, I write those on everything I do. All my writing that I have write for my Sixties Scoop, for my magazines, for everything, those three are always there.

I was doing a survey one time in Surrey and I told this guy, “Yup, I’m positively positive.” And he just starts laughing his head off, and he says, “I’ve got to remember that. I’ve so got to remember that.” Support is a big thing. That’s one of the reasons why I want to be a counsellor – I want to help people. There’s no reason – there’s just no reason in today’s world that people should become positive. There’s no reason for it. People know how they get it, and you know, I guess that’s what really gets me now is when I see people that are positive in just the last few years, that pisses me off. Why the hell are you becoming positive? Why? When I was in the back alleys, I used to see people picking up rigs and trying to use them, and I’d go up to them, “What are you doing?” “I want to get AIDS.” “What for?” “Because I hear you can get more money.” That was the biggest thing. You know, they had the section C years ago, and I wouldn’t accept it, because I knew at that time, I would be dead – I knew I would die. I wouldn’t accept the money from any other thing, unless it’s five, ten, twenty bucks – whatever, right? I get so pissed off at people. Yeah, you might get some money, but you know what, what’s more important – your life

or the money? Think about it that way. To me, my life is more important. I didn't think that all the time, and I'm grateful that I'm still here.

I'm grateful for my friends, I'm grateful for the people that love me and support me. My Facebook, I get every day, I get a whole slew of people – “[Name], I'm so happy, I'm so proud of you.” Dr. Peter's, I was going to walk out there a few times – I get mad at some – you get so happy that... Sometimes I get so happy that I'm like I'm gonna screw it up, I'm gonna mess it up, because that's just not who I am, right? They actually evicted me out one time because I messed up, and then they let me come back, and I've been there now for – since September. And I'm not going nowhere. They keep telling me, “Nope, we're not letting you go yet, [name]. We've got to make sure you've got your meds, we've got to make sure of all your health.” That's so cool – that is such great support there. And make sure you take your meds, make sure you get everything. I love it.

BK: And it's not the type of support that you would have had in the '80s, right?

P: Oh man, you didn't have support back then, you didn't have anything.

BK: The little bit of support that was out there was probably for gay men mostly back then.

P: Yeah, exactly. And for me, it was more abuse. You're positive, people stay away from you, and my family disowned me. I've lost so many friends, but you know, today I think if you don't like me, if you don't like what I have, then turn around and walk away, because I don't care. I have to like me, I have to love me. You don't mean nothing to me. If you can't accept me for who I am, well, go find somebody else. And the people that do love me and care about me have been there for many years, and they're never going to give up on me. I told them I want, when I do die, I said I want a parade going down Hastings. [Laughs] One of my nurses asked me on my birthday, “Do you still want a parade?” I'm like, “Hastings, no.” It's changed way too much. It's not Hastings anymore – it's trying to be rich, and yet you've got the homeless, you've got everything. It's not Hastings – that's not the Hastings I know. I grew up on Hastings when it was good. All the restaurants, all the bars, all the people were caring back then.

BK: More of a community back then?

P: Yeah. Today, it's like nobody cares about anybody. People rob people – people rob people in wheelchairs and walkers. And you know, they'll steal from you even two dollars if you have it – they'll beat you for it. They don't care. It's because of all this new crap drugs. It's sad. It's so fucking sad. I don't care if you're gay, lesbian – I don't care what you are, it doesn't bother me. You're human. Nobody deserves to be treated bad. I'm a person who has learned from my mistakes, from my past, from everything, from all the beatings and rapes – from everything, right? I've learned from it all. It's taken me a lot of years – I'm fifty-eight years old. I didn't expect to live this long. I'm grateful. God's got my back daily. My friends have my heart and they gave me their heart, their support, and their love, and that's what I want to do – I want to do that. It means everything to me to help another person. If you were – let's see – if you were sick and knew you would die, I'd be helping you, you know?

There's no reason for it though today, and that really gets me. I don't know why – how do these people keep still getting AIDS and HIV? How do they do it? Because they just don't care anymore. The drugs that are there now that people are using, it's messing their freaking minds so bad. This crystal meth and this whatever it's called is screwing their brain so bad. Even really great people are no longer those people anymore – they're full of anger, they're full of hatred, they don't care. They look at themselves – they're dirty, they smell, they don't care. There's gotta be some way to stop this. We can stop it – there's gotta be... Cancer and diabetes and everything, you know? They gotta all be stopped. As far as HIV/AIDS, that's number one. [Laughs] Just how do people...? Look at me – look at me. Do I look like I've had it for thirty years? I see so many people in St. Paul's and I go, oh my god, there's a few that have just kind of given up now – just want to end to their life. They just don't care. I have to care, because if I didn't care, I'd have nothing left. I have a family to think about, I have friends I have to think about, I have the kids in schools. I have to think about the neighbour. That's what makes me who I am today. I love me today, you know?

BK: I think we've covered most of it. Let me just take a quick look here. Did you connect at all with the Indigenous community for support?

P: No. I went to that Native place and I tried a few places, but I didn't feel like I belonged because of what my adopted mom said to me, that "You're just a squaw," you're this and that. So, I didn't want to be Native, I didn't allow myself to think that I'm Native. I now find out that – okay, my birth family was alcoholics, and my sister died of drug overdose, of pills. But that's one side of the family, and I didn't know about the rest of the family. I now have met on Facebook my auntie and uncle, and a bunch of other people, and I have nieces and I have nephews and I have – oh man, it's like, wow, I really got a family that doesn't drink and drug? And they're into Native dancing, they're into the culture, they're into, you know? It's like, wow. So, when my health is better and I can travel, I'm going back to [town] to be with family, to meet my family, which will be hopefully this summer.

BK: That's really cool.

P: It's going to be so scary though. [Laughs] It's scary but it's exciting. Yeah, it's going to be neat, because I think that's probably where the strength comes from is that side of the family, you know?

BK: From your Indigenous identity?

P: Yeah. I want to – I have two drums in my room now. My rooms is like eagles, eagles, eagles. I got all my shells and everything. This is not who I was. I'm now a First Nations woman and I'm proud to be Native.

BK: That's amazing. That's great. Maybe just to end, what advice do you have for younger generations? You say you go to schools sometimes. What's the advice you have to share with folks from younger generations?

P: If they're abused, if they are around people who are using drugs and drinking, anything like that, I say, tell them, that they need to first get out of there. Second, they need to – they always ask me the same question, every single time: how do you forgive what's been done to you? Well, first of all, you have to forgive yourself. Forgive yourself, then you can forgive them. You have to be strong. You know, I went to a Catholic school, and like, what am I going to be able to teach these kids? These kids are all Christian families and that, and then I get there and I shared my story – guess what? These kids came up, “My mom's a prostitute.” “My dad's a drug dealer.” “My dad's in jail.” “My mom's in jail.” “I have to live with my grandparents.” I'm like, what? I was shocked. It hurt so bad to hear these stories. These kids are strong. They got love from being there. I went to [town]. My granddaughter ran out of the place when I was sharing my story. Her mom went and grabbed her and brought her back. She doesn't like to hear my story, because she's scared, because she's been abused. Her mind goes to what's going on in her life too. I had a time when this girl – this elderly lady came up to me and a young girl came up to me, and she just crawled up to me. “I've never told anybody ever, but you make me want to – I want help. I want help.” “What do you need help with?” “I'm a prostitute and a drug addict and alcoholic, and I need to get off of it before I ever find out that I ever get HIV too.” I just cried and I cried – I cried with her. Then I says, “Let's phone right now. Let's get you into detox.” She goes, “Really?” I said, “Right this minute, we'll do it.” So, I got my friend to phone up a detox just because I didn't know [town], and we got her into detox. I got one letter from her and I've never really heard again, but she got clean and sober, and she got a life. She [indecipherable] and everything. I still pray for this girl – I hope that she's still doing well. Yeah.

Stay away from the bad life. Stay away from it. I mean, I see so many kids out there today – they're just young kids and they're homeless and they're smoking that crystal meth. I'm like, what are you doing? You're not going to be alive, you know? Your brain's going to go [indecipherable]. You know, so many people are so nuts now. I don't know how I survived or I am not totally insane, but I think because my creator has watched over my back and has helped me go on, and then with the friends and people who keep pushing me forward. You need to stay strong, no matter what. No matter what, you have to stay strong. You have to love yourself – you have to learn to look in that mirror and say, hey, I'm worth it. I'm worth it, because you are – you're so worth it. I'm a B.I.T.C.H. – a babe in total control of herself. Yeah. [Laughs] And I'm positively positive – yes, I am. And I can't say I'm – okay, maybe I'm kind of grateful to be sick because I've gone through a lot, and through all the abuse and everything, maybe it was – I don't know. I think – this might sound crazy but I think I was abused and everything and got this disease and everything else so that I could teach and help others, because if I didn't, I think that I would just end my life. I should have ended my life if I did not go there and go drink and drug. It's brought me out of it, I think – it's taught me to care more about me and others.

BK: And that's amazing.

P: Yeah, I'm kind of surprised at it too, seriously. [Laughs] I'm surprised at who I've become. I'm a good person. Doesn't matter whether I drink or if I get high, or if I – it doesn't matter, you know? But what does matter is that I've got to keep struggling and keep striving to go on no matter what. I don't know if I'm going to be able to go into school, but I'm going to try – I want to do it. I don't think I need the paperwork because I've been through that – I don't see why I need to have the paperwork, but I know legally, you have to to become a counsellor. You have to

go to school, have to get that book worm – book smart. [Laughs] What about street smart and everything else, right? Living the life – I don't know. Anybody who is positive should take good care of themselves. Take your meds, do what you're supposed to. Right now, at Dr. Peter's, I have to tell you, is we're trying to do more health things. We want to get up in the morning, do a dance, do a – what do you...? Yoga-type thing, because we don't have that going on yet, but that's what we want to do. I think it's a great idea, as well as having – what do they call it? Self-defence for people with walkers and wheelchairs. And because me, I've got hearing aids, I can't hear you from behind. If somebody comes behind me, that's the first thing that I... It's hard, so that's why I want defence. It's just another part of me that needs to keep striving, right? Yeah. Anyway... Keep going. Keep looking to the future, because no matter, you're worth it.

BK: Thank you so much for sharing all of this with me.

P: You're welcome. And thank you for letting me cry. I feel better now. I like the ending. [Laughs] It's much easier than the beginning. The only reason it's easier is because I make it easier. I've worked myself through all of that, that's why.

BK: Is there anything else you want to add before we finish, or is that good?

P: All I can say before ending this is I want to – anybody who's... I don't know. [Laughs] I don't know. Anybody who's positive, please take care of yourself, please remember you're worth it and you are loved. There's nothing, no matter what – you didn't do nothing wrong. You did nothing wrong.

BK: I'll just stop this for now. And thank you again.