"HIV in My Day" – Interview 6

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Interviewee: Paul Craik (PC); Interviewer: Ben Klassen (BK)

Ben Klassen: Alright. Thank you so much for agreeing to participate and share your stories and experiences of the epidemic. We're really glad that you're here with us.

Paul Craik: Well, I'm glad to be here.

BK: Thank you. We like to start with an icebreaker of sorts, by just asking guys how you first became involved in the gay community or when you first started engaging in gay life.

PC: Oh, well, it was maybe in 1982 in Kamloops. I met a guy from the Young New Democrats. I decided I'd go to one of their meetings and he was involved. He was actually the president of Gays and Lesbians of UBC, and this was his summer vacation, so he was home in Kamloops. And we met and he came out. He told me he was gay and I told him "I think I'm gay, too, but I've never told anyone else before." And we talked about that and I had sex with him – the first time I ever had sex with anyone was with him. And he took me to the Thompson area gay group community meetings at the United Church – they had a meeting space there. And so, that's when I first came in contact with the gay community.

BK: What did the community look like in Kamloops?

PC: Well, they didn't have a gay bar. They didn't have any kind of formal gay… anything, anything. It was all sort of very informal – it was like house parties. There was a bar on the main street, Victoria Dri-… Street, which had one area where gay people were – quite often would go and meet, but it wasn't a gay bar and it was mostly straight people there. There was a lot of passing on phone numbers and stuff like that, and that's how people connected. So, it was more of a very small-town community kind of feel to it.

BK: A lot less formalized or…?

PC: Yeah, there was no – you didn't have a community center. You didn't have… We had, like, I think during gay pride weekend, there might have been, like, maybe we'd go to a film or something like that, but that was about it. Or they'd have a film they'd show at the United Church, at what they called the Community Christian Education Center. It was just a hall or whatever and they had different rooms, and we got one room. And that's where I first saw the movie *Cage aux Folles*. So, that was – they showed a video of that, so that was one of the things they did. They also had an interview. People could come - they had a… a journalist come and interview people in the gay community in Kamloops, and we could use pseudonyms and stuff like that, so you'd just use a pseudonym. And I didn't really speak, but other people spoke of their experiences – I was still coming out but other people would talk about things, like custody issues, and all sorts of other things, and their lives and what they had to deal with, being gay in Kamloops.

BK: It's interesting to think that the United Church was this hub, in a way.

PC: It was. When I think about it now – 'cause I thought about, like, back in the '80s when there was this surge of the Christian Fundamentalists and the religious right, here was a church, a mainline church, which actually created a safe space for us. So, it was pretty amazing when you think about it.

BK: Pretty amazing.

PC: Yeah. Progressive.

BK: Wow, that's fascinating. So, then you moved to Vancouver in…?

PC: In February of 1984, I moved here and I moved right into the West End – so, right at Bute and Comox. There's an old apartment building there. It's still around. I met a lot of people there in the building and still know someone – I'm actually meeting someone – I've seen someone there recently who used to live in the building as well, so we reminisce about stuff about the building as well. So, it was kind of a neat place, and of course it was right in the gay community center area of, you know, Mole Hill, Davie Village.

BK: Was part of the reason you moved to Vancouver to be in that community? Was it explicitly to be in that community?

PC: Yeah, exactly. That's what I wanted, yeah. It was sort of, like, I wanted to move aw- - I wanted to be on my own and I also wanted to be in a gay community, so that's why I came specifically to the West End. I had a boyfriend in Kamloops and he showed me – on our winter vacation during Christmas holidays, we came down to Vancouver. He showed me – we went bar hopping. He showed me Little Sister's bookstore and took me down to Wreck Beach even though it was the middle of Winter, but there were people there at the beach…

BK: I'm sure. [laughs]

PC: …So, he showed me Wreck Beach and told me all about this. And met some friends of his. So, it was quite an eye-opener for me and it's like, yes, I can hardly wait to come down here and live here. So, I did it two years later.

BK: Wow. Yeah, I think that's the story we hear so much about people moving to Vancouver from all over Canada, really, just because of the sense of community here, so that's really interesting to hear in your experiences as well. Just one tangent here: I'm going to be looking over at the camera once in a while, so sorry about that, just to make sure we're still rolling. So, what did the community look like in Vancouver when you were first seeing it in the early '80s? What was the community like then?

PC: Well, I think – I hate to use to term small-town because I left a small-town, so for me it was like so cosmopolitan. "Oh gees, you've got…" Well, basically a community center was starting up – had just started up and they were producing a newsletter, and they had a gay bookstore. I

thought, "Wow, this is so…," you know. And there were bars here, and not just one but several bars – like, a number of bars all over the city. So, it was really exciting. I was excited. It was kind of – I thought it was very – it seemed very alive in a way, for me. You know, being new to it all, and just coming out. It was quite exciting. I think – but I also thought that the community was also – I think it seemed a little more closer knit than my perception of it is now. I think there still is community here now, but I think it seemed more people were – if you were gay, you were in the West End, you know. There were gay people out all over the place, in the suburbs and stuff like that, as there are now, but I think it's probably more dispersed, you know. It's more spread out than it was. There was like a little hub, a little bubble that we had.

BK: Any other thoughts on what the community looked like then? Just trying to get a little snapshot of what Vancouver looked like pre-AIDS if we can.

PC: Oh yeah. Well, it seemed like cruising was easy. Like, up in Kamloops it was easy to get sex, it seemed. [laughs] You know, people passed around your phone number and other people would phone you up. And here in Vancouver it was fairly easy to do that, too, but I also remember that – by the time I moved here it was '84, and AIDS was starting to hit. And when I first moved here, there was this backroom at a bar called John Barley's – it's 23 West Cordova – and they had… So, people told me lots of people would have sex in the backroom, but by the time I moved here, it was kind of, like – I think that was all sort of starting to – just starting to fizzle out. So, that was kind of – but there was still… It hadn't really fully – the crisis hadn't really fully hit the community here as I think it was… Like, there was a little bit of a delay compared to say, the bigger cities like San Francisco and L.A. and New York.

So, there was some of that. But you know, people would be cruising at what's known as the Fruit Loop, which is down near Sunset Beach at the parking lot there, and in the parks. And, of course, they still do that kind of stuff, and it was more – I think it was crusier, especially at night time. You know, like, there were more bushes and stuff, and around – underneath the Burrard Bridge there were old buildings and stuff like that were abandoned, and people would go into there and… I never did that myself. I was kind of feeling a little too afraid, still coming out and that. But… You know… And Wreck Beach and stuff like that, so it was… It seemed a little more… A little less… Sort of, more care-free, I guess, yeah. It seemed a little freer at times. You didn't have as much to worry about.

And then, it would have been about a year or two later, things started to change. And that's when, you know, it started becoming in the news more – AIDS. It was – I actually first heard of AIDS actually back in Kamloops from my – that first friend told me. He said there was a – back in '82, he said, well there was a gay cancer. Guys in L.A. were getting this gay cancer. We didn't know what it was back then and they thought maybe it was caused by poppers. And… But I – for me, a lot of the community was – I was involved with stuff like – I would go to Little Sister's bookstore and get books and magazines. I had a subscription to *The Body Politic*. *Angles* newspaper had started up and so I ended up taking a subscription – subscribing to *Angles* newspaper. And… let's see, there was… And I was involved with other groups. I got involved with a group called VASM: Vancouver Activists in Sadomasochism. It was a gay men's – kinky gay men's S&M group, so I was involved with them for a couple of years. I think it was, sort of

– people were still – the crisis still hadn't really hit, the gravity hadn't really hit at that time – '84, '85. I think it took a little bit longer than that.

BK: So, you had a couple little communities that you were a part of. There was Little Sister's, which was probably a little more of a bookstore at the time.

PC: Yeah, it was just a bookstore, but I'd like to go in there and just browse. You know, it was neat. Every now and then I'd buy a book or… [indecipherable]… Yeah, I'd browse, and every now and then I'd buy a magazine or a book or something like that from them, or sometimes a button.

BK: Yeah. This is a little bit tangential to what we'll spend most of our time talking about, but what was VASM?

PC: Oh, it was a gay men's S&M support and educational group, and sort of social group. And sometimes they'd also have parties. They would also go down – I went down to a run in Seattle and they had a sex – they met with two other organizations: Seattle Dungeon Guild and Knights of Templar San Francisco and VASM of Vancouver. And they had, like, a large play party in a place which was formerly known as the Seattle Boxing Club. Someone had bought it and they were converting it into a bar, but before they opened up, we had this play space, so there was a lot of play going on there. And then they also had other play spaces. One was this – one member had inherited a farm out in – I think it was Maple Ridge or somewhere around there – so we could play around on his farm or in the barn or wherever – just out in the field there. There was lots of freedom to do that, so we did that one summer weekend. It was interesting.

BK: It sounds very interesting. I just hadn't heard that acronym before. You alluded to this just now, but when you were first hearing about HIV and AIDS, where were you hearing that kind of information from?

PC: Um, let's see. I was in Kamloops at the time – still in Kamloops. And I think got it from – just other people in the community were talking about it. I think there was also some – it was on the news. I'm trying to remember exactly, but I remember I have an issue of *The Body Politic* from around that time period – the front page said, "The Case Against Pan-" – "AIDS: The Case Against Panic." So, it was already starting – coming to the awareness in the gay community, even in the early '80s. In Toronto, of course, they were closer to New York, so they would have really had their ear to the ground on that, probably a little more than other places would have in the country. And, yeah, there was – so, it was sort of in the gay press as well, and after when I moved here to Vancouver, there was more stuff, like *New York Native*, and *The Advocate*, and all these other publications from the States would have a lot more stuff – *Bay Area Reporter* from San Francisco would have a lot of news on the crisis as its unfolding. So, it – the word sort of filtered out into the gay community, and then to a lesser degree to the mainstream. Of course, in the mainstream, it was probably a little more – I don't know if the word is sensational. I think everyone started to panic a bit.

BK: When you were first encountering that information and first hearing about – well it probably wasn't called AIDS yet. It was probably GRID or gay cancer. Do you recall what your initial

reaction was when you were hearing that news? Was it an immediate "Oh my god, this is going to be really terrible," or was there kind of a "This is happening somewhere else" kind of thing? And that's hard to put your finger on, but…

PC: I think at first it was sort of like – in the very early days, it was like it was sort of like, well, that's somewhere else and it's probably something like – "I don't do poppers, so now I'm probably going to be okay." And then as things evolved, it started to become a little more like they're finding more and more cases in more and more places. And then they were forecasting that it would it would be spread and increases as it progressed. So, it became – at first, I wasn't really scared. I think – this is going to sound odd, but I think I was more scared about the threat of nuclear war at that time than I was about AIDS or GRID or whatever it was called at that time. It was too – too abstract. I figure it was, like, a little too much for me to absorb, you know. And I figured, well, they don't know enough about it that they, you know… Until they know more, we can't – what's the point of getting, you know, too concerned about it, you know. And I thought, well, this is happening out there in New York or San Francisco. It's not happening here in Kamloops, or… By the time I came to Vancouver, we were starting to think about it more.

BK: There was just a lot of uncertainty initially.

PC: Yup, there was. We didn't know what it was. We didn't know what caused it. We didn't know how it was spread. And, first it was gay men, and then they started finding IV drug-users were getting it and sex trade workers were getting it. And then, later on, as the decade progressed, they were seeing a lot of cases in Haiti and they thought, "Oh maybe it originated in Haiti." And there was a big backlash against the Haitian community in places like New York, and they ended eventually having a big demonstration in the late-1980s – people marching with signs saying, "I'm proud of my Haitian blood." You know, because of course there's all the hysteria and stigma towards Haitian people back in those days.

BK: Just to continue on with this information piece of the puzzle, as the epidemic continued, where were you – were there good sources of information out there about what was going on in terms of the epidemic?

PC: Um, to me, yeah, I mean… Yeah, there was stuff. A group formed – AIDS Vancouver formed and they had some safer sex education forums that they had. And this is about 1986, I remember going to a safe sex educational and they talked about condoms. They were talking about – I think it was about 1985 that they actually had determined that it was a virus and that it was – and that condoms could prevent its transmission – that actually a latex condom was a barrier that would actually prevent it. And they also were finding out that, no, it cannot be spread by casual contact; no, it cannot be spread through saliva; it cannot, you know. How it was spread was through blood transfusions or from unprotected sex, you know, and IV drug use – sharing needles, stuff like that. So, it was – the word was getting out if you were sort of paying attention to the gay press. You'd get that, you know. But I think a lot of people, of course, their lives are so busy or whatever, they don't always follow all the alternative press. They don't always – even the mainstream press, they don't always follow it and the mainstream press doesn't always do – they're going to do what sells. They're not interested in what – that's their bottom line is they need to make a profit, they have to sell their product. So, if it shocks people, that's going to get

people's attention – they're going to buy their paper, watch their news story. So, their coverage was a bit distorted – or could be distorted or skewed because of that, which was one of the reasons why I really liked reading *Angles* and *Body Politic*.

BK: So, those queer newspapers were big sources of information for you.

PC: Yeah, they were. And I'm forgetting about what time – I'm just going to go back. I forgot something else, and I lost sort of my train of thought.

BK: Oh no, that's great. Sorry, what were you going to say?

PC: No, I lost my train of thought about… let's see, the sources of information. Yeah, I forget when – oh, I remember the government had put a ban on donations – blood donations from gay and bisexual men, and that was back when I was still living in Kamloops, I remember that. So, they kind of already had I think, back in '84 – '83, '84 – they were already, I think, had that concern, that you could get AIDS through blood transfusions. And I had – before I came out, I remember in high school I had given blood a couple times and I remember after hearing that I stopped donating blood once it came out.

BK: I didn't realize it was so early.

PC: That's at least how my memory serves me. Could be wrong on that, but…

BK: No, I trust your memory on that, it just – wow. You talked a little about the sensationalist bent in the mainstream media. What kinds of things were being said in *Angles* or *The Body Politic* about the epidemic?

PC: Well, I think like – I think for *The Body Politic*, it was very – the headline was, "The Case Against Panic," you know. Don't start panicking, you know. We don't – and they didn't know when… For instance, in *Angles*, they told us about how it was spread and how it was prevented from being spread was through the use of condoms – how it was not being spread through casual contact. So, that was the kind of stuff that was really important for the community to know. What the mainstream press was talking about was the high-risk groups – you know, homosexual and bisexual men, IV drug users, prostitutes. So, of course, it was easy to – of course, all of these groups already had been stigmatized by society as it was, so it was easy to – that just sort of reinforced that stigma, you know. So, of course, people were like, "Oh, I want to avoid those people" or "it's their fault and if it spreads to the rest of us" – you know, us versus them – "then it's their fault for bringing it, spreading it around." And, of course, in the gay community, we were more concerned about, like, how are we going to protect ourselves and each other was I think – in the gay press, was more what are we going to do to, you know, prevent the spread and how are we going… What can the government do to help facilitate prevention, you know, and research and find out what's – we need to know more about this virus and how to prevent it and how, you know, can we cure this – those kinds of things.

BK: Maybe a piece of it was also about how do we continue having sex?

PC: Yes, absolutely. That was part of the prevention thing. You know, like, we're still - we're gonna have sex. We're still - we are who we are. You know, we're not just going to deny a basic part of our humanness, our sexuality, so we need to find ways to have sex that is safe and make ways – and find ways of eroticizing that – you know, the use of condoms and that sort of thing. And I remember seeing on various different images, like in comic strips and stuff like that, guys telling a guy about put on the condom – put it on really slowly – trying to find ways to eroticize it. Or a picture of a guy in tight jeans and in his pocket you can see a condom in the package. You know, that kind of stuff. And Tom of Finland, I think, actually did one too with a condom as well. So, there was – there were attempts to eroticize the use of condoms as a means of prevention, and still being true to ourselves.

BK: Which in a lot of ways is a lot more effective than just identifying risk groups, for instance, right?

PC: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I mean, you say, well, if you're part of that risk group, well, where does that leave you? It's just like, well, you're already condemned, so… You know, to heck with you, you know, kind of thing. It was like you were disposable. We didn't have to care about you. And we're saying, well actually you do have to care – we do care about ourselves.

BK: Yeah. As you're encountering all of this information and some of the information is really quite good information from some of these queer sources, how is this influencing your behaviour? Did this have an impact on what you were doing in terms of the type of sex you were having, or "risk practices," so to speak?

PC: Oh yeah, from condomless sex in the early '80s to the use of condoms by the mid-80s, that was I think a big change, I think. That was for me. And I think, like, in – being really careful about, you know – like even one of the things they said was have a shower after sex, and stuff like that – things like that. You know, that kind of stuff. They were talking about dental dams for rimming or – I just didn't do any rimming. And… I think… You talk about… I think – that's sort of the big thing, was just the use of condoms. They said about IV drugs, not to share needles or to clean – clean with bleach or whatever – but I've never done IV drugs. I have no interest in doing IV drugs, thank you very much. [laughs] Yeah, I think that was – yeah, basically it was that sort of thing. They said that if you're drunk or you're stoned a lot that can lower your inhibitions and affect your judgement, and so that was one thing I thought about too, you know. It's like, do I really want to go home with somebody who's totally pie-eyed, and stuff like that, so that's one of things I decided. I just didn't want to – you know, I'd have a few drinks but not get plastered out of my mind and then go looking for sex. But usually if I'm totally pie-eyed, I couldn't possibly have sex with anyone anyhow. [laughs]

BK: Yeah, that always amazes me. [laughs] So, there was a change in substance use to some extent, at least in terms of drinking?

PC: Well, maybe for me. I don't know about for other people. In fact, I don't even – I don't know how much that affected substance use, because, I mean, I was still – I was in contact with people who were using drugs. They were using – I don't know why – one friend – he's actually still alive, one guy, and he… You know, he was really into the drugs and everything, and I did

acid a couple times, but I never had sex when I did acid. It was just enjoying the trip of acid, and the same with magic mushrooms. Magic mushrooms upset my stomach – didn't care for them. Let's see, I think I did MDA a couple times, and I did cocaine once with someone, and the next day I was bawling my eyes out. And I remember when I did the cocaine I just thought, "I feel like I've just been to dentist and had my mouth frozen," and then the next day I was just bawling my eyes out. And I was thinking, "Okay, why do I feel this way? Okay, it's 'cause I'm crashing." Cross that off the list. Who wants…? I think my favourite was just smoking weed, every now and then. I had a partner who has smoked a lot of weed. He's a pothead. And when I was around him, I would smoke weed. But again, it was like, it was more like a social thing for me to do the drugs with the people, because I was around those people, than "Oh, I'm going to do drugs and have sex." I think the only time I really had drugs and sex was MDA – I think I did that a couple times, and that was… it was pleasurable, but I think it can lower your inhibitions too, so you have to be careful of that. And played rough and stuff like that with one friend and that. We had a – so that was – and I think we were both on MDA, so it can lower your inhibitions. That – so, it was a good lesson or knowledge, you know, to experience that. But I – I didn't – when I think about some of the stories of other people, how much drugs they did and that, I just thought like, well, the amount I did was very little in comparison to a lot of people in the community.

BK: And it's not an issue – substance use is still something we see a lot in the community.

PC: Oh yeah.

BK: So, it's not just isolated to the 1980s or anything like that, obviously.

PC: The drugs – I think a lot of the drugs of choice have changed, I mean… I mean, now I hear that people are doing crystal meth and I just get the willies when I think about it, because I hear how addictive it is, and I just think, "Oh." And for me, I just lost interest. Like, when I met my current partner, I mean I no longer – I stopped drinking alcohol because he didn't drink alcohol. And I actually stopped smoking pot and I hadn't done hard drugs since probably the early 19- - probably 1990 or so. So, I just – I just lost interest in that. Now, I don't know if my story is – as particular as my – it's particular to me but I don't think it can be generalized to other people. I don't know.

BK: That's understandable. These things are very personal a lot of the time, or subjective. So, you moved to Vancouver in 1984 and then you start to see the epidemic emerging in Vancouver. How did it start to manifest? How did you start to see the epidemic in the community?

PC: Um… Let's see… Well, I would see some – sometimes I would – like, a lot of it was in the news, but I was also noticing, like, I know this one guy in my building I lived in, he was pretty sick and he was having – he was so weak that he had groceries and he couldn't carry the groceries up the steps, so I carried his groceries up the steps and helped him to his door. So, I was sort of noticing that on a more personal level, and I had a friend who, well, I played around with a few times. And we were very careful. He was very responsible. And I actually found out that one day he was sick and I remember visiting him in the hospital. So, it was starting to come out in the community – like, personally seeing people that I know getting, you know – getting

sick, people dying. Also, I knew – I started meeting people who were HIV positive and I ended up – my partner – I had a boyfriend – my previous partner. We ended up moving – we were friends with two other guys who were roommates and one of them died of AIDS. And I remember it was that same week that, in the news, one of the – some politician from the Social Credit government in B.C. made some comment about – that AIDS was a "self-inflected wound," and they were… There was a lot of nastiness and moralizing on the part of the Socreds. They were playing to a socially conservative constituency. And I remember how angry I was feeling about that and, um… I remember I was at work and I was just thinking how angry I was because this friend of ours had just died and we went to his memorial, and there were other memorials for other people I had met. Like, for instance, the friend – the first guy that I had sex with, he was with – president of Gays & Lesbians of UBC – and I met one other guy from Gays & Lesbians of UBC through him. And so, I found out that he had died and he had a memorial – there was a memorial at a friend's place.

And it just kept – like, every here and there, someone else would die, or someone… And then I had my partner – my ex-partner – well, then we were going out together – we moved in together with one fellow after his roommate had died. We all three of us shared a place in – Cordova – not Cordova Street, Keefer Street on the East Side – and we… And he was – he had AIDS and we were roommates for about a year, so… And then he – he was sort of – he knew of course that his time was short, and so he wanted to live life to the fullest, and he did a bunch of things. He moved to one of the Gulf Islands for a while and then he moved to – he went to Montreal where he was from, and he travelled off to Morocco and stuff like that. And then I remember getting a phone call from my now – my ex, by that time, partner – and he said that he's in Montreal and he's basically on his death bed. So, I phoned him up and talked to him. And he was – we said goodbye to each other and he said he was surrounded by people who love him, and he was – so, he seemed very at peace with… You know, he lived a good life. We had done AIDS activism together and stuff like that, so we had some good memories. So, that was – there was a lot of that – a lot of those losses, those personal… friends and all that.

BK: It just sounds so overwhelming.

PC: My partner said it was – I think he was far more connected and social within the community than I was, and he said that he – it got to the point where he just stopped going to memorial services because it was just – it was like every week or so it was some other person that he knew who was dying. This person from the square dance club, or you know, whatever. You know, it was just one after the other and it was getting to be too much, so he just… And to this day, he doesn't like watching movies – I've never seen the movie *The Normal Heart* because we like – my partner and I like to things together, watch movies and stuff like that, and he doesn't want to watch another AIDS movie because it's too – it just brings up too much stuff for him. It's too painful, so he just doesn't want to get all in that sadness again. So…

BK: The epidemic is really manifesting in the community in this really visceral, horrible way. You mentioned the Socreds a little bit. How was the government responding to the epidemic?

PC: Well, I think they… They were quite happy – I think Bill Vander Zalm, his quote – he was quoted later on as saying that he would have been quite happy to let the gays die. Because he –

this was at a, I guess, Federal-Provincial conference and he was talking with them. And the Federal government was starting to do – finally starting to take action on AIDS and this was during the waning years of the Mulroney government. And – so he… But we already knew that this was his attitude by the attitude of the things that were said in the news media, the actions the government had done: their continued opposition to safer sex education; the threats to John Blatherwick, who was the medical health officer for Vancouver, who was talking about the need to have safer sex education. The Vancouver School Board was talking about the need for safer sex education and the government – provincial government was opposing all of that and preventing, or at least trying to prevent, that from happening. I think the threatened John Blatherwick with dismissal on two occasions. We ended up occupying his office to protest those threats. We – let's see. The government had toyed openly with quarantining people with AIDS on some remote island on the West Coast, you know. And there was – and of course, I mentioned that comment about the "self-inflicted wound." There was all… That kind of attitude was quite prevalent. The government of B.C. was the only government that did not fully subsidize AZT when it was – became available, was approved for use here. So, that people with AIDS in B.C. had to pay 20% for the cost, which could come to $2000 a year, which – if you're on disability, that's already prohibitive. So, there were protests around that and I remember one activist screaming, "Free AZT! Free AZT!" very frenetically. You know, you could just see the panic he was [laughs] – he was…

BK: Well, it was the only thing…

PC: It was the only thing back then, yeah. And… So, that was – there was…All these things were happening at a time where we're losing people in our community, sometimes people who very close to us we cared about. And – so, I think… And then they brought in the Health Statutes Amendment Act in 1987, which was another – basically, what it was the… There was already provisions in the health act for quarantining someone, you know, if there was a need to, and they just sort of dusted it off, because they knew this would be a great way to – this would get attention. It was like, it was totally unnecessary and it was just sort of a way to get attention to stigmatize the community, 'cause of course this would play to their constituency – you know, the moral, social conservative, right-wing, segment. And then they think, well, nobody's gonna stand up for gay people, or, you know, people with AIDS, and sex workers, and IV drug users. They didn't, you know… So, they figured, oh good, we can just do this here and make it look like we're actually doing something when of course all we're doing is fanning the fires of hatred without doing anything to stop the crisis from worsening. And they – so what – so, 1987 we – we had a big community forum. We started to – we were getting more – the community was finally, in my opinion – it seemed like forever [laughs], but finally, anger was starting to come out in the community about how we were being treated. This was the same year that ACT UP formed in New York. And it was about the time – maybe around the same time that the Lyndon Larouches – these are a neo-facisct group that formed. They had a quarantine – they wanted to put quarantine on the ballot in San Francisco, and… So, this was just – the community was starting – was getting out of the shock and into – and finally becoming angry.

And I remember we went to a memorial at – it's near – well, I forget. It was downtown. It was a square near this cathedral – the Catholic Cathedral downtown – there's a public square there across the street. And one speaker said we have to turn our sadness into joy, and then another

speaker came up and – and this was the AIDS memorial – and they said, "I'm angry." And people started to applaud. They said, "I'm angry." And I thought, yes, this is finally what's happening. People are becoming angry. And it was also happening at a time when Little Sister's bookstore was having these book seizures happening and… And they'd been being harassed for years by Canada Customs through books being seized and damaged, and stuff like that – deliberately, just harassment. And only them being singled, you know, them, not the straight bookstores and pornography was left alone. And I remember going to another demonstration – it was one protesting – it was at – I think it was at Plaza of Nations, or it was somewhere near there, and it was a protest against Canada Customs banning or seizing Little Sister's bookstore material. And at the end of the rally – you know, they had Jim Deva and everybody speaking – and then at the end of the rally, someone in the crowd just started chanting, "Gay rights now! Gay rights now! Gay rights now!" And the whole group, the whole crowd just started chanting and I thought, "Holy shit, I've never heard this." [Laughs] You know, people chanting for gay rights at a demonstration. I thought, "Wow, this is amazing." And found out later on this person was actually someone I became involved with on the – he was on the *Angles* collective and I became involved politically with him. But anyhow, I'm – I think I've digressed a lot from…

BK: No, this is great. We want to give you lots of space to tell your story. I think this is great. I hadn't thought about the obscenity – the Little Sister's obscenity trial – well, it turned into series of court cases, but I hadn't thought about that in relation to these other layers of oppression that obviously gay men were starting to experience in relation to the epidemic, so that's really interesting. I think you were just beginning to mention Bill 34, I guess.

PC: I think it was, yeah, Bill 34. Yeah.

BK: Or… I'll fact check myself. I think that's a good transition point to talking about how the community started to respond. And you said that there was an organization that was forming in response to the bill. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

PC: Yeah, that was the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation. We had a meeting and that – that was the name that was chosen. It wasn't my [laughs] personal choice for – because it kind of implied that you could somehow responsibly legislate around this issue and it wasn't a legislative issue, it was a health care issue. It was, you know… an education issue, but that's what this one person insisted on and the group agreed to it. But we actually ended up having some demonstrations against this quarantine law and – which was amazing, getting people out into the streets actually protesting. And we had one before it was passed and then another demonstration – a smaller one – after it was passed to let people know that we still didn't agree with the legislation. And in the meantime, we'd also had gone to bars and had leafletted at bars and had a recorded tape played, I remember at the Castle Pub on Granville Street. And I think we made – I don't know if it played at any of the other bars, but I remember us going out to the various bars and handing out leaflets and we were handing out condoms and leaflets and stuff like that. And telling them about the quarantine law. And we also, during gay pride, we had balloons with – black balloons with the pink triangle on it saying – placards saying "Stop…" Actually, the balloons might have been ACT UP, I don't remember that, but it could have been quarantine – it might have been later – but we had placards saying, "Stop the quarantine law." We made those and then marched in gay pride, and that was back in 1987, I think. And – it might

have been 1988 – as far as ’88. And we – actually, I think it was ’87 – that’s when most of that was happening. And let’s see…

And there was some division in the community. There was [sic] people in the community who wanted – who thought that, well, we could just amend the – we just had to amend the legislation to take the worst of it. But the whole point of what we were trying to say was that the very fact that they brought in this amendment – because it was totally unnecessary to bring it in anyhow, ‘cause there was already provisions in the act for quarantining people if someone was deliberately causing – you know, maliciously trying to spread an infection or whatever. So, the whole purpose of the act was to stir up hatred and so, our whole – so for us, our argument was they had to just drop the amendment, just drop it completely. You can’t change it, because it still plays to the whole – into the hands of what the government is doing.

So, we didn’t win on that particular score, I don’t think, but what was really significant was that we had gotten the community mobilizing. And I know that Positive Living – well, B.C. Coalition – Persons With AIDS Coalition – Vancouver Persons With AIDS Coalition ended up having a demonstration outside the premier’s – he had this place in Richmond called Fantasy Gardens, which was a business of his, and they had a big demonstration outside there, and that was in ’87-’88 – sometime in there as well. I think it had started to encourage people to mobilize and people from B.C. PWA Coalition were having demonstrations at the legislature in Victoria, and stuff like that. So, they were – people were more inclined to mobilize in the streets around this issue than had happened before. And I just – during this time period after the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation had fizzled out, I just thought nothing was happening even though tons of things were happening. And then, I think it was about 1989 that ACT UP – we had the founding meeting of ACT UP, with – in the backyard of one person’s home, and that was when we formed ACT UP. And that was – for me, it felt like forever for that to happen, but it did happen. [laughs]

BK: I definitely want to talk about ACT UP, but just a couple questions about the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation. Who was involved in that group? Was it mostly gay men or was it other groups, or…?

PC: There were a whole bunch of different groups. There was… Some were gay men. There was a group of us from a group called Front for Active Gay Socialism – it spelled FAGS for short. And all the people in FAGS were also – well, several of them were members of the *Angles* collective, myself included at the time. And also that guy who started that chant “Gay rights now!” – he was in FAGS. Let’s see… There was a group of leftist dykes called Dykes for Dykedom, and they were really cool – I liked them – and they were actively involved. There was… Let’s see – there was POWER, which was a group of women called Prostitutes and Other Women for Equal Rights – they were involved. And then there were people who – from B.C. Persons with AIDS Coalition – members, individuals from there. I mean, these were not necessarily all necessarily representing those organizations. Sometimes they were just – just for identification purposes, they were from – they had associations with those other groups, but they were also involved in this. So, there were a lot of gay men, a lot of lesbians were involved in that. And there were other gay men in the community who didn’t have any affiliation but who were also really, you know, progressive or just concerned and got involved.

BK: So, it really was a coalition of these groups that probably hadn't done a lot of work together, at least immediately prior to that.

PC: Yes, that's correct. Yeah, that was – it was a… It brought us together, a lot of coalescing, a lot of groups in the queer community who had been working separately before. So, it was – because I think they were realizing that this was – that this is sort of the thin edge of the wedge, you know. You had the rise of the religious right and of neoliberalism, and they were – they knew, like, I think that… For, like, the women's community was also under attack, like abortion rights were also under attack. This is around the time that Every Women's Health Clinic was facing protests from anti-abortionists and fascists. Little Sister's was starting – there were bomb threats against the gay community – Little Sister's was bombed a couple of times. I think Every Women's Health Clinic might have been bombed as well – I'm not sure about that – but I know they were – they definitely had a lot of protests and neo-fascists were involved in those – some of those protests as well. So, the women's community also knew that they – we were all sort of in the cross-hairs of the far right, so they knew that we all had to come together to fight. So, some of us from – that were involved in Front for Active Gay Socialism also got involved in the security for Every Women's Health Clinic and gone to abortion rights demonstrations for, you know, choice – things like that. So, we got involved in other issues as well.

And also that because some of the people in Front for Active Gay Socialism, as they were socialist, we were also involved in other issues as well, such as the – there was a strike in 1987, I think, when the provincial government brought in a bunch of legislation to allow strike breakers to work and on – to cross picket lines. And so, that created an uproar within the labour movement. So, we were – me and the one person who had started the chant for gay rights now, we had gone to the Agridome – the PNE Agridome, where there was a B.C. Federation of Labour Rally happening. And one – we started chanting at the end of the – this indoor rally, we started chanting "General strike! General strike!" And we ended up getting the Agridome – the whole Agridome chanting "General strike!" [laughs] And they actually had a one-day walk-out, so I think we might have had something to – a little bit of influence to that. I mean, obviously you can't take credit for something like that. People don't go on strike just because someone starts chanting "General strike," but the fact that we were somehow able to help contribute to that I think was one of the things that we did. And… Yeah, there was so many other things happening, now when I look – it's kind of hard to remember them all. [laughs] You know, it just…

BK: All sorts of different forms of activism and political engagement.

PC: I mean, and in between – and before when I first moved to Vancouver, I was also involved in the anti-nuclear movement – well, Trident Action Group. They had a local group here which was trying to build opposition to the testing of weapons systems in, I think it's Parksville, or on Vancouver Island where they have a naval base there and they tested U.S. weapons systems there. So, that was one of the things that I had been involved with as well.

BK: But the CRHL – the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation – this was kind of the first time you'd seen street activism, per se, since you'd been in Vancouver?

PC: For – on queer issues, on gay issues. On AIDS issues, it was the first time. This and that demonstration for – against the Little Sister's [Customs issue]. That was – those were like the first times I've – 'cause I'd gone to a few of the gay pride parades and marched in a couple of those when I first moved here, but I didn't really see any, like, protest rallies for gay issues, and stuff like that. And I thought this is – and I didn't – it was new to me to see the gay community actually rising up and marching. Yeah, I wasn't really aware of our history that well. I knew there had been protests against the bathhouse raids in Toronto, and that there had been protests against – like, the White Night Riots in San Francisco when Harvey Milk – after he was assassinated and his killer was basically given a slap on the wrist, or – I think he was… something. And I knew about Stonewall, of course, but I didn't really know that we'd had a long [laughs] history of marching in the streets, yeah.

BK: And part of that might also have been that there weren't really bathhouse raids in Vancouver or something comparable to that. But I don't know that much about that. Why do you think it took so long to get angry as a community? Why did it take so long to turn to direct action activist actions?

PC: I think part of it may have been that people were kind of stunned and – at the time. I think when, like, this trauma happens, the first thing is you're stunned, you're sort of immobilized for a while. And then, I think as – after you're able to sort of, I guess process it. And I think sort of on a collective level, it took the community a couple years to process this, then finally realized, you know, like, "Hey, we're being treating like shit here and we're in the middle of a crisis. And we just sort of support. And you're giving us – and all you're doing is trying to, you know, stir up hatred against us, or you're bombing our community, or you're seizing our books, or you're bashing people in the streets, or, you know, you're humilia- - you're attacking us in the media, and with legislation." That's – finally that anger, it finally just turns to… I think some of that anger is always there but it doesn't really come out until the trauma wears off enough, and you're just like, "Okay, we get the picture here, and we're going to fight back."

BK: You talked about the type of people that were involved in the CRHL. Did a lot of the people that were involved there end up being involved in ACT UP, or was that a different group of people?

PC: There was a lot of overlap. I think a lot of the – for various reasons, a lot of people, maybe, had lesser degree of radicalization or politicization to begin with, so they probably – once the CRHL fizzled – they probably thought, "Oh, I've done my activism and it didn't work," or whatever, even though it did work in different ways. They may have not gotten re-involved, but others – a lot of the more dedicated or more conscious people in the community definitely did get involved with ACT UP. And I think over time, more people got – more people got drawn to ACT UP, but then as time went on of course, I think ACT UP didn't have enough… I don't think it did enough prop- - like, organizing and stuff like that. I didn't think there was enough clarity about what exactly we want to – where do we want to go and what do we want to achieve. And how do we draw and keep people in and grow the organi- - you know, grow the group. It was – I think it was very much like, well, this person wants to go and do the most radical civil disobedience and other people were not prepared to keep getting arrested every single time they

went out for an action. So, there's a whole bunch of other reasons why ACT UP probably didn't continue on for a long period of time.

I think – but also, I think there were other dynamics going on, like maybe – in the United States, I know there was a group that formed ACT NOW!, which was AIDS Coalition To Network Organize and Win, which came out of the ACT UP movement. And I think it was – they were fighting to get single payer health care – public health, medicare in the U.S., and they couldn't – I think their goal was to try to get the labour movement in the U.S. to support this, because it would be a big campaign. And that just never really – I don't think the labour movement – the higher echelons of the labour movement were interested in mobilizing their membership. I think that's a perennial problem with the labour bureaucracy in all kinds of contexts. Also, there was another – that I think was a result of that – a lot of the queer members of ACT UP – gay and lesbian members of ACT UP – were also realizing, like, that we don't have anti-discrimination legislation here. We don't have civil rights. And this was one of the demands of the ACT UP movement, was gay rights, because, you know, you're stigmatizing a segment of the population. So, this is a way to break the stigma, so that – to help facilitate AIDS education, you know. If you can't discriminate against someone – you can't fire someone from their job or whatever for being gay, then it's easier to reach out to people. They're more inclined to identify themselves, when they've, you know, come out, and come to gay organizations and learn.

So, Queer Nation formed in the United States and that started – they had other Queer Nations wherever, throughout I think other parts of the world as well. And here, in Vancouver, we formed a Queer Planet and that again drew some of the people from that, and then there were other people as well that were involved in that. And that lasted for a couple – maybe a couple years, a year or two as well. And we'd go and have queer-ins – going to put stickers up in shopping malls – you know, "Queers are here. Get used to it." And marching through the – what's that mall in Burnaby? Metrotown. And chanting, "We're here, we're queer, we're proud of it. Get used to it." And holding hands and stuff like that, and walking through the mall doing that. And just basically being visibly queer. I got a t-shirt of two men, two sailors kissing, and it says, "Read my lips." And wearing that just when I was going out and doing my business downtown – shopping or whatever. Yeah, just being visibly queer was, I think, very important for our [undecipherable]. And I think that helped to – I think in a way, later on in – as the 1990s progressed, I think that really helped to sort of lay the groundwork for the passage of gay rights legislation in B.C., and I think in other parts of the country as well, because the queer community had mobilized. We mobilized around AIDS and we mobilized on being queer – just being out and demanding – taking our space as a response to having – being stigmatized over AIDS and attacked, physically and politically. So… So, I think – 'cause when I look back at how the 1990s, all of these civil rights actions happened and legislation was passed, province after province, and federally, and then it just kept snowballing and kept growing. And pride parades. And we were commenting on that in the early to mid-'90s when we were saying how the gay pride parades were going – actually, we were noticing this by the end of the 1980s, how the pride parades were growing. And this was just amazing.

And we had Celebration '90, which was the Gay Games in 1990. In the midst of all of this happening, in the midst of losing all of these people in our community, we ended up having a celebration. [laughs] And it just blows my mind. You know, it's like, we actually organized this

and had – and it was a big success as a result. And its success, it was a real – it was a perfect response to the Socreds and their hostility towards us. It's like, we had this and it was a success. We had a lot of people from all over North America, and actually from various countries around the world, come here and we took up – we took over B.C. Place stadium and had a big opening ceremony, and it was quite a… Yeah, it was really interesting that there was one member of the Social Credit government came to give greetings, and when he first introduced himself or whatever, my roommate got up and he started booing, and then the whole stadium started booing him. And then he said – and the guy says, "Well, I'm here." And then people cheered. [laughs] So it was like, okay, alright. So, when he gave greetings from the provincial government, we let them know that we didn't like the government, and then – but we approved him being there, because he was supporting us. So, that was – I thought that was an interesting message.

BK: You're not the first person to mention the Gay Games as being part of the community response in a weird way to the epidemic – to have a celebration or have a party as part of the way of dealing with the epidemic.

PC: Yeah, in a positive way, to be, you know – we're still here. And I remember – I remember you – when you gave a lecture on *Angles* newspaper and you quoted one of the writers that said this is being – something to effect of being gay is not how we die; it's how we live our lives. And I thought this is – so, this is kind of an example of that, you know. It's like, we're not here dying, we're here living. We're not just here protesting, you know, the death – or early, premature death of our community, members of community. We're here – we're alive, we're here, and we're living our lives.

BK: Yeah. That's pretty powerful. So, what was ACT UP – what did ACT UP look like, I guess, as an organization? What were they doing and how did they do it?

PC: Do you mind if we take a break?

BK: Yeah, of course.
[End of video 1, 1:08:50]

[Start of video 2]

So, I was just asking you a little bit more about ACT UP and how the organization worked and what they were doing as an organization here in Vancouver.

PC: Well, let's see. ACT UP was – I think it was more based on – like, affinity groups was sort of the idea or theory behind it, though we didn't have to have a specific, like, blueprint or model of what the organization had to be or how it had to function. So, it was – we had people who wanted – like, if someone wanted to have a demonstration, then some other people in the group would say, "Well, go ahead and organize it." [laughs] Which was kind of cool but kind of problematic in way, so… Because – and I remember – this was my roommate, for instance, again. He said he wanted to have a demonstration and – I think it was against the Socreds at their convention. I forget which one it was. Anyhow. And they just said – and some of the people, they said, "Well, just go organize it." So, he ended up, I guess, doing a lot of the organizing work

to get this demonstration and then people coming out to it. And that would be – it was good as far as anybody could organize an action and do it. The problem of course was that you didn't always get the whole organization behind you participating in it. So, I guess that – although there was quite a bit of overlap, I think, of you know – if some person here in this group said they wanted to organize something, a lot of other people from all around would show up anyhow. And we had people who wanted to do different levels of activism. Some, like, always wanted to do the most extreme, outrageous civil disobedience, and others maybe wanted to focus on protest marching or a rally outside a spot – a building or whatever.

So, we didn't really have a – we didn't have any, like, set… We had people who – like, a person would chair a meeting, but we didn't have a set structure. We didn't have anybody, say, "This person's the chair person. This person's, you know, on the steering," or what have you. We didn't have those kinds of things as I recall. And we ended up doing things – like, we'd decide – we'd have like, affinity groups, what we'd call affinity groups, which was similar to actually what Trident Action Group had – was modelled themselves on, small affinity groups. And small affinity groups was – in that group, everyone would work on a consensus basis, you know. But for – so, we had a lot of – we also didn't – well, in the larger meetings, I think we did go on a voting basis. I don't really remember that, to be honest. It's kind of embarrassing to say that, but the thing – I think the one thing I found was that even if people – if the group, the larger body voted on something, it didn't mean that the individuals would actually follow through. They'd go off and do their own. I think, I remember, we had one action where we had decided we were just going to be outside the – on the parade lines of the Grey Cup parade in English Bay and hold a banner, and we're not going to bring any other placards or stickers, or anything like that, and we'll just hold the sign. Well, one member, of course, wanted to the most extreme stuff. Well, of course, what does he do? He brings all his stickers and everything, and of course he gets into a big confrontation with the police, because that's one of his things – always get into a confrontation with the police.

BK: We'll be talking to him, I think, too.

PC: Yeah, we all know who he is. And so, the police – once we had our banner there and he started chanting, and we weren't planning to do a chant. Well, he started chanting and of course, the police came up and grabbed the banner, and pulled us – we were holding onto the banner really tight – sort of towing us along with our banner way out of the way where we can't be seen by the cameras or anything. So, that kind of – that action kind of flopped. So, we left after a while. We've had – we would have other actions with affinity groups where we would actually go into the provincial legislature. And this was around the time of Iraq War One. And we – and so we – the group of us – and there was, gees, I guess maybe a half dozen or so of us – we decided that we would have a really thin banner wrapped up inside our jacket. And we had condoms and leaflets, and we couldn't have anything metal on us because we didn't want to set off the metal detector. And we went in, and we had one person on the far side of the gallery, sitting there, and he would start a chant, a distraction. And then on our side, we would strap ourselves with plastic zap straps to the seats of the observation gallery, and then would drop condoms and leaflets on the legisla- - onto the government's side of the house, which was the Social Credit government. And so, we got there. So, we'd sort of give him a signal when we were ready. So, we go there and we sort of carefully strap our wrists with the zap strap, kind of

trying not to get any attention – being very careful so that no one would notice us. And then sitting there, I nodded at the guy across the gallery, and then I'm like… And then, it's just like – I'm waiting and I'm waiting and I'm waiting. And I'm like [shrugs, laughs]. Like, come on, here! Well, I think what it was – and then finally he starts getting up and chanting, "ACT UP! Fight back!" And so, we – and that created a big distraction, so other people were able to get up that didn't strap themselves down. They had the banner and they draped it over the side of the railings of the legislature above the – from the gallery, looking down. And people were throwing condoms and leaflets onto the Socreds about safer sex.

And then, of course, the security people came and they ripped the banner in half and they stood – and they came in with bolt cutters. [laughs] I guess they were used to people using handcuffs. I don't know… anyhow. So, household scissors would have done [laughs] just as well to cut the straps, but anyhow. So, they cut our straps and they were hauling us off to the elevator – dragging us off to the elevator, and they'd throw one of us in, and then as they'd go and grab the other person to throw them in, the other person would climb, scramble to get out of the elevator. So, it was back and forth, throwing us into the elevator. And then ejecting us – taking us down and then ejecting us from the legislature. Anyhow, the reason why the guy had delayed was because he – it was during Iraq War One and the provincial legislature was sending, I guess – wanted to send – the government wanted to have some kind of congratulatory message from the government of British Columbia for the war in Iraq. So, we disrupted during that – we thought that would be a perfect time to disrupt.

As it turned out, they – this was also the first time they had cameras in the legislature, which we didn't know about. And the news media felt that we were there because of the camera in there. When they were there – the biggest news media were there covering the opening, or whatever – the first session of legislature – whatever it was. So, they asked us, and I was kind of so – I was too pumped and everything. And they said, "Were you there because of the cameras?" I said, "Yes, we were there." And then I realized, no, that's not what we were there for – because of the cameras. We were there because of the thing, but I was so scattered and high-strung that I couldn't – I didn't get that right. But anyhow. So, that was one example of how the group functioned. That was just one small affinity group of about a half a dozen of us, and most of the other people in ACT UP were not at that – couldn't make it for various reasons, or they didn't want to do it, or what have you. And – then there was another where it was more – I think we had a little more carefully planned, where we went and occupied the office of the – the Vancouver – what is – health officer…?

BK: Blatherwick?

PC: Blatherwick, yeah. The city health – Vancouver health officer, because the provincial government – he had been calling for safe sex education to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, and they kept threatening to fire him, so I guess we decided we're going to go out and occupy the offices. And we had very carefully – had gone and planned out – gone into the building, staked it out a few weeks before – and thought, "Okay, this will be great. We'll go in, go up to the office, and go in." And we have our little zap straps again, and stuff like that. Or, actually, one person did and the others were just going to sit there. Anyhow. So, we – and this was different people from – some were from POWER, some were from – various other persons. One was our – the

one who likes to do the most extreme level, yeah – you-know-who. And a few other people – some women, some men; some from Front for Active Gay Socialism, and other groups. And persons with AIDS. So, there were different people, and I think there was, maybe, six-to-eight of us, if I recall – I don't remember the exact number. So, we go into the elevator and we're just going to go up, and we found out it was controlled by a keycard. And this person comes in who's in the building, she says, "Oh you forgot your card? Oh, don't worry. I'll punch it in." And we just looked at each other pokerfaced. So, we got up to our floor, and we just – we all got out, you know, thanked the person, thanked the person, got out of the elevator – and we just said to each other before we went into the office, "Don't say how we got in here." Because we almost – we didn't know that that was the case. We would have gotten stymied from the get-go. We wouldn't have been able to get into the office.

So, anyhow, we got there and we said, well, "We're here from ACT UP – AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power. We're here to peacefully occupy your office. And we have a set of demands for the government – provincial government." And they were quite – the people in the office was quite calm – they weren't upset or anything like that. I think they were pretty sympathetic, actually. So, they all finished off – they ended their day and they all left, and we were all in the one, I guess, board room there, sitting there. And one guy was strapping himself to the – I think he actually brought metal handcuffs, if I recall. I don't remember if they were metal – it might have been zap straps. Anyhow, he's attached himself to a chair, and then the rest of us had kind of decided that we'd walk out under arrest, and others had decided that we would be dragged out. So, I was one of the people to be dragged out and a couple of other people were, too. And we had – as it turned out, we also had arranged to have some people – support demonstrations from another group of people from ACT UP outside, just having a support demonstration after we had occupied the office. So, that was – so, we opened up the window and said, "We're here, we're queer, we have power." Chanting and getting the people down on the ground all riled up. And they were supporting us, we were supporting them and chanting. So, that was really exciting.

Then of course the police came and we told them the situation. The police were okay. They had – they knew what the story was. They knew that we were harmless and they – certain people walked out under arrest and then they dragged the rest of us out, and the other one they had to cut the cuffs or whatever it was – the manacle or whatever he had. And – so they put us into the paddy wagon or paddy wagons – I think we were all in the same paddy wagon – I can't recall… I'm not sure, but anyhow. When they processed us, they had us separated into men's and women's cells for processing, and they asked one member what – I think they asked what our HIV status was. And a couple of us said that we weren't going to reveal that. One guy, they had him pretend they were doing a strip search of him, even though with his clothes on – they were just, you know, like, "Turn around. Bend over" – stuff like that. Just, I guess, like a humiliation thing. And then for me, they had me take my shoes off and had me – and I said I wasn't going to reveal my HIV status – and they took me into a room. It was the hold, basically – no light or anything. It was the size of a closet. So, I was there for a while. So, that's – and they were saying that, you know, "You want to tell your other friend," the one who had handcuffed himself, "that he's making things really hard for himself," because he kept saying "I'm being non-compliant. I'm being non-compliant." He wasn't doing anything – he wasn't letting them fingerprint him, he wasn't giving his name, and la la la. He was being as difficult as possible. And they, I guess fingerprinted us, and took our pictures or whatever. And then when they were – when we were

being released, we had some of those Monopoly "get out of jail free" cards [laughs] – handed them to the police. So, they got a bit of a chuckle out of that. So, anyhow. So, that was one of our – that was one of our actions that I was involved in.

There was a whole bunch of other ones. There was one demonstration outside – I think it was outside the Orpheum where – it was a fundraiser for the Social Credit government and they had – Dionne Warwick was going to be singing. So, people there were protesting that. I wasn't able to go to that because I had to work that evening, and – one of the chants was "If Dionne only knew, she would never sing for you." So, that was kind of ironic. But again, she didn't know the situation in B.C. – I mean she's traveling all over the place. But – so, that was – people were always keeping the pressure on the Social Credit Government, because, you know, they had been harassing us, so now they were finding that we actually do fight back, and that we're not just easy to be stigmatized. You know, and we can – people can – will fight back.

Then there was another rally that we went to – it was outside the Queen Elizabeth Theatre and it was *Les Miserables*, and it was when Vander Zalm was going to be there – the Socreds were going to be in attendance for that. I don't know if that was another fundraiser or what that was, but Vander Zalm was going to be there. And there were a whole bunch of other groups, not just ACT UP or AIDS activists. There were people from anti-poverty groups from the Downtown Eastside, and various other groups were also involved, because of course the Socreds had made a whole list of enemies with all their neoliberal attacks they'd done in their two terms in office. So, people were finally fighting back. And… anyhow. Apparently, one of the – the story has it that – several people were arrested, including some people that were from ACT UP. And, of course, our usual, you-know-who person – when Bill Vander Zalm and Lillian were stepping – they were doing a die-in – people from ACT UP were doing a die-in. Bill Vander Zalm had Lillian in tow around his arm and she – and they were stepping over people and I guess this one guy grabbed Vander Zalm – I guess, put a leg lock around his leg or whatever, and Vander Zalm just kept on walking and Lillian tripped in the process.

So, that created a big stir in the media and people were all outraged, you know. Some people were so outraged over Lillian being knocked over even though it wasn't quite that how it happened. And I remember, like, my sister had come down to visit and – so it was at this time, so we had gone to the demonstration. I said to my sister, "Look, let's just step back a little bit." Because I could see it was getting really tense and there was some pushing and shoving happening at one point during the rally – the protest – and I thought we'd better just keep a little safer distance, you know. So, we did that – but that's what happened. People got arrested and the one guy that did the leg lock, well, he was – they were chanting, "ACT UP! Fight back!" and to the chant, he was in the paddy wagon, and he was kicking the window of the paddy wagon to the beat of "ACT UP! Fight Back!" [laughs] So, that got a lot of attention in the news and so… And I remember, someone had written a letter to the editor about, you know, there was no amount of anger justifies what happened there. And I wrote a letter in response to that person – it was in *Vancouver* – it was in *The Province*, I think, and I just said, actually it was fully justified considering that they basically figured that they – our community is being bombed and bashed, and they do nothing but attack our community, you know, and attack people with AIDS. So, we – so… Of course, I got one crank phone call from that, you know. Nowadays it would be a lot different on the Internet. Yes.

BK: Yes. Oh my.

PC: Yeah, the trolls would come out in force, but…

BK: Obviously, what ACT UP was doing was a lot of angry, necessary work, but it does sound exhilarating to have been a part of it.

PC: Yes. Oh, yes.

BK: Fun?

PC: Yeah, it was fun as well, yeah. And – yeah, I think that was the thing, too. It was like – it was very thrilling. I mean, we got arrested – my last time, got arrested – was at the Social Credit – I think it was their convention at Pan Pacific Hotel. And they – and we had our banner, "the government has blood on its hands." And we had water-based paint – red water-based paint – and we went onto the side of the building when they were meeting and had handprints on there, and the police arrested us for vandalizing. And another – our usual you-know-who was using spray paint on the sidewalk, because that would be more permanent, and they arrested him. And then my partner at the time, he had paint on his hand, and there was a member of the – some member of the conference – Social Credit party, whatever, was going into the conference. And as they were – the police were dragging him by one arm, you know, by each arm – and his hands were kind of free like that, so he went a smeared this guy's suit with this [laughs] paint.

And – so, we all got in – were all hauled off to the – back to the jail, and processed and everything, and then held in the medical – I guess, ward, or cell, or whatever. And every hour they would come and check to see how we're doing, make sure we're okay, which I thought would be kind of nice. But the other problem was, if I were to spend overnight there, if they were checking every hour, I'd be getting sleep deprived, because I'd be woken up every hour to see how I was. And – anyhow, when we were being processed, they had a sink there in the cell, so we rinsed our hands off – rinsed the paint off our hands, because it was water-based paint. And then when they – the cops said to us later on when they went to put us in the medical cell, "What happened to the red paint?" I said, "Well, it was water-based. We rinsed it off." [laughs] So, I think one of the police officers said they'd be crazy to charge you or whatever, but ended up they actually did – this time they actually did charge us. I think we had – my ex had to write a letter apologizing – we all wrote letters apologizing, saying we weren't thinking what we were doing, and didn't think about the consequences, and we apologize for anything that's… And I just thought, like, okay, whatever – like, we have to go through this. And then the social worker said just do work with your group, you know. That was our penalty. So, basically it was…

BK: Just keep doing it.

PC: But, you know… But I thought, you know, I got diversions, so I guess it means basically no more get out of jail free cards, so I've never – that was sort of the – I think that for me and everyone else there except for you-know-who, that was sort of the end of our civil disobedience action, because we knew that we couldn't push the envelope. And we also were noticing at that

time that the numbers of people coming to demonstrations had dwindled – was starting to dwindle – and I think it was because we were doing a lot of the civil disobedience and people weren't really… I think figuring out, like, a lot of people didn't know really how to integrate into that. We couldn't really just have everybody doing civil disobedience, because it's just not practical to continue just doing that.

But we didn't really – I think our problem was that we didn't really do enough organizing. I think it might have been useful to have tables set up on Davie Street or Commercial Drive or, you know, doing leafletting, or at the street corners and stuff like that, or certain key times, or maybe more presence at pride parades. But I don't know if we could have – I don't remember if we ever actually had an ACT UP table or not – I don't recall if we did. I know we marched in the parade in ACT UP and we had our… So, that was good. And I remember we gave out – at the bars, we had these little packages, Ziploc bags packed up – and a little button and a balloon with a string, and whistles because there's a lot of gay bashing, so we had whistles and leaflet – an information leaflet. And we had those in a little box, asking people to just donate some money to the box for these little packages. So, they did that for a while until, I guess they ran out. And the bar owners just gave the money to AIDS Vancouver, or whatever – B.C. PWA or something like that. So, yeah – the problem was that we just didn't have enough – maybe enough organizing, maybe enough… I think if there had been a little bit more structure to the group that maybe it would have – it would have kept going. And maybe more of an over-arching plan. How do we do internal education, you know, as well as developing a strategy? What's our goal? What do we want to get? Where do we want to go from here?

We had a lot of demands, you know, and they were good. Things like safer sex education, and gay rights, and, you know, condoms in the prisons, and teaching prisoners how to clean, you know, their IV drug – their rigs and stuff like that, for shooting drugs and stuff like that, because that stuff happens in prison. And all that kind of stuff. And I think we were actually talking about safe injection sites at that time. I think there was – some of that had come up, you know. So, this sort of was, sort of, the – the nascent, I guess, or whatever – sort of the embryonic ideas of a lot of these other movements that happened at the end of the late-1990s and early 2000s. Like, we had groups like Insite doing a safe injection site, and stuff like that, because we were talking about that in ACT UP, and how people were theorizing or talking about – maybe they had other places in the world who had tried that, or pilot projects or whatever. We knew we needed to come up with these kinds of solutions to prevent the spread of HIV. So, it – so, I guess in that sense, that may have helped get some of those ideas out there a little bit more. Unfortunately, we didn't really have that structure, the organization to really, like – okay, let's do education. Let's have regular conferences, maybe, for the community to come in and participate, and see if we can integrate and draw more people in. I don't know what we could have done either than that. Those are some things that I think might have helped, but…

BK: Was there a sense that that was being done elsewhere in the community?

PC: Well, there was things happening. Like, there was the Gay and Lesbian Conferences that happened, and they were happening quite often at UBC. The last little while, I think they had at the Britannia Community Centre. And I've been going to those, even when I first moved here in '85, I think – '84 or '85 they had them, and I was going to them every year. And we had – I

remember, that – I think it was Front for Active Gay Socialism and Dykes for Dykedom, and maybe some other groups had put on a forum once called "AIDS, Censorship, and the Right Wing." And we talked about – because this was around the time of the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation, or shortly thereafter, where we were talking about, you know, all these connections of this right-wing onslaught that was happening – the socially conservative onslaught that was happening – and how it was impacting our communities, and why we needed to come together. So, there was some of that stuff, I think, happening elsewhere, and I think probably the other AIDS service organizations or whatever, they were – they were definitely talking about these kinds of things. I think B.C. PWA – now Positive Living Society – AIDS Vancouver, and other things – other AIDS organizations were forming or had formed, and a lot of them had formed before ACT UP, of course. And they were advocating and promoting various – these various things for prevention and care for persons with HIV/AIDS.

BK: Looking back on ACT UP, did it feel like it achieved some of the things…? As an organization, do you feel like it was successful in some respects?

PC: I think the thing about ACT UP was it was probably successful in mobilizing the community, of creating a culture of resistance and, you know, struggling. Well, you can win. It raised our own self-confidence as a community. I think that was really important, because we were – because we had been through so much in that decade, so much that was so harmful and so negative. So, it's like teaching us if you struggle, you can win, you know. We struggled and after that – after ACT UP started forming, the whole issue of quarantining, and stuff, that was – it was gone. That issue, it was like, forget it – they didn't talk about quarantining us anymore. They actually started talking about safe sex education. They actually started talking about – when the NDP got in, we actually got anti-discrimination legislation brought it – got the human rights commission brought back, and…

BK: And AZT eventually got funded.

PC: Yes, AZT got fully funded, and other medications were released, you know. I think there were delays in medication. That was another one of the things too that people were fighting for was, like, in Toronto, AIDS Action Now!, especially was involved in releasing – fighting to get other medications released. And the same thing was, I think, happening here, too – they were fighting – I don't remember the exact details of that. Other people I'm sure have a better memory of that sort of thing, but they were… So, that kind of stuff, I think it really broke the ground for that as well as the stuff, like, around, like – the Queer Nation stuff. It spurred that which then spurred the queer movement later on in '90s. And the other thing too was that I think we helped – in a small way, we actually helped to bring down the Social Credit government. [laughs] You know, we helped contribute to that, you know. I mean he – Vander Zalm did – I mean, Vander Zalm was also defeated by Bill Vander Zalm and his own scandals over Fantasy Gardens – and I forget the name of the woman that sort of squealed on him – it was some sort of scandal. I forget that. [laughs] Anyhow, it was kind of comic when you think about it. And, of course, the opposition by the labour movement, actually having a one-day general strike. And that mobilized, I think, members enough that they – by the next election, they had had – people had had enough. They'd had enough of this and they'd realized that they can fight back and win. And we did.

BK: Just one final question about ACT UP that I already asked you about the CRHL. Who was in ACT UP? Was it again a lot lesbians? Was it a mixture of positive guys and HIV negative guys?

PC: Yup, it was that. It was… I think there was also, again, some of the – I think maybe some of the women from Prostitutes and Other Women for Equal Rights were also – some of them may also have still been involved at that time. It was, again, people who were HIV positive, people who were HIV negative; gay men, lesbians. So, we had – it was – and members of the community, some that were more radicalized and leftist, others that I hadn't – people's faces that I hadn't seen before and that were maybe more – they were leftist or sort of progressive, but they hadn't been in any of the groups I had been involved in, so I wasn't familiar with who they were. And some of them went on to be involved with Queer Planet and then with – one of them actually was involved with – got involved with Queer Planet, then he was also involved with a lot of activism in the Commercial Drive area and was part of the Dyke Marches there. And he also ran for – I think for parks board, for the Coalition of Progressive Electors in the municipal election at one point. So, I think he was trying to dip his toe into electoral politics, and I don't know where he is now. I haven't seen or heard of – I don't know, he may have gotten sick and died. I don't know if he was positive at the time or if he was negative, but I haven't seen or heard from him in years.

But there were all kinds of different people, and every now and then I think about, "Oh yeah, I remember this person." I was at a climate action rally for the Leap Manifesto about – what, two years ago, I guess now, down at B.C. Place stadium – I mean at Plaza of Nations – not Plaza of Nations, at Canada Place. And he recognized me from ACT UP and I couldn't – didn't have a way to write down his contact information which was too bad, because I hadn't seen him, but he's been involved in other stuff – in community activism and other stuff for a while now. And environmental activism, so – and it was just like… So, there were all these other people who have come in and there's other people I've seen that – like, this one guy that lives about a block from where I live right now, and he's still around and he was involved in the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation. So, it was all these different people that – in the community, every now and then, I see them or I think about them. And I don't know where all of them are now. But, it was a broad base.

There were some – there were some indigenous members of the community involved as well. One guy who was a medical student, and I've seen him around actually – he's still around. And another fellow who was living in the Downtown Eastside. I don't know – the guy who they did the mock strip search on when he was first arrested – he – I don't know what his name was or where – I haven't seen him since then, you know. But – and there were a lot of women, a lot lesbians involved as well, 'cause they could – they were very, highly conscious and active.

BK: So, from your perspective, most of your response to the epidemic was through activism?

PC: Yeah, that was primarily what it was for me. And then I was diagnosed in 1990 and I've been – I stayed active for a while. I was also working at the time, too, so I – a lot of the time I couldn't go to get involved in certain actions, or whatever. Or I was just, like, I was working 12-

hour shifts and it was pretty exhausting, and I just thought, oh, I had to pull back from activism. So, as the 90s progressed, I became less involved in that, so probably about 1992 or so, I sort of basically pulled out from activism for… oh, about a – almost a decade. And then I got involved later on with protesting Gordon Campbell's cuts and neoliberal attacks on the province, and did that for a few years as well. And I've gotten involved a little bit – gone to a few demonstrations – every now and then, I go into climate action demonstrations. That's sort of basically where my activism has been lately.

BK: Pulling back – was that partially because of the loss of your get out of jail free card?

PC: Yeah, I think that was a big part of it. I mean, I could never do civil disobedience action again, also. No. I also – there was a whole bunch of other reasons, I mean in my person life. I mean, I'm in a relationship now and, you know, I can't get involved with – politics detracts from my relationship with my partner. Also, my health – I have to really monitor – like, really budget my energy. I stay physically active but I also have to realize that I just – like, gee, do I want to go to that – get up early and go to that demonstration that's in the pouring, freezing rain at, you know, 10 o'clock in the morning or whatever. And, it's like, "No, I'm not going to do that," you know, unfortunately. That's just sort of how it is. I guess I'm being more selfish now in that respect, but that's how I survive.

BK: Thinking about all this activist activity that you – from 1987 to 1992, that was a huge part of your life. Did that change your relationship to the gay community at all, or did the epidemic as a whole change your relationship to the community?

PC: Um… I think it shaped my relationship to the community. I think – I mean, it was – yeah, it's basically what, for me, I was – because I really felt quite… When I first moved here, of course, I didn't know – I didn't have any friends, I didn't know very many people here, and so I had to sort of establish myself and make friends, and stuff like that. So, that was kind of – that took some time. And getting involved politically was where my passion was, so that's where – I thought – so, that's how I developed my relationship with the community, how I built my relationships with people and felt friendships was primarily through the activism. And that was – and I've maintained a lot of my – those connections, sometimes more distant, you know. There's certain people in the community who – not necessarily in the queer community, but other people on the far left that I've been involved with politically during those time periods as a result of my work with queer activism. And I've kept in touch with them. Every now and then, I see them at a rally or whatever, and I chat with them or whatever, so I keep some contact with them. And some of the other activists, I've maintained relationships – friendships with them for many years, and then of course things – as you get older, you know, friendships come and go, and relationships change, and stuff like that. And that's been my case as well, you know.

And I find other ways of being involved in the community. I get involved with – well, I would go – my partner and I like to go to Positive Talk at Positive Living Society – we do that. That's one of our social outlets. And then we go to Health Initiative for Men and get involved in doing life drawing, and then they have a discussion group for men 55+, so I'm – I'm a little too young by one year, but that's okay – they don't I.D. me, it doesn't matter. And then there's the Dr. Peter Centre – everyone assumes that it's palliative care, but it's more than that. It's palliative

care on the upper two floors of the centre, but the lower two floors, it's more open to the broader HIV community, and they have a whole bunch of programs. Like, meals – breakfast, lunch, and dinner meals – like breakfast and lunch for the day program, and then on Wednesdays there's a dinner meal. And we go to the Wednesday night evenings and we do – we're going to start music therapy there – just learning – we're just going to get some recorders and play the recorders, and stuff like that. So, we're staying in touch and meeting people that actually come in contact – like, for instance, one person there who started coming who's – who lived in my building, the apartment building I first moved into when I first came here. And we were just talking and reminiscing about living in that building, and he remembers people from that building – so, "Oh yeah, so-and-so person's still around," and that. So, there is – there's some contact, some continuity, some loss, some change – and just new people coming in, others going out. Yeah.

BK: So, we've talked about how the community responded to the epidemic and dealt with the epidemic on multiple different fronts, whether that be education or activism. One thing that always amazes me is the resiliency of the community, and considering the burden that was on the community – the ability of the community to just make it through the epidemic. So, how did people – I mean, how did you, as an activist, as someone who during your activist years became HIV positive, and was working – how did you avoid burning out?

PC: [Laughs] Well… I don't know. [laughs] I guess, you know – I – I mean, part of… I mean, some of the years – I was unemployed for a couple of years as well, so that gave me free time to do some activism. Other times I was working, you know, long – I was working shift work and stuff like that, so I could sometimes participate and sometimes not. And I don't – I think it was just – I think it was having time just hanging out with friends and relax maybe, and being with like-minded people. I think that just helped rejuvenate me, I guess – kept me going. I don't – I think a lot of people did burn out from activism, and I've seen that. I know, for instance, one – the activist that started that chat for "Gay rights now!" at the Little Sister's rally, they – I don't know if he necessarily burned out, but I would say probably – he was always doing something activist for his life. And he ended up – he passed away back in 2005 and he had moved to Toronto. He – I think he just kept on going and going, and didn't take time to look after himself, and I think that was, for me – sometimes I did just stop doing stuff. Like, the early 1990s after Queer Planet and that for a while, I said, well, I've got to work. I'm working these 12-hour shifts and then I've got this other job when I got laid off of that – it was 12-hour rotating shifts. And then I said, okay, I'm not going to be doing activism right now. I can't do this. I've gotta just work on looking after my health and my job, so that's what happened. That's how – pulling back was how I prevented burn out. That's the way I did it. So…

BK: In the early 1990s, when there still are fairly limited treatment options, how did you look after your health?

PC: Well, for me, I was always, like, very physically active. I was always – like, I rode a bicycle everywhere, I didn't own a car. So, that was one thing I did, was to stay physically active. And I worked out at the gym and I ate – instead of white potatoes, I'd eat brown rice at dinner time, and had whole grain cereal, and stuff like that. And I was just trying to eat healthy – and always had vegetables and stuff like that, or fruit at breakfast or whatever. So, I was trying to eat healthy as much as I could, on whatever money I had, which wasn't always easy. A lot of the time I was

vegetarian or almost vegetarian because I didn't have money, and I'd be eating tofu to get the protein. But I just – I think for me it was – at that time, that was basically what I did for my health. And then as – when I eventually – in 1994, I went on disability. I had met my new partner and we'd been together for about a year, and I was just – he said I'd come home from work and I'd look just ash gray – I'd just look grey. And he'd say – and he had friends over one night when I came over and they all said to each other, he looked just – I looked just terrible – and he said – told me I had to quit my job, you know. So, I eventually did go on disability and I – and now I just – and I eat better too because I live with my partner, and with a combined income, I'm able to eat better, so I eat fish. And because of his influence, I cut out red meat when I – and I've basically almost entirely cut out sugar, and we take a lot of supplements, and I don't drink alcohol anymore, and I don't even smoke pot anymore. So, just living healthier in that way, and doing yoga and stuff like that, just keeping – and we go bicycle riding and I do some calisthenics, and that's what I do to look after myself. And I take my antivirals now that I have them. And I think being socially engaged is really important. Social isolation is as dangerous to your health as cigarette smoking and that's one of the reasons why my partner and I are always going out to all these different groups and stuff like that is to stay socially engaged. So, that's what I do for my health.

BK: You mentioned antiretrovirals. I guess 1996 is the start of the big shift, where we actually started to see some really effective treatments. Looking towards the present a little, how has your perception of HIV shifted over time, thinking about antiretrovirals specifically but broadly speaking too?

PC: Well, I wouldn't be here without them. [laughs] That's what I think. I remember even when I was – before – when I was first diagnosed, I had decided that I wasn't going to die of AIDS, because I remember that I'd been hearing stuff like they'd been finding people who were actually naturally immune to HIV. And so, I thought, somewhere there's an answer to the puzzle, and that's probably part of it right there. So, eventually they're going to figure out how to harness that. In the meantime, the antivirals, when they came along… Well, this is interesting – the first person to become undetectable was in 1995 because of antiretroviral therapy, and that's me. [laughs]

BK: Wow.

PC: That was me. Yeah, it was a study at St. Paul's. I was on nevirapine and AZT and DDI, and that was the combination that worked for me. And – so, I was – I hit the jackpot, you know, the first time, because it was a double-blind placebo test, so other people got placebo presumably, and I got the real thing and it obviously worked. And so, that was really – for me, that was a game changer as far as, like, "Okay, I know I can survive." Yet, at the same time, I also know that I can't go back to work. I'm not sick enough to be bedridden; I'm not well enough to go and hold a job, [laughs] you know. And I know my stress level is such that, you know, getting up to an alarm clock every day of the week would not work for me. It would just be – I know how exhausted – I sometimes sleep ten to twelve hours a day, or more. So, the antivirals, as far as for the community, I mean I think it's – obviously it's a positive thing 'cause it's keeping people alive. And it's – we're discovering that also – that if you're undetectable, you're untransmissible, so the struggle now is to get that message out, because I think they need to – because I think that

treatment as prevention is very important and I think that's a really good key to fighting HIV right at this point in time. There also are some promising strides being made with regards to vaccines and things – various other approaches to building – making the body immune system able to fight HIV.

Yeah, there's – it kind of reminds me though, in a way – the community – this is how – almost how I imagine the community was in 60's and 70's in that respect as far as… In the 1950s and the 60s, the sexual revolution – well, not in the 1950s, but in the 1960s, the sexual revolution began. And the two big reasons for that was the pill and antibiotics. The pill of course prevented pregnancies, so women didn't have to worry about getting pregnant. Antibiotics, of course – well, any bacterial infections you get – well, you don't have to worry about syphilis or gonorrhea 'cause you can treat those, you know – and other STIs, you can treat those with antibiotics and that's it. And that was fine right up in the 60s and 70s, and then towards the late 1970s, there was a big rise in STIs and this big… Of course, now, because of the way antibiotics are misused – and I think primarily that people will say, well it's the way people are misusing the prescriptions and stuff like that, but I think it's more than that. I think the big thing actually has to do with our agricultural system, because they have these – I'm digressing here, but it's because they're feeding all these antibiotics to livestock and people are getting it into their system and developing a resistance. So, I think that's a big problem. So, then, of course, we have AIDS strike and antibiotic resistance increasing over time and then – so, you had that time period where – actually there was a… I remember my doctor had said there was a – he had a sign up in his office saying, you know, big drop in syphilis – "Good work, guys!" Something like that. And this was back in the 80s because a drop in syphilis meant that people were not – were not having unsafe sex or whatever, and therefore they were not getting HIV as well. So, that was the only – that was one sort of upside was the drop in the STIs.

But the problem, of course, is that now that we have – the upside and then the downside: the upside is that we have antivirals so we can now – don't have to worry about HIV killing you. It's still not the best thing for the rest of your life if you're infected, and there's side-effects for that. And of course, the other thing, too, is that now we – the upside is that we're sort of, like, going through I guess another sexual revolution in the gay community. I mean, the stuff that I see on the Internet now, the kind of pornography now that I see is kind of like – I haven't seen that since the old stuff in the '70s. Like, I remember in the '80s, I'd see a little bit of the pornography from the '70s, you know, and stuff like that. And then in '80s – as the '80s progressed, the '90s progressed it was like – there was – people were not – people weren't fucking or if they were fucking they had to use condoms, of course, which was a good thing that they were using condoms. Or, you know – but nobody was doing anything daring like that, like you know watersports, no flogging, no this, no that. It was very, you know… It was very circumscribed.

So, now it's become more wild again and that's very liberating and, you know – in one way, but of course I have – my concern of course is having experienced all of this sort of thing, it's like I've got a sort of feeling of – an uneasy feeling of déjà vu. Because they've had people who've – scientists who study the evolution history of microorganisms and viruses. They said that HIV was actually around in New York around 1971, so that was a full ten years before the first – they started having cases of AIDS show up. So, it had been around and I guess it hadn't mutated, so it spread for a quite a while. So, that makes me think that, hm… [laughs] You know, we have –

we're seeing antibiotic-resistant gonorrhea, so having – those kind of things are becoming an issue, and syphilis is on the rise, and issues like that. So, I think it's really important that we work on looking at all of the factors that cause and lead to men having sex with men especially, but other groups as well – how to prevent infection and risk-taking and stuff like that. And getting yourself checked and looking after your health, and that's why I like the things that are happening with these various groups, like Health Initiative for Men which is working I think to try to prevent the spread of HIV through different approaches to health. Like, not just your sexual health, but your physical health, your mental health, you know – your social health. All the, you know – they're sort of trying to connect all those together and I think that's really important. And same with Dr. Peter Center and Positive Living Society. There's work in all these – the interplay of all these different factors in men's health.

BK: Those organizations are still doing such necessary and great work. One of the questions we like to ask near the end is if you have any advice for healthcare providers in the present? And you were just starting to articulate some pieces of that, but anything else that springs to mind?

PC: Um… Well, I don't really know there's much advice I can actually give. [laughs] I think the people that work in healthcare professions are – a lot of them seem to be very well-informed on this. I think that, of course, the issue, the thing – one of the things, of course, is that we live again in a bubble in this part of, you know, the West End or Vancouver. Like, HIV/AIDS care is really quite top-tier in this part of the city, but you leave the West End or you leave the city and there's a lot of lack of knowledge. And people are actually still getting AIDS in the Northern parts of the province, you know, and ending up on – in ward 10-C at St. Paul's because people are not looking for AIDS, they're not… So, there's – there is that issue, and I don't really know how to – what to suggest to people. I think we know that we have to do AIDS education, HIV education and that throughout the province, and I think there needs to be more sex education happening – better quality sex education happening throughout the province. And, I mean, there was a big fuss over that over in Ontario and I don't know how far they – how much progress they actually made on that, because of the conservatives are rallying around certain communities – racialized communities to oppose sex education. So, I think that really put a damper on that.

But I think they need to – I think maybe the healthcare activists, people in the healthcare fields need to become more activist, I guess, in that respect. And I think people in the queer community – of course, more activism, I think, the better we'd be as well. And… yeah, I think another thing, too, is that we need to realize that a lot of what's happening around – things around addictions and mental health is also related to homelessness and poverty and social isolation. And there's, like, for the social isolation, there are resources out there. The problem, of course, is trying to get – how do you reach out to those people who are socially isolated, to get them to come out to a group like, you know, Health Initiative for Men? How do you get them to come out to Dr. Peter Center? I mean, there's a certain stigma around Dr. Peter Center, because people think, "Oh my god! You're with Dr. Peter Center. You're on your last legs. You're at death's door." And it's like, "No, no, no, no, no. It's repurposing itself. There's more to it than that." And… yeah and I mean, homelessness – one of the best indicators for the health outcomes is whether you have a home or not, and if you're out on the streets or you're living in a homeless shelter – you know, in and out of a homeless shelter – then your health outcomes are much drastically reduced. So, that's a big issue, so we need a national housing strategy. And it's not just, you know, the

municipal government and the province, it's the Feds that have to be – that have to put the gears to the Feds on this. So, I think we need to have civil disobedience and activism movements around issues like that, and about income redistribution. You know, we've had over thirty-five years of neoliberalism and austerity, and it's not producing the much-vaunted prosperity that [laughs], you know. Those of us who – back then, a lot of us already knew that back then, but there were a lot of people who didn't who thought, "Oh, this will be great. Tax cuts will [laughs] bring about…" You know, this prosperity never happened, and we've seen Donald Trump doing the same thing, and it's like, we've been through this before. So, we need to have people organizing in the communities and fighting back, you know?

BK: It seems to be a re-articulation of lot of what ACT UP was saying in the late-'80s, early-'90s: health issues are social issues.

PC: Yeah.

BK: These are things that are conditioned by these large social structures and if we really want to address this health issue, we need to address those social issues, right? So, it's interesting to hear that that's still really at the heart of the problem, isn't it?

PC: Yeah, that's right.

BK: I don't have a whole lot more in the way of direct questions. One of the other things we want to ask is how do you think the community changed as a whole as a result of the epidemic, which is a really big question. Early in the interview you mentioned that it feels a little bit less like a community than it did. Like, it feels a little less central or cohesive – I forget the word you used.

PC: Um… It's more spread out, more dispersed, I think. It's kind of hard to – hard to put my finger on it exactly. I mean, it's different and yet I don't want to – and I'm not quite sure I'm right about this either, and it's like – and I don't know if it's… Like, I think some people sort of think, well, "All the young people today, they just don't know the way it was." It's like, "No, no, no, no, no." I don't want to get into that kind of garbage. I think, you know, when the AIDS crisis started, it was also built – when the community was able to – the community was able to draw on its experiences from the past. I mean, people had fought for gay rights and Stonewall and stuff like that, and it was the '60s. It was a very – a period of time of radicalization, not just in the queer community, but in all sorts of social movements; not just in the Western countries, but all throughout the world. There was the national liberation movements in Vietnam and Latin America, and elsewhere – Africa, and so forth. So, we – we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us, and so, of course, the stronger we can make our movements now, the more that we can support those in the future, you know. I think also – I'm also Marxist – there, I've said it, okay?

BK: Oh my. [laughs]

PC: [laughs] So, I – and I think we still need a project – a project of human emancipation and – we have to free ourselves from capitalism and build a socialist project, a socialist future for

humanity to survive. And we depend on – we look back on our previous struggles. That's where we can draw our lessons from and it's also – whatever experiences, common experiences we have, we can build on those. You know, all that stuff I was talking about that happened in the '80s, that helped influence the struggles in the '90s for when people were demanding equal civil rights. When they wanted to get, you know, simple things like opening a gay bar on Davie St., and stuff like that, which is not a big, important struggle, but in a way it is because it was a social space. But even things like – you know, like, equal marriage, even though it's – the problems with, you know, like, an institution like marriage. On the other hand, it's a civil rights issue. It's like access to all institutions. Like, everyone should have access to all institutions, you know. Should women be able to be in the fire- - be firefighters? Well, of course. You know, it's so – there's all that sort of previous struggle that we're – things are built on and I think I'm talking in circles here…

BK: No.

PC: …But that's what I think. Like, for the community – you know, I think the community – I like to say that history doesn't repeat itself, but I think it rhymes. That's the way I like to look at it. And there's certain struggles that look very similar to what they were in the past, and I think we can learn from those in the future, and draw from – you know, what are the mistakes? What are the strengths? And how do these things apply in the current context. And I think that's always been the case, you know. I mean, the people in the '60s, they were the children of people in the '30s and '40s who went through the Depression and were fighting fascism. Like, people went to fight in the Spanish Civil War, they fought in the Second World War, they were fighting for jobs, you know, and unemployment and relief during the Great Depression. So, they learned, and people joined the Communist party, and they learned a lot of skills. So then, in the '50s and '60s they got involved in the Black Civil Rights movement and in anti-segregation struggles and stuff like that. And people – I remember, people in the '80s were talking about what they learned from the '60s, and on and on it goes, so… I guess I'm repeating myself, but that's [laughs]…

BK: Well, you're illustrating your points. Speaking of lessons learned, are there lessons that we've learned as a community from this?

PC: I think the lesson is come together. You know, always come together to share your ideas. It's one thing to say you're connected via the Internet or social media, but that's not the same. Being together face-to-face with a bunch of people is different – it just is. You can't do – and I'm not a Luddite. I love digital technology. I do my art digitally. I won't go back to traditional because I don't want to deal with the paints and the mess and the smell and the – all that kind of nonsense, right? So, I've got – but there's sort of a – it's not the same. Don't use that as a substitute for coming together and actually meeting people face-to-face, because when you come face-to-face, you feel your bond and in a time of crisis, you can feel your strength – your unified strength that you don't feel. And that's what we felt when we marched together against the Socreds or, you know, for fighting against the AIDS crisis. We felt our collective strength.

BK: That does seem like a very important lesson for this political moment. Any other lessons that come to mind, or…? If there's nothing else, that's totally fine. That's a big takeaway.

PC: I think that's – I think I'll leave it at that.

BK: One final question for you: any advice for future generations that might not have lived through this? As a community, we don't always do a great job of communicating this history across generations.

PC: Yeah, learn your history. [laughs] That's always – learn your history and learn your political theory as well. You know, it doesn't necessarily have to be Marxist, but just learn. You know, there's Anarchists, there's all sorts of currents – Marxism, there's tons of currents of Marxism that – tons of Anarchist theories, there's tons of other leftist theories – Weber's theories and so forth – queer liberation theories. Learn, learn. And, yeah – and come together. [laughs]

BK: I think that's probably a good point to end on. Is there anything that you wanted to discuss that we didn't cover or that you thought we'd ask that you'd like to share with us?

PC: Let's see… No, other than I like the idea of – we didn't mention *Angles*. I'll just say that – I don't want to go into too much detail, but just say that I think that alternative media is really useful. It really helps a lot, because it's getting a message out, 'cause we get a lot of stuff that's filtered by the commercial media. And of course, that – they have their own agenda. And when we start coming together, and if we form our own – do our own media, we actually can formulate our own ideas and understand the world, and share that with the outside world. 'Cause it's a great educational tool. And the thing with *Angles* – like, a lot of people look at *xtra*.ca or whatever. They say, like, it's a community publication. And *Angles* was sort of community, but it was something different. I think *Angles* – there was a large segment within the paper that wanted to impel the queer community to fight for its liberation, and I think that's what we were trying to do on *Angles*.

BK: It was right there in the masthead, essentially. It's a gay and lesbian liberation periodical. And I don't think we have anything quite like that anymore.

PC: No. And *The Body Politic* used to be – was like that too, a magazine for lesbian and gay liberation. And we don't quite have anything – I mean, *Angles* – *Xtra* does do a lot of good stuff, but they don't have that same – I think, the same mission as the – I don't know if they have the same focus that *Angles* and *The Body Politic* had.

BK: Those were both very activist-leaning publications and personally I would not describe *Xtra* as being activist as such, although it does cover a lot of important issues.

PC: Yeah, so that's pretty much about it, I think.

BK: Great. Well, I'm going to stop this then.

PC: Okay.

[End of video 2, 1:15:42]