"HIV in My Day" – Interview 67

February 22, 2019
Interviewee: Ted Mason (TM); Interviewer: Ben Klassen (BK)

Ben Klassen: Just talking to Ted this morning. Thanks so much for being here and sharing your story with us. We are really looking forward to hearing about your experiences in the early years of the epidemic. Just to get started, can you tell me a little about how you first got involved in the gay community or started engaging in gay life?

Ted Mason: Yeah, actually the – well, I had an experience when I was seventeen and it was kind of a thing where I didn't accept it because I had had relationships with women, but I kind of fell in love with this guy, but that didn't go anywhere. And then I went to off to university, and again I had more relationships with women. And then after two years of university I decided to come out to Vancouver, and that was in 1977, and when I got here I had a couple of friends – I grew up in Williams Lake and so I had a couple of friends who were going to university here in Vancouver. And I went out one evening with a girlfriend who I had known in Williams Lake and she confided in me that the woman she was living with was actually her sexual partner and that she was lesbian, and I kind of turned to her and said, "Well, maybe – I think maybe I am gay," right? And so then she got one of her friends who was another lesbian woman who had – I don't know, she had a boyfriend at that time, and for some reason they knew about gay clubs. So, they took me out to, I think the club was called the Love Affair on Seymour St., so that was my first going to a club.

So, I was – I had gotten a job in Vancouver in an architect's office and the office was in Yaletown, and that happened to be about half a block from the Gandy Dancer, which was you know a very popular club in Vancouver at that time. Like, I didn't – I was quite naïve, I didn't particularly notice the club although I used to work quite late and I would walk home up Davie St. and I would see one or two or three guys walking together down Davie St. They were probably going to the Gandy Dancer. But at the time, I didn't know, but I also didn't know about the prostitutes. I had heard people in the office talking about the prostitutes on Davie St. and I was like, totally oblivious because I lived more or less in the middle of the West End, but I used to walk Davie every day to work. And I guess it was in the summer, and come some bad weather in the winter, I was walking up Davie St. and I notice all these women with umbrellas standing out in the rain and it kind of clicked, oh okay, that is what people mean about the prostitutes. Anyway, I had – I did meet a guy, I think he must have picked me up just walking down the street or something, and he was an interesting guy. He was very, very political, he was very much involved in the whole gay rights thing and like it was kind of exciting, it was my first really gay relationship where I was like accepting the fact that I was gay.

We did things like walk around at night holding hands and he took me to the bathhouse – I had never been to one. And the – I had a funny experience, I didn't really know what to do. He seemed to know what he wanted and kind of left me, and I was just kind of wandering around with my towel. Well, I will kill some time and have a shower and I go into the shower and I see over one end my principal from high school, and I am like, oh fuck. Anyway, I just kind of ran out of there and got my clothes and left. That relationship didn't really last that long but it kind

of got me into the mode of thinking about I am gay. I want to see more gay people and I heard about the Gandy Dancer, it was right by my office, so hey, it was perfect. I work late, I can just go over and have a drink whatever, so I used to hang out there fairly often. I loved the music, I was really big into disco music, I love to dance. Didn't really meet people very often. It was – I don't know, I felt like a bit of an outsider. I had a beard at the time and sort of longish hair – would have been quite fashionable today, but at that time it wasn't at all and certainly not amongst gay men anyway. At that time, in '78 I went down to San Francisco and everybody was talking about San Francisco, and a lot of people were going down to Seattle, going to clubs and things. So, I wanted to go to Mexico, but I thought, well I would stop in San Francisco on the way down and of course that was kind of mind blowing. I got into the hotel on Castro, which turned out to be infested with cockroaches, but it was the only thing I could afford. I was just amazed, there were all these gay clubs, people were out on patios, hanging out of windows, and everybody was walking around. And they called them the clones, at least people who weren't in to that, gay people who weren't into that, maybe more effeminate gay people were quite dismissive of the clones. The clones all wore plaid shirts and they had Levi 501's and a mustache, so the – that was a real eye opener, how just open and free gay life was, which kind of again helped me to cement my own sense of myself.

But then in '79, I went back to university and when I was in university, I worked pretty hard. I didn't really – I had no money to go out to clubs or anything like that. I think I did join Gay McGill for maybe the last year I was there, maybe in '81. I met a few friends. There was one guy that I saw – you know, had a bit of a sexual relationship with maybe for about six months at the end just before I came out to Vancouver. So, in '82 I graduated and came to Vancouver, got a job back in the same architectural office that I had been working in and the – actually, back when I was in Montreal, in '81 I subscribed to a New York magazine, the *New York Native*, and that is where I started to read about the gay plague. But it seemed – the consensus seemed to be that the people who were getting so ill were doing a lot of drugs and having a very wild life and were getting run down by this. At that time, there was not talk of it being caused by a virus, but the *Native* was – it was obviously of concern. They actually had on their cover a box for counting the number of cases, so I knew about this, it was kind of in the background. So, by the time I got to Vancouver, '82, there still wasn't commonly known that it was caused by a virus – I think that was about the time that they discovered the HIV virus, but nobody talked about it.

And I had a friend who I used to hang out with a bit, and he had this boyfriend who had been living down in San Francisco, and they broke up. And I was at a party and he was, the boyfriend was there, and the boyfriend was cute – I always thought he was very good looking, and he kind of hustled me, really kind of pushed me. But what was weird was when I had gotten together to have dinner with them, they had this rule that you couldn't talk about the gay plague, it was like whatever, off limits, because I guess everybody was talking about it and they thought it was boring or whatever. The irony is of course, this guy, [name], he is the one that infected me, and that was the end of July – July 31, 1983. And I got really sick – not everybody gets really sick when they are first infected, but I did, so of course I had a fever of 105 for days, and I had sort of a fungal infection in my throat. And I went to see the doctor and he didn't know, so he sent me out to UBC, and there they assumed – by the time I had the appointment I was starting to get better. The whole sickness lasted maybe ten days and they felt that it was German measles, is what the diagnosis was anyway.

Then about one month later, six weeks or so, I was out at a bar with a friend, and by this time I was getting – I had dated a lot when I was in Vancouver and really being quite discouraged. I wasn't very outgoing, so I didn't meet a lot of people, and the people I did meet, a lot of them seemed to be just interested in sex, while I was always relationship-focused when I was younger and the… So, I was looking for a partner, and then, so that was in September '83, I met the man who is still my partner today, very lucky for me because – so, during this whole really difficult time, I had fantastic support, which I am sure is actually part of the reason I made it while friends didn't. When I first met him, I wasn't really committed to the relationship. He seemed quite closeted, and I was kind of a little bit more, maybe a bit more political about being gay, and in fact, I did march in a parade. That was – no, that might have been in '77. It was weird, it was a gay pride parade that consisted of one convertible with a drag queen and maybe fifty guys walking behind it with signs, and I remember, so that probably was about '77. And the – maybe my friend did talk me into going to it and the – it was somewhere down around Burrard and Pacific.

BK: The parade route was probably a lot shorter.

TM: It was probably four or five blocks, but there on the corner was this camera crew from CTV, and all these guys, they were all going, oh my god, my parents are going to see this. So yeah, it was quite a – it was still a very closeted scene at that time. Going back to when I met my partner, he seemed kind of closeted, which I wasn't really crazy about, and also I had applied for an exchange program that the Canadian Government, for people in technical fields who wanted to work in Mexico, and Mexicans came up here. And then of course, right around the time I met my partner, I had another problem, and I had it a couple of times earlier with a collapsed lung, so right around the time I met my partner, my lung collapsed again, and this time the doctors decided that they needed to do some surgery where they would actually attach my lung so it wouldn't collapse again. So, I was in the hospital at that time and I had already been away for two weeks at the beginning of August, and here we were at the end of September, and I was in the hospital, and my boss told me, well, that is the end of your job, I can't really afford… I mean it was a very small firm and I totally understood him, and there wasn't a lot of work anyway. I mean '82 was horrible, the recession. I mean people talk about the financial crisis like it was this terrible recession – well, it was nothing like the unemployment in '82 or '83. I would say that 40% of architects were unemployed, so the – I understood that. My now partner was maybe a bit more critical but.

So, I got out of the Hospital and I started to notice I was getting these really strong allergic reactions, and I had had allergies in the past, and now I was getting all these new allergies. And it was – I guess I didn't pay that much attention to it as I had had allergies before, but in retrospect, I realize that my whole immune system was being severely disrupted but… So, my partner and I were together for about six months and then I, it was time for me to go to Mexico because I got on this exchange program, so I went off to Mexico. I was there about a year and three months and I was living in Mexico City. I was – I did meet several guys that I had relationships with, and I do have a lot of, I don't know, bad feelings, because it is very possible that I could have infected them. And certainly, Mexico wouldn't have had the kind of treatment that was available here, but you know, of course, I was oblivious. I had all these friends who went to the bathhouse

all the time and I didn't do any of that, so I never thought that I could have been infected, because at that time, it was '84 – by that time, they were talking about the HIV virus. There wasn't a test then, but it was definitely out in the media, or at least in the gay media and the… So, I guess it was the last thing on my mind that I could have actually have been infected with this virus, because again, the people who were getting sick were the big partiers and had these wild lifestyles, lived in New York and San Francisco, so it was all tied in with promiscuity, right, and I never thought of myself that way. But you know, it certainly is possible that I could have infected two or three people.

And came home in Fall of '85, and that was – it was later in the Fall, that is when the first HIV test was available in Vancouver. I didn't get tested right away, maybe the spring, and maybe my doctor mentioned it, it might be an idea or whatever. So, I went and had the test and didn't think that much about it, and it had been a week or ten days and I hadn't heard anything, and so I called my doctor's office. And the receptionist said the doctor wanted me to come in and see him, so I came in, and he told me that I was positive for the HIV virus. And I was like – well, one thing, I was pissed because he didn't call me right away. I think he was bummed out, I think he was – I think he felt really bad about it, and I think he was very reluctant to tell me because I had seen him for several years. And you know, I had had maybe chlamydia or something, and he had always said, "Oh well. Oh, just take these pills, no problem. After a week, you will be able to go out and fuck like a bunny." So, I don't know if he was having second thoughts about being so cavalier. Anyway, I was pissed that he didn't tell me, so I asked around, and somebody told me there is a gay doctor that you could go see. So, I went to see him, and he gave me blood tests, and I had about 400 T cells, and at that time, that was the only thing they counted. They didn't have a test for viral load and – but the range if you look at the charts, the range for normal T cells is 400 to 1100 or something, so in my mind, well I am still normal – low but normal.

So, I guess it was in the back of my mind, but I didn't really dwell on it. When I had come back from Mexico, I had moved back in with my partner, so we were – it was, like once we found out that I was infected, we always had safe sex, and so it was getting to the point at that time, there was enough information out there that everyone was getting very fearful. And the guy that infected me unfortunately died while I was in Mexico, but of course it was like liver cancer or something. It seemed everybody who died of AIDS never – it was never publicized, it was always some other disease. But of course, when you are HIV you get all kinds of diseases, so the – so that wasn't really praying on my mind. I felt fine, but I do remember we went for a really, really hard hike, and when I came back, I got shingles, and I thought that was strange. And I went, and my doctor probably gave me something for it – it cleared up. But at this time, it is '87 I think, and I saw that there was a meeting at one of the community centres in the West End for to talk about HIV and AIDS, and somebody was going to be giving a presentation on it. So, I thought I better go and find out about this, and so the person giving the presentation was Julio Montaner. And after the presentation he – because at that time, people with HIV were getting treated with AZT, and I went up to him at the end of the thing, and I was just kind of chatting to him, told him a little about my situation. And I told him what my T cell count was, and he said, "I want you to make an appointment next week to see me," and so I did that.

And he put me on AZT and there were a bunch of side effects. I didn't really feel good on it, it might have been effective for two or three months. I think my – I don't think my T cell count

went up at all, but after about six months, my T cell count was dropping, and so it was obvious that the AZT wasn't doing much for me. But new drugs were just getting discovered – I think there was DDI and another one – DC something, I can't remember – but this was also a time when it was getting, it was getting out there that there is a serious plague, right? I needed to get a dentist, and I actually got turned down by a dentist, even though at that time it was known that you could take safety precautions. There was no reason for a dentist to be afraid of taking an HIV positive patient, however, this dentist did and reject me. And so, I told my sister, "Phone up and see if you can get an appointment," and of course she got an appointment right away, and I had been told that the doctor wasn't taking any new patients, but so you know. So, when my sister got taken on as a patient, I realized what was going on. Fortunately, I was able to find another dentist that didn't have these kinds of prejudices. That kind of stuff was happening – you were hearing about it all the time, people getting discriminated against. There was also – the stories were starting to come out in the media of people in hospital all looking like skeletons. It was getting very, very – it was getting to be an awful lot of fear. Like, I know the BC government was very conservative and didn't want any education, sex education, or education about protecting yourself from HIV, because the idea was that, well, it would just encourage people to be promiscuous. I guess that was the thinking, but the other people were really beating that drum, so it was a bit of a struggle there. I don't know exactly when, but at one point, the government came on board and the whole safe sex thing was being very heavily promoted.

And at that time, as well one of my friends got very, very sick and it is really sad because… He was a really beautiful guy, really sexy, very good looking, super athletic. We used to go skiing up on Grouse, but doing that kind of off-trail skiing where you are kind of climbing up to these different peaks, going to find powder snow. I just could never keep up with him. He was such – so amazingly healthy and strong, and he moved back to Toronto, and I didn't hear much from him. Possibly, I knew that he was HIV positive, but he came out to Vancouver, and I don't know, that was probably '88 or '89. And I guess that is the first time somebody really close to me was very sick. I remember we went up the Capilano Canyon, because that is a place we had gone before to swim or dive, and he didn't want to go in the water. He was really cold and kind of weak, and he really, really looked ill, and I felt afraid of him, you know?

Of course, when I think of it now, it was like – I don't know, I guess it was self-defence. I didn't want – because I was still really not showing any particular symptoms, although my T cells had dropped, and I think, I don't know… I didn't want to be associated, because they were starting to get some AIDS support groups and this sort of thing, and I had no interest. I didn't want to hang out with people who had HIV or AIDS, I just wasn't – I didn't want to think about it. It was right about that time that [friend's name] went back to Toronto, and a few weeks later, he was – they had just given him DDI, I think that was the new drug. But he was in the hospital at this point, and he called me. We had a really short conversation. He just told me – I guess I hadn't told him that I was HIV positive, and actually that is another thing I feel shitty about, because I didn't even share that with him. And he told me, "Oh, just be careful whatever you do. Just be careful." And a few days later, he was dead.

Through Julio, I was getting – the IDC clinic was kind of in the basement of St. Paul's at the time, and I was being sent there. I guess my T cells were maybe at 200, 150, somewhere in that, so what they are doing is giving this prophylaxis inhaler to try and stop PCP, so I was going for

that. And he was being quite aggressive and then – but I was starting to notice things now. I felt really weak, I hated being out in the sun – it made me feel exhausted. My partner and I had bought a townhouse and we were doing all this work in the yard and I just couldn't do more than about two hours and then I just had to go inside. I started to get fungus growing underneath my fingernails and toenails and the – it was getting kind of scary. And then Julio got, I guess a trial for a new drug, 3TC, and it had only been tried by about forty people in Holland, and we were the first in North America to try it. And actually, it was a dosing trial where you were given different doses, it wasn't even a – it was just a dosing trial. I met a few guys at IDC, sort of had a little camaraderie about all of that, and then when the dosing trial finished, they said, well, we can do now phase two or three – I don't know how they label these things, but a trial where they actually put you on the drug and then start to monitor you at a particular dosage that they decided was safe. And while I was on it, I noticed real improvement. My T cells went up, the fungus went away – it gave me real hope that there would be – that I could, that somehow medicine was going to save me. And it was effective for about nine months or so.

But there were always announcements of new drugs and – but people were talking about resistance and cross-resistance, so it was getting – there was concern out there about, well, if you did one drug, are you going to be resistant to the other drugs? And I got into another trial, this one was for a protease inhibitor, it wasn't a very good one, and I had asked the girl who was conducting the trial if there were cross-resistance to other protease inhibitors. She said no, but of course, it turned out that was wrong, and that drug did not work particularly well for me, but it also left me in the boat that none of the other protease inhibitors were going to be effective, right. So, we are getting to around 1994, I would say, and I am going downhill. I had a job with the city in New Westminster, and they were really great. I had my own office. I was really just reported to the administrator. The job wasn't super demanding. I could leave my office at any time. I made all kinds of trips downtown, for medical appointments, for trials, that sort of thing. Julio was able to get other drugs – there were other classes of drugs becoming available and he was able to get them before they were approved in Canada, so he got me on some, and he was one of the first people in the world to start combining the drugs, and at one point I was on like eight medications. I don't know, maybe two of them might not have been HIV medications, but the others all were, right?

And I was realizing that this was getting really serious, this has got to work for me, and I – but you know, I was taking eight pills in the morning, and after about two hours, I was throwing them up, and I remember just I wanted to take them. I wanted to, I wanted them to work, and every time I threw them up, it was just so depressing. At that point, I told the administrator at the city that I was HIV, and I didn't know how much longer that I could continue to work, and he was great. It is funny, he was a big basketball fan, and I guess at that time Magic Johnson had just come out and said that he was HIV positive. This guy was, "Oh my god, you are just like Magic Johnson," and he even said, "Don't worry, just come in whenever you feel like it. No pressure. Just do whatever you can," which was fantastic. But I had told him, I said, "Probably in a few months here I am going to have to quit. It's just nothing is working." And I remember seeing Julio and telling him, "I just can't take the meds," and I remember him saying, "Are you really trying?" And I was like oh fuck – I was trying so hard. And then there was a new protease inhibitor and he put me on that with a number of other drugs and I responded to it and T cells

started going up, because I had been down around about 100 and the – it was like the light at the end of the tunnel – oh my god, there is hope.

Then after a little bit, I became – it was funny because the drug was obviously working and I was starting to feel better, but I was becoming really depressed, and I remember talking to a social worker over at IDC and talking about how my depression… And it was like, probably most people wouldn't understand it, but it was that realization that you are going to live, and yet I had done the number of things in terms of my career, in terms of finances, everything was for the short term, because I thought I was going to die. And suddenly, there was this chance that I might live. And it was around '95, the whole multiple drug treatments was getting publicized, and I realized that, hey, I might live, but I had made a few decisions which I wouldn't have done if I had known I was going to live. And I just – it made me depressed for a bit but I kind of got around to that. My partner was always super, super supportive. My parents had quite a hard time with it. I had come out to them earlier around '82 or '83 and they had taken it really badly, and I had hoped that when I got into a stable relationship that that would kind of make the whole thing more acceptable, except that it was at that time I had to tell them I had HIV and that I was likely going to die. And my sisters were supportive. Like I said, I had a great situation at work – good benefits, all drugs, everything covered, so we just kind of, things just kind of got better and better.

And even newer drugs came available around 2000, new classes of drugs, and Julio got me onto whatever was the latest, and there were less side effects. And you know, they were working really well – I never, my immune system never totally recovered. I probably have 500, 600 T cells today, but the – but I felt healthy and it's – I was lucky, I was very lucky. I had a friend – when was that? That was probably maybe about '86, '87, who had, who was getting quite ill, and he worked for one of the big lumber companies. And when he went to their human resources department and told them what his situation was, they told him, they said, "Well, just wait here and someone is going to go back to your desk and collect all your things and then walk you out of the building. We don't want to frighten the staff." And because there were all these stupid things about how you could catch HIV from just whatever, talking to somebody, right? He had a really tough time, he had a really tough time, and I wasn't that involved, because I knew him through two other friends and they were very, very – they were like caregivers for him, but I just knew him socially. And of course, at that time, I wasn't really – who knows how many I had even told that I was HIV positive, but you know, I didn't really ever talk to him about his being sick. It was – I heard things from my friends, but that was at the time when I was still in quite a bit of denial but… And he did die. And lots of people did.

I know they put up the – is it still there? The plaque with all the names of people, and I noticed that my friend who died, who had infected me, his name wasn't there. So, I wrote in and I said, really his name should be on that. I don't know if they put it on or not. I know they were asking people for other suggestions of names that had been missed, but yeah, it was… I think for people young people today, it is kind of hard for them to kind of grasp things. I have two young friends in their thirties, and you know one of them got infected. About three or four weeks later, he infected the other guy. And actually, his doctor, he had asked about having an HIV test, and his doctor told him he didn't think it was necessary, and then he went off and infected his friend. But of course, they get put on drugs immediately, and they are good drugs, so basically they just

carry on. I guess for them, the shock of getting infected takes you aback but there is never any kind of thought that you are going to die of HIV, so when you do explain things about how it was, I think – I guess because of what you know, and you know that it is treatable and people can survive, it doesn't really have the same impact.

But it was, yeah, it was a scary time – it was a scary time. And I had lots of support. I had a good job, we had money, I had one of the best HIV doctors – no, I had everything going for me, which is why I made it. Julio still likes to – I see him once a year. I always ask him, "Well, shouldn't I go on something new?" "No, we have found something that works very well and we are not going to change it. Probably never will." But he always likes to – he always has interns, student doctors who are with him, and he always likes to show them my chart, because he says this is a really ugly one, because they have the phenotypes where it shows all my resistances. But I was lucky there was a combination that I wasn't resistant to. The last time I saw him, I told him – I thanked him for saving my life. It was funny, I hadn't said it earlier, but somehow it didn't seem quite professional or whatever, but the – I think he appreciated it. There's not that many of us who kind of were really ill right from the beginning who made it, and I think he likes to see me because he knows that I am one of his success stories. Anyway, I think that is kind of my story.

BK: Thank you so much for sharing all of that.

TM: No problem. I thought you were going to ask a few questions.

BK: I will ask you a few now.

TM: It just kind of poured out of me. There hasn't been too many opportunities. I have told people little bits of it, but not the whole chronology, right? Probably even my partner doesn't even know some of those things. So, it is interesting that you kind of did want to know the whole thing.

BK: And you have covered a lot of the questions I would have asked if you hadn't just told me the whole story from start to finish, from my perspective. Did you want to say anything else about where you support was? Your partner was a huge part of that.

TM: And my job. The guy I worked for was no judgement and just do whatever you can. Unfortunately, he actually, after about five years, left and was replaced by a man who didn't have quite the same leadership skills, so the human resources department had been bugging him about – they wanted my situation to be written down, like how many hours of work I would do a week, you know, and all the sort of medical things all filled out and whatever. I went to Julio and he said, "This is crazy for me to sign this. I don't really know how things are going to progress for you. Just about everyone else in your situation is on disability." He said, "My recommendation is to go on disability." He had actually recommended it a number of times and my family doctor as well, but for me, again, it was a like denial thing, right? It was like, I didn't want to. Going back to the whole thing, I didn't volunteer for AIDS organizations. I went in the AIDS Walk to raise money, but I didn't – I just wanted my life to be normal, to be just like everybody else. And so even though I had, I could have left my work and gone on disability, I

stayed with it, I worked there for maybe fifteen years and then, like I say, the human resources then wanted all this medical stuff, and Julio said to me just apply for disability.

And so I did, and I know – because by this time I was in reasonably good shape, so I know human resources were pretty skeptical, and they sent me to several doctors. And you know the doctors all said, "I am going to argue with Julio Montaner? No." There was no problem getting on the disability, but it is a shame that – because that work, I was never in love with the work or I wouldn't have left it, but it was a good job, and I enjoyed the social interaction and just the benefit that one gets from going to work. So, it is a shame that I had to leave it, but then I was able to do follow-up with some of my hobbies, and then basically turned into the housewife, because my partner was a bit of a workaholic, and he made good money. So, my job was doing a lot of the support, plus I worked, I did a lot of stuff to try and improve my health, and I put energy into that. So, reasonably healthy today. I mean, I do have some problems. It could be related to the fact that I don't have a strong enough immune system, so I do have certain things that gay men who were HIV positive are more prone to get, but so far so good – everything seems to be treatable.

BK: I feel like that the decision to go on disability must have been a difficult one for a lot of people because so much of what we are taught is that so much of our worth is associated with our work. I know a lot of the people we have interviewed went on disability very early on when they were still healthy and that has become a challenge for them.

TM: I think if you could have worked, and I mean a lot of people did qualify and went on disability, and I think – I guess I felt it was a mistake when I was in that situation. I seriously believe that keeping my life a normal as possible just psychologically really helped me. I mean, it was lie. A lot of people didn't have the same support – their families had abandoned them, they were pariahs. Just the fact that they were gay, and now they were gay and sick, and people with religious parents, there was all this whole thing that this is God's way of punishing your bad behaviour. And yeah, so there were people who died alone, right? One of the guys who – he was a friend of a friend, and he would come in and do some cleaning for us, and his partner died, and he was infected as well, but he was healthier than the partner. His partner died, and the partner's family came to their apartment and basically took everything. And this guy was so devastated by the whole thing, he didn't make any – he didn't put up any resistance. But yeah, he was treated really, really badly, and he died not that much longer after that. There are – yeah, I mean, I think a lot of…

I guess another thing actually that made such a difference is that I had a background in science. I believed in the medical system, I totally trusted Julio. Going back to that question of "are you really trying?" I am sure he had people who were being told, because there was all kinds of stuff out in the media – these drugs are a plot by the CIA to kill gay people – I mean, you heard these stupid stories, or that HIV isn't actually the cause of AIDS. So, there were people who were very distrustful and didn't take advantage of all the help that they could have got because they didn't have faith in the medical system. And there was – there were a lot of stories of people who ended up in the hospital and weren't treated all that well, but I guess if you are all alone and you don't have friends and family coming to see you, and you are sitting in hospital dying, you can't really replace – like, nurses and doctors aren't going to give you what you need. And so, I think some

of the people who did complain, really were wanting something that really couldn't have been given to them by the medical staff and – but again, you know, my trust and my faith in them kept me strong, kept me going. I was always enthusiastic to really try whatever, so I am sure that helped.

BK: We didn't get a successful culmination of treatments unless people were trying them out. It was kind of a contribution to the community, whether you saw it as such…

TM: Oh yeah, I know it was. I am lucky because Vancouver was one of the first places that was experimenting with that, and that was because of Julio. And I didn't know when they – I think it was '96 when they decided that it was actually, there was enough evidence that it could be publicized – yeah, now combination therapy does work.

BK: We had the big conference here in '96.

TM: Yeah, that is where it was announced. Of course, I knew about it earlier because I was involved, but yeah. And that kind of changed, too, people's attitudes, maybe became less fearful, less fearsome, because it doesn't seem to be – I mean, I guess there is still stigma. There are certainly people out there – I mean, they didn't have things like dating apps when I was younger. I mean now you look on a dating app, there are people who would never consider having sex with someone who was HIV positive, even though if they were undetectable, they are probably safer than the person who says they are negative.

BK: Yes, yes.

TM: But that is an evolving thing too. It takes a long time for that knowledge to get out into the community and for people to actually learn, so that is why – I mean, even I think it was '83 when it was announced that the virus had been discovered. I mean that – it took years for the whole safe sex thing to really pick up speed and for people to really start trying to protect themselves. So, it's – you realize, I think that is what makes it all so hard in retrospect, when looking at it, is that you are analyzing it from the point of view of all the knowledge that you have today, and it is hard to understand or to feel what it would have felt like without that knowledge, and that changes your perspective.

BK: How was that safe sex information getting out there when it was getting out there in the mid or late '80s?

TM: I think AIDS Vancouver or PWA, they were very big on getting that out there. I think it was getting into the schools as well. There was the initial resistance, like say maybe '84, but probably by '86 it was, the information had been around long enough to actually absorb it and accept it and then start doing something about it. It took a while, because it is funny, I remember before I went to Mexico, *The Vancouver Sun* did this story about a gay guy who goes out and it was like, it was a fictional story, but they were talking about how AIDS happens. So, in the story, the guy goes out, he goes to the bar, he picks up a stranger, they have sex, and then three months later he is in the hospital dying. And it is like, stories like that were dangerous. So, there I was in Mexico, feeling healthy, totally unaware that I could have been infecting people, and

there are probably all kinds of people out there like that as well, who read stuff that was totally inaccurate and made bad decisions based on that information. I mean, I didn't even realize who had infected me until – it was quite a few years later, when you started reading about – what did they call that syndrome when people first get infected? And that is when I made the connection, oh okay, and I remember that being told that he had died of this liver disease or whatever. But it is funny, he was a really sweet guy. I don't have any animosity or anything like that, even though he did live in San Francisco, and they had this thing that they didn't talk about it. And so, in the back of my mind, it seemed possible that he knew something might be wrong and – but it was such a scary time that I don't blame him. He was just maybe looking for comfort, and didn't really – just felt very, very needy. Couldn't maybe see the risk that he was posing, right? I feel very sorry for him. He was a really, really attractive, intelligent guy and… But as well, of course I couldn't – I could never judge him, knowing that I may have infected people in Mexico, so…

BK: As you said, it took a long time for the information around how it was actually transmitted to get out there. For a long time, oral sex, was that dangerous? There was a lot of discussion around what is actually safe, what isn't safe.

TM: And – but it depends where you looked. I mean the information was there, but it may have been in more in-depth articles in maybe scientific magazines or but not maybe in the popular media. It took a while for all that information to get absorbed by society.

BK: What did the stigma look like in the '80s or early '90s? It sounds like you didn't disclose to a lot of people, your status, but did you experience seeing that happen to other people or yourself?

TM: The worst one was with my friend Greg, who was marched out of his workplace. I didn't – I think, like for instance, with that dentist thing, if I hadn't actually tested, I would have had no idea, so I think a lot of the discrimination was quiet, it wasn't right out in your face. I mean certainly, there were people, there were religious people, born again Christian types, who were very, very judgemental, and you heard about it. They were in the media, they were beating that drum, and there were a lot of people who were buying that story, and I think even gay people, because I mean we tend to be a bit, maybe insecure because we know we are different. And maybe having not fit in as kids, maybe we would take that on, that somehow it was our fault. So, I think, it is the whole thing about being gay as well. I mean a lot of the prejudice, probably half the prejudice that people feel is actually coming from themselves. Like, if they were more – if they felt better about themselves and were more open, they would find out that most people were very accepting, but it is kind of hard to get to that place if you have been – well, growing up in a society where there was a lot of bullying, there was so much homophobia, it was probably pretty difficult to get to that place where you felt really good about yourself. I was lucky, I just enjoyed sex so much that I just felt like how can something that feels so good be wrong, right? So, it did allow me to come out at that time, fairly young for a gay person to come out. And it is just being made easier and easier now – there is just so much more support.

BK: Still thinking about the stigma piece, did you see that within the gay community at all? People scared of HIV positive people within the community or shunning them or anything like that?

TM: I guess because I was in that very stable relationship, we were kind of in that home-building phase, buying a place, I wasn't really that involved in the gay community. I mean, I heard about it, right, but I didn't really have a lot of first-hand knowledge. I mean – and I guess even if I did hear about it, I would never have been all that judgemental about it, because I mean, I would just go back and think about how did I treat my friend, [name]. I was super afraid of him, so I guess if people were feeling like that, I sort of understood where they were coming from, whereas other people might be more political, might have had a greater sensitivity to that sort of thing. But like I say, like before I met my partner, what was going on in the gay community was super important to me, but once we settled down into whatever, the house mode, our, my – and I also had a lot of straight friends who I did confide in. I don't know what kind of time frame that was, but over time, probably everybody knew, and I was supported by them. I didn't – it is hard to know, like if somebody suddenly drops you, you don't – I mean, unless you were a super good friend, but if it was somebody you just knew casually and you don't see them around anymore, you don't think anything about it. No, people that were close to me were very accepting.

BK: Given the sheer amount of fear at that time, it is interesting that your partner was able to be so supportive being in that relationship at that juncture.

TM: Well, hey, that is probably one impact I forgot to tell you. It seems that when I came back from Mexico, September, at that time, I believe I infected him, and he did – he was the kind of guy who never ever gets sick, but he did at that time. It wasn't anything like what I had, but mildly, and so of course he was tested after I was tested, and we knew we were both positive, so again, we – that kind of drew us together and made us less inclined to be out in the gay community. But he was what they call a long term non-progressor, he only needed medication maybe about fifteen years ago, and so he went for about close to twenty years without medication, but he was getting his T cells monitored, and it wasn't showing anything, and he was getting his viral load tested as well once that test became available. But at one point his T cells dropped and his viral load went up and they said okay, now you start the medication. I mean nowadays, they probably would have started him immediately, but at that time, it really – there was, because the first medications had so many negative side effects, there was a lot of debate as to whether early treatment was actually better than waiting until you started to get seriously ill. I think even the Centre for Disease Control, they had their numbers, 200 T cells or something, and then you start. They had guidelines, whereas the thinking is quite different today.

BK: And at the policy level, the idea has changed with treatment and prevention, where intervention is the goal, early treatment.

TM: But as you say, really treatment to prevent the spread of the disease.

BK: I think we have covered most of what I would have asked. Do you remember seeing any kind of activism in those days?

TM: Oh yeah, it was very much out there. The PWA people were quite strident really and there was – there were a lot of stories about stigma and there was a real attempt by a lot of people to improve that situation. A lot of straight people or the media – there was that Dr. Peter series the

CBC did, trying to, I guess, humanize the whole situation, make it more real for people, and it definitely was around. Like I said, I didn't get that involved in it. I donated money but I didn't personally go down there, and yeah.

BK: Depending on how expansive you want to be about your definition of activism, the AIDS Walk is a milder form of activism.

TM: Yeah, it was showing support. And I also – I guess I felt some of the activism was kind of maybe extreme, in that while there was a segment of the population who were obviously bigots and whatever, but as a gay person, at that time anyway, you knew there was a chunk of the population that did not feel comfortable about you being gay. But still, the majority, if they knew you, were usually pretty supportive, but it's the exceptions that got all the publicity, and that got people all worked up. But I guess – and I mean my parents, that was a bit of a tough nut to crack. I mean, we got married in 2005 and they didn't attend, so – but I guess, I don't know, I seem to be able to kind of let that go and I just put it down to the kind of, the background, your religious beliefs, that sort of thing. And I mean, if I found that sort of thing all around me, yes I would probably be quite radicalized, but I believed that in general people were supportive and people did want to help, and that the world is a kind place.

BK: And your perspective might have been a bit different because a lot of your community it sounds like, wasn't just in the gay community – you had straight friends.

TM: Yeah, at the time, I remember telling my one friend that I had gone to high school with, and she – a straight friend – and I remember asking her, could you kind of look after my partner if I die? Because at that time, I wasn't certain, and she was super, just super nice about it. And I think, well she even, her – she had a baby shortly after and she gave him my, as his middle name, she gave him my name. But again, that was at a time when maybe we weren't sure whether I would be around. One funny story is kind of taking things and putting them into your advantage, when I was a kid, my father had a partner and they bought a ranch that was on a lake up in the Cariboo, Horsefly Lake, and they turned it into a resort. And so as kids we would have to go out there and work. The whole thing wasn't particularly successful, and my dad dropped the whole thing and we stopped going out to the lake, but for the years we were going out to the lake, we absolutely loved it. And I remember going up the lake, and maybe five or six miles up the lake, there was an island with a beautiful cabin on it, and I guess in my mind that was always the kind of thing, well, only a millionaire could have something like that.

And in 1992, I went back to my high school reunion and a couple of friends wanted to go out to the lake because we used to go camping and stuff out there. And we stopped in the town, and there was this bulletin board, and there was a picture of the cabin on the island, and the place was for sale and it was something like 75,000 or something. And I said to my friends, you know what? I am going to get that. I mean we didn't have the money at the time, but I said, I really want that. Anyway, took a picture, went home, had it up on my dresser, and I remember telling my partner, "You know what, I just want a place where I can put my ashes." But as I was saying that to him, I was thinking to myself there is no fucking way I am going to die. I just – I didn't mind saying it to him just to push him, but in my deepest – I guess in the deepest part of me, there was a part of me that said, no, you are not going to die. Of course, I had been told that I had

three to five years, I guess, and even though I did, things changed things about my life and my career and sort of financial things that I wouldn't have done but it was – I was almost going through the motions. Yeah, I am going to die, so I need to do this, but down in the deepest part of me, I was "I am not going to die."

BK: Where do you think that resolve came from or that sense, that resilience?

TM: I guess just a very strong desire to live. I don't know. I think maybe if I had more personal problems – you know, because as a kid, growing up, I was – I took a lot of bullying and the, it kind of, I guess in some ways makes you stronger, right? You know, I was bullied on one side, but then I was a really good student, so I had all kinds of positive things on the other side, so I never got – I never took the bullying, it didn't really lessen my self-esteem because I was getting so many strokes for other things. Whereas, I think if somebody else had taken more or that on it might have made them less resistant to the disease. I mean, there are connections between your physical and mental health, and depending on what your experience has been, if you had a lower self-esteem, maybe that made you more susceptible to getting sick faster. I am just lucky I was able to hold out until they came up with something better.

BK: And like we were talking about earlier, if you were one of those people who was quite isolated and didn't have a lot of support, you can see…

TM: Oh yeah, I really felt sorry for a couple people. I mean these are people, they weren't friends, but I knew them through other people or just casual acquaintances. Like this one guy, his mother was a born again Christian and she had nothing to do with the guy. And he was getting sick, he was alone in an apartment in the West End, and I just thought to myself, I am so lucky in comparison to that. I know that no matter how bad things get, there will be people there who support me.

BK: Just a couple final questions. How do you think HIV changed the gay community as a whole?

TM: Well, I think definitely while it kind of – it sort of galvanized the religious right who became quite extreme and made some really horrible comments. I think that actually pushed people who were more in the middle toward supporting gay people and maybe had more sympathy, because they understood better the hate that was out there for people, especially people who were really sick. And if you are not – like in my situation, when I saw people with, on television – for instance, I didn't even look at the Dr. Peter special, but if I saw pictures of people like skeletons in hospital ready to die, for me that was frightening, but probably for a lot of people, it actually made them feel very sorry for these people. So, I think actually it created sympathy for the gay community and at least with a big chunk of the population.

BK: And if we look further down the line, we have marriage equality now and maybe this is part of that story.

TM: I think it is, and it maybe – it kind of forced some people to come out of the closet because that is such a big part of acceptance. It is so much easier to accept gay people if one of your

friends is gay, and the more people that came out, the bigger the momentum got. I would say in general, I feel that the whole AIDS crisis created sympathy and support for the gay community.

BK: We also talked a little bit about your younger friends in their thirties, and they don't know anything at all about what this was like to live through. What lessons, or advice do you have to pass on to younger folks in this community, in the gay community, who weren't part of this, who didn't see this?

TM: I almost feel like I really can't – I can't really tell them what it was like, because as I explained to you, I don't think you can feel that if you haven't gone through it. But I mean, just general rules of life, of loving yourself and being supportive, being generous. I mean, I guess maybe those are – it is more things that I might have learned, because like I said, I don't know if telling this story really – I don't know whether they, I don't know if they could actually understand what that felt like, but maybe it is more the things I have learned about myself as I went through that whole thing, that maybe that is more useful information to pass on. But I mean, I was pretty discouraged when they became infected. I decided to introduce one of them to the other one but it's – I just know how life is, right, and stuff like that happens. People do crazy things when they are horny, it's – we don't all, we aren't all clinicians about sex.

BK: Nor should we be. That would take the fun out of it in many ways.

TM: Yeah, exactly, and I think today the whole internet is maybe making promiscuity more easier right? And for that reason, there is probably more reason to be careful because it isn't just HIV that is out there, there are other things as well. I don't remember exactly what your question was.

BK: I think you have answered it. It is true what HIV means has changed so much to younger folks growing up now where HIV is a chronic condition, and what prevention looks like with things like PrEP, so it is hard to know how to generate dialogue between those two different groups.

TM: And I certainly hope PrEP doesn't give people a false sense of security. I mean, I am sure it is very effective against HIV – still, you need to be a little bit careful. But it is good, it is good that we don't live in such a fearful time.

BK: Absolutely.

TM: Maybe we are going back more to when I first came out in the '70s and going down to San Francisco, and just seeing how wild and crazy things were. There is probably a happy medium – it is just having fun but just being smart about it.

BK: Any advice for folks who might be newly diagnosed as a long-term survivor?

TM: Well, just that hey, it's no big deal, and I have said that, like don't sweat it. Yes, it's a shock for a week or two, it's really – it is really no big deal. And I mean, especially living here in Vancouver, where we have such great treatment and there is so much support for anybody who

does get infected, that they have no reason to be fearful. It is a pain taking a pill every day, but it isn't that big a deal.

BK: I think that is it for my formal questions. We always want to leave some space at the end just for you to add anything that we didn't have a chance to touch on, or expand on.

TM: I think we went over an awful lot. There were probably a few things I didn't talk about but I think I pretty much covered it.

BK: Well then, I will just say thank you again and stop this for now.

TM: Okay.