"HIV in My Day" – Interview 74

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Interviewee: Loree Rose (LR); Interviewer: Ben Klassen (BK)

Loree Rose: How's my hair look?

Ben Klassen: Looks good, I think so. Hi Loree. Thanks so much for being here and sharing your story with us here today. I am really looking forward to hearing about your experiences during this time. Just to get started, could you tell me a little bit about your connection to Vancouver?

LR: To Vancouver? Sure. I was born in Vancouver, and I was born at Vancouver General hospital, and my family, we lived in Kitsilano at that time.

BK: And you have lived here ever since?

LR: I have been away. I went for a long trip in Europe and Africa and stuff with a husband of mine at that time. And it was when I was in my early twenties, so we went away for a long trip, and then I go off and on, I go away for a couple of months in the winter.

BK: Not a bad thing to do.

LR: Also, it's a habit, I think.

BK: But you're – that is pretty rare, for somebody to actually be from Vancouver.

LR: Yeah, I know, everybody says that, and they say what schools did you go to, because they want to make sure that the schools are still there, maybe their kid went there. And then I went there, after I went to Sir Winston Churchill high school, because the area I lived in when I was a teenager was an area where a lot of Jewish people lived, so that is the school we all went to, was Churchill – it was the area up by Oakridge.

BK: The city must have looked a fair bit different then.

LR: It was a fair bit different. It was not crowded, people drove nicely, and they let people go through the cross walk, instead of coming to one inch of them. Yeah, it was very different, there were not as many people as there are now.

BK: Do you recall when you first heard about HIV or AIDS, or whatever it was called at the time?

LR: It was the early '80s, and I was – I had heard of it sort of, and then at that time, I was a very different person than I am today and I had a was with a fella who was living in the Downtown Eastside and shooting up drugs at that time. And so you know, of course we were sexual, because he was my boyfriend, but he was probably a boyfriend of other people at the same time, the needle women, and so I read something in the paper to say that there was some people that

were shooting up drugs who had gotten sick and I took great note of that. And then I really – I mean, I was up nights after that, just thinking about what would happen to me, maybe I would be affected by this. And so, then I think the first person I met was Leslie Wagman, was working at AIDS Vancouver at the beginning. I told her about what – that I was feeling the way I was feeling, and she said well maybe you want to come to the office and talk to some people and see what they have to say. So, I did that, and then I had thought I should probably get to know more about AIDS, which I don't think it was called at that time, but I will call it that now. And so, I did as much research as I could, and I was really scared, and then I thought, well if I am going to learn more, I should probably go on the phones here and that could be a first step. So, the first thing I did with AIDS Vancouver, I would answer the phone, and sometimes I would know what to say, 'cause I had some information at that point, and some I didn't because I didn't know, and then I would just talk to someone or get them to call the people back, so… And I really felt like in the office there, it was like, after a couple weeks it was like a family, it just was. We were all there for the same reason, everyone was very scared and vulnerable, and so that is where I started – I started working at the office at AIDS Vancouver.

BK: What kind of people were there in the office at the time? Who were these people, just generally speaking? Were they mostly gay men, were there a lot of women?

LR: There were mostly gay men, except for Leslie and I, yeah.

BK: And how big was AIDS Vancouver back then?

LR: I am trying to think where the office was back then. It was quite small, may have been the one on Davie Street, I forget the address – do you know the building?

BK: Yes, I think so.

LR: Yeah, that is where we were at first, just a small office there. And can I mention some people that were there at the time. Bob Tivey was definitely there at that time, he was really very active, and Michael Welsh, Brian – hm, tall Brian, I can't remember his last name, he is still alive. And Leslie and I and – okay, that is all I remember right now, but there were a few people, a few people, maybe eight, ten, something like that.

BK: So, early, early years.

LR: Yeah, early, early years.

BK: Interesting to me that you went there initially looking for information and you found yourself all of a sudden very involved. Like, how did that happen?

LR: That is how I am, that is who I am. Yeah, yeah.

BK: And what kind of information was out there at the time? Do you remember?

LR: There was all sorts of different ideas about what was going on, and so we didn't really know. We thought we knew but then something else would come and it would change what we thought. It was very confusing for quite a while, and then I think what happened was that we started to trust that some of what we were hearing was true, and that made it a little bit easier. And just that would have been from the newspaper or from people who had talked to people in the States, it came from all sorts of different places, the information that we got. And there weren't any women calling at that time, it was all gay men.

BK: What was it like answering those calls?

LR: Well, it – for me, I – for me it was, I have a lot of empathy and compassion, I was just born like that. It came down in my family through my dad and my grandmother, so that mostly was what I was. I would just listen and be compassionate, and tell them the truth – "Well, we don't really know the facts about that right now but if you call back in a week, we will know more. Please do. What is your name?" Try to just be really personal, like it was, and that it was important, and it was important, I mean it was really important. And I would just say things like I know what you mean, calming, try to be really calming, because, these people all said they don't have anywhere else to go to, we can't talk to our friends. So, it was – I would say that basically the people that phoned were really lonely and really scared.

BK: Must have been pretty heavy answering those phone calls and listening to people in that kind of state.

LR: Um, I was just glad I had some language to help, yeah.

BK: What kind of information were you able to provide to folks like that?

LR: Well, we really didn't know that much, so I just told them what we knew, 'cause in the office, if anything new came in, we would all read it and then we would use that as well to talk to them about, but at the beginning, not much. Later on, there was more of a conversation with the person, because the person that would call, would know more and we knew more, so it just got more and more clear about what was going on. But we were walking in the fog, we were walking in the fog and doing our best to be compassionate and be there for all these people.

BK: Was there any – I guess safe sex wasn't really something that was known yet?

LR: No, no, that wasn't known.

BK: What was safe and what was not safe.

LR: Nobody knew.

BK: Wow. What are you supposed to say to someone when there are so many unknowns?

LR: Just, we don't know yet.

BK: How long were you on the phones?

LR: I was on the phone line until I stopped doing the phone line when I went down to San Francisco to the Institute for the Advanced Study of Human Sexuality, because I had heard that they had more information than we did, and so, and that was in San Francisco. And so, I actually went there with my aunt. I am Jewish and my aunt also of course was Jewish, but my aunt had broken her hip skiing up the mountain here, so she had a limp, so no Jewish man – I mean she is beautiful, but no Jewish man wanted her because she had a limp. So, she was taken in by two men who some people will know who had a shoe store on Granville Street, one of the – and they were a couple. I mean, it wasn't talked about, but they were a couple, and I know because I am the cousin of somebody in their family. So these, [name] and his partner took my aunty Betty under their wing and she got – she was friends with, as all the gay men that they were friends with, they were at all the parties, and they loved her to bits, and she was really happy. And so, that's why she came is because I was, I could talk to her about what I was doing and she got it, and so she wanted to come to the institute. And she is also like me, I didn't care, I cared about people's soul and who they were, and not what they were – she was exactly like that too. We went to San Francisco, and we stayed there for a couple of weeks, did some courses, and there was this guy [sic] from Minnesota, who was eight feet tall and was transgendered, and wore skirts and a different dress every day. And there were all different kinds of people, but we were all in the same boat because there wasn't a lot of information, and the institute did have more, way more than we had here. So, that is where I started to really learn more about AIDS was there, and it was very good. That helped me to be able to come here and just tell people what I had learned when I was there. It was fascinating, absolutely fascinating.

BK: So, you took that information and you took it back to AIDS Vancouver and shared it with that organization. Had you previously engaged with gay men a lot before getting involved there?

LR: No, but I never – it is like, for me everybody is just people. I don't have a thing about it at all because… I don't know why. It doesn't matter if they use a wheelchair, or problems, no friends, or whatever, they are just people to me. So, that is just how I brought myself up.

BK: So, there wasn't any awkwardness of stepping into a gay space?

LR: No, they also had programs of seniors having sex, there were different programs, so they had a multitude of programs. But this one that I went to was focusing on HIV – well, it wasn't even HIV, or it wasn't even AIDS, whatever we called it at that time.

BK: Do you remember when it was that you were down there?

LR: I think it must have been the late '70s, early '80s

BK: And at that point was there a little more information about condoms and prevention in that sense?

LR: Yes, they knew quite a lot more than we did, and they did quite a lot of show and tell about condoms and lectures on condoms and how you use a condom. And also there was no – even if

you used a condom, they still didn't know, but this was what they had come up with at that time was just to use a condom, which people didn't really like.

BK: No, I can imagine. Gay men were probably not used to using them at all, so a lot of the guys you were talking on the phone with were probably surprised.

LR: The other reason that I went down there was because I had lived with a man in the Downtown Eastside who was shooting up and I was having sex with him. That is why I was scared, that is actually what drove me the whole time I was working with AIDS Vancouver, it was that sense of it could have been – it could easily have been me. Yeah.

BK: So, when you came back to Vancouver, did you tie yourself back in with AIDS Vancouver?

LR: Yes, but by then I was so full of, ideas and I thought… Well, the next thing, because I was also working at the same time with kids who lived in – not kids but people between the ages of eighteen and thirty who lived in group homes, so they were mentally not able to do a lot of things. But what I did when I got back was I went, oh, I think I should probably go to – where are all the men? They are in prison, so I will go see the head of the prison system, so that is what I did. That was within the month that I got back here and I just – you know, I can't remember this guy's name – I went to his funeral 'cause he died. Went and told him what I had done, I had my papers and everything, and I told him all about what I had learned, and he said we could do a program. This is the age group that I will take to listen to you, and we will see how it goes. And I was like okay, and I was like wow, wow – yeah really, that was amazing, I still can't believe that. Anyway, he took – not the older people, it was younger men in their twenties to thirties who had, who were in prison, so most of them were white, and some of them were First Nations, but most of them were white. And so, I went, and I had to think about my outfit. Like, no seriously, we want them to take you serious, I am little, I am a woman, right? I am little and I am a woman. You think if you are big guy it would be better, so I chose a lime green dress which I thought was kind of military, so that might help and then, and it did, I think the dress really worked.

I went in there and just told them my story, and they were just like – they were in awe. They just were thinking she is standing up there just telling us she has had sex with a guy who is shooting up? I mean, you know I think they were very shocked, I had their attention, I got their attention which was what I wanted, just for them to listen, just to hear one thing that they would remember. And so, it was a very good session and they asked questions, they weren't afraid, it was really good. And so, the head of the prison system then went on to hire me to go to the maximum, minimum, medium security places, and so I did that as well. And it was – these guys, they were really fascinated, they hadn't really sort of heard, but not really heard about it, so they were getting information. And then I also went to that prison in Ontario – for the life of me, I can't remember the name of it but it is really, it's like, not medium security, not like – it's max, it's like maximum, it is a really bad prison system. And I kind of just decided that I don't think it was the proper place for me, I didn't feel like I would be able to work there and do what I had to do, because it was – it wasn't scary, I wasn't scared, but I just didn't think they would listen. I thought they would make fun, and I just didn't want to be in that position, because I never had been. But I did get in there. It was fascinating.

BK: I mean, there must have ben very little information available to folks in the prison system, hey?

LR: None, none.

BK: So, while there might have been some information out in the gay community, there they must have been so starved for information. What kinds of information were you able to provide within that setting?

LR: I didn't, I went in and like it's a very secure prison for the worst that people have done really bad things. It just – it was just a wrong vibe, it wasn't, it was about listening to the correctional officers, it was not about listening to something about HIV/AIDS, yeah.

BK: Elsewhere, outside of that one particular setting, in the prison system in general, what kinds of information were you able to talk about?

LR: Everything.

BK: Was there information at the time about cleaning your rigs? Was it mostly about sex?

LR: Mostly about sex, that was way later, that was quite a bit later. It was just about sex. And then I was asked to go into the group homes for older, like people in their fifteen to twenty who were living in group homes, going to them, and doing some of the group homes. So, that is where the fake penis that was in my trunk, because if they don't see it, they don't know what you are talking about. It was not for – when I was at the prison system, they knew the language, but people who had disabilities were, never ever, at that time, in that era, they were never ever talked to about sex at all.

BK: You kind of found yourself doing sex education, in all of these different contexts.

LR: Yes, in all these different contexts.

BK: And you were doing it on your own.

LR: On my own, completely on my own. No one else was doing it, none ever came with me – I mean I am not saying that was good, but that is just what kind of, I was. I went to university and I was a teacher to begin with, but not about these things. I was teaching kids to help them, the ones that couldn't read, they were late readers, I was trained to do that by a psychiatrist and his wife.

BK: Later on, I guess some of those initiatives became a little bit more institutionalized, or tied to organizations, like some of the education initiatives became formalized, so you wouldn't have been on your own. But I guess in these very early days, it was a bit more scattered, or something?

LR: Well, people don't talk about sex, people do not talk about sex. When I went to, I went to talk with Gordon Hoag, who at that time was the head of Willingdon where all the young adults were. He was – he and this other woman, and I don't remember her name, because we made all, had put together all sorts of programs for the kids that were in there, so it was fourteen or fifteen to nineteen. He was so in favour, he was so in favour, and so that was, we were able to do that in there as well with the younger adults. A lot of it depended on who was in charge and their issues around sexuality, because some of them were just like [sticks fingers in ears], they wouldn't even go there, but mostly because it was so weird, they would just say okay.

BK: This dismembered body part.

LR: In my trunk.

BK: Quite the image.

LR: I always prayed I wouldn't get in a car crash. I just imagined them all falling out of the trunk and they come out, you know, over the road. That never happened, thank goodness.

BK: So, while you were doing this work, was HIV showing up within your social circle at all? Were you seeing it showing up in your more immediate community in any way shape or form?

LR: No.

BK: That wasn't going on for you.

LR: One of the things though that we did that was really quite smart was *Cats* came to Vancouver, and at that point I was married to a man who owned a restaurant, and I asked if we could possibly have, do something with *Cats* in the restaurant, and he agreed. So, that was very good that we did that, because it was to make money for AIDS Vancouver, so we had a huge party there and it was really great. It was written up in the paper. I think I have one of the write ups in my bag, and you know it was really great. So, it wasn't really talked about, but we knew what we were doing, because here were all these people, the *Cats* cast was a lot of gay men, so they were worried, so they really loved that, yeah.

BK: So, there were some fundraising initiatives going on that you were involved in.

LR: Yeah, and then the same thing with the quilt, we brought the quilt to the Vancouver Art Gallery – I have that written up, too, somewhere here. We did a lot of proactive education, because people, one on one, were not really able to listen to it. Everybody was just so scared, so you have to think of other things to do, so some of it was done through the Vancouver Art Gallery.

BK: You were involved there as well, at the Vancouver Art gallery?

LR: No.

BK: Involved with bringing that here, the quilt?

LR: With AIDS Vancouver. We brought the quilt here.

BK: So, you stayed involved with them even as you were doing this education.

LR: Oh totally, absolutely, that is where my heart was. The other things were because I would think, oh my god, I just thought, we need to do this as well. And then I would think, well how with the skills, can I do that? Usually I could do it, but sometimes I couldn't. I would try to involve other people or have AIDS Vancouver be – they were the ones providing this, you know.

BK: What were you doing there as the '80s progressed at AIDS Vancouver?

LR: I wasn't on the phones anymore. Then people started to get sick and one – I am not going to name any names, I would prefer to do that. Is that okay?

BK: Of course.

LR: So, there were two men that I was mad about, just mad about. I just adored them, and we were very good friends. One of them was a man who I had met through a place that I was working where he was a big brother of one of the kids there, and he got AIDS and we all – he chose who he wanted on his care team, because at that time we were doing care teams. You know, the person would pick who they wanted on their care team, and then sometimes the person – people rarely said no, we were just, that is what we did. And so, he got sick and, well, I mean, I never even asked him, I just was on his care team, and then he had four or five other men who were on his care team. And he got really sick and he – we all took care of him, we all made sure he had food, and he owned a place, so we all made sure that we would stay overnight, and somebody would be there with him. And then he got really sick, and this was my first time that anyone had asked me if I would consider getting something for them so they could just die, and nobody had ever told me that they had done this, or I didn't know how to do this. Who do you ask? And so, every time I would come to see him, and he was in really a bad stage – really bad. He couldn't get up from the toilet, he felt that he – he felt very disabled at that point, and every time I came, he would say, "Did you bring me a pill or something?" And I never did. I just couldn't do it, and it wasn't because of anything except that I just couldn't – like, I guess I felt more comfortable with being with him till the end. But he didn't want to wait till the end, he wanted it now, and then soon after that he said goodbye to all of us. And I don't think his family knew he had AIDS. And his name was… his family took his ashes. I know because I got a picture from them. They took his ashes on a boat and took them out to sea, so I felt like that was a great thing because he had difficulty with his family, and they couldn't accept that he had AIDS. They weren't around till the end.

BK: Which is why having the care team would have been so essential, not having that support from your family.

LR: Oh yeah, yeah. Wow. I never – nobody else ever asked me to help them die. I may have if someone else would have asked, but nobody did so. My sense was that people wanted to die with

a sense of grace – not the way that people did die, in most cases. Yes, there were all of us around them, but there was very little grace. But I think when the main board in Stanley Park went up, that may have helped. I know it helped me. You know, Rick and I, we used to go out there - he didn't tell you? Every time World AIDS day rolled around, we would go out to the names board in the morning and we would stand there. We would go through all the names, and the names that we knew - that *we knew* – we would yell out and remember them. So, we would do that. So, I would do some and he would be the yeller, and he would do some and I would be the yeller. We had to do that, we wanted to keep them alive. We knew that if we didn't know that nobody would remember, and now nobody remembers. I used to go by there and people would be looking at all the names. Now, nobody even knows it is there.

BK: It is a very beautiful monument, but probably a lot of people don't know that it is there.

LR: They don't, no.

BK: And for people that weren't around back then, I don't think they realize what it was like.

LR: Yeah.

BK: There is a big generational gap, because HIV means something so different than it did back then. That is what this project is about, is trying to remember these people and remember what it was like.

LR: I remember being in Little Sister's. I mean Little Sister's was really central to the whole thing, the man who owned it…

BK: Yes.

LR: Um, who fell off – he fell off his ladder and died. Oh come on, Loree – I can see his face.

BK: Is that Jim?

LR: Jim, Jim Deva. Oh, I loved Jim Deva. So, that was kind of the centre at the beginning, was his place. A lot of people went in there and it was also for the – like we did a thing with Bob Tivey there. He called and, he was going to call us, and so because he knew he was going to die, Bob Tivey, so he called us, me and Jim, and I forget who else was there. There was about five or six people. We talked to him, to Bob Tivey there. He called and we talked to him, that was it. Jim had made arrangements to do that with him. Yeah, I remember singing "Amazing Grace" and, I don't really sing, I was really awful, but I did my best. 'Cause he drove so much of what happened, he was just an angel. As were many people.

BK: And that just kept happening, I guess, the losses.

LR: Yeah, they kept happening. And you know, to me, the hospital – see, now that I am crying, I am losing my mind, our hospital here…

BK: St. Paul's.

LR: St. Paul's, that hospital turned into a big angel. They did unbelievable things, they changed everything in that hospital to be able to accommodate people with AIDS. I mean, I lived there, I practically lived there, and many people practically lived there, and we were often. So, also one of the things that would happen after people died, or maybe just before they died, is we would get their clothes, and maybe I would see you and I would say, "That shirt looks familiar." And you would say, "Yeah, it is a DMC." You know – you know DMC?

BK: Yes, Rick mentioned that.

LR: Did he mention that? Yes, it is dead man's clothes. Whose is it? So, we kept people alive by wearing it. I still have Pei Lim's top, I still wear it, I still have it, because I loved it, and he knew I loved, and he said, "Take this, this is yours." He gave that to me. It is precious to me. I have a drawer at home, when I open it, and I see all their faces. Doing that work made me a much better person - a much better person. I am so grateful that I was with someone who was shooting up at that time because if I hadn't been with him, I would never have stepped foot – I wouldn't have stepped forward. I mean it was a life changer, because it made me understand what love was, what love is. It helped my wardrobe a little bit. Just the kindness, it just – anything I had in there that wasn't kind, left. And even – and you know, that stuff doesn't go away. I wouldn't be the person that I am today. Like yesterday, I was sitting at this table outside and these people came up, and they said we were going to sit at that table. I said, "Are you from out of town?" And they said, yes, and I said then take the table, and I just walked to the inside. It just seemed normal to me, and they paid for my lunch, and that happens to me all the time. It is from what I experienced – it is not what I learned, I experience that – from all my experience with HIV/AIDS, with that time, that era, how people were, how we treated each other, the kindness that was offered – you don't get that anymore. It was probably the most harsh and most loving atmosphere that, because really, we had no power – all we could do is really love, we could love. And you walk in the hospital and the bed is empty, you don't even have to ask.

BK: How did you deal with the burden of all that loss? I mean how did you avoid burning out?

LR: I felt, I just – I would never burn out form that, there was so much love. There was so much love and kindness and respect, and you don't tell anybody what to do, we all knew what to do. If we were doing that, we all knew what to do. There was no book to say, okay, now you do this and now you do that. We just knew what to do, otherwise the people that didn't, they didn't understand that, they weren't there, they couldn't be.

BK: Just kind of grew out of the place of love and care for one another.

LR: And respect and trust.

BK: Sounds like – did you get involved with PWA at some point as well?

LR: Oh yeah, I did.

BK: When did you start getting involved there?

LR: I honestly can't remember that part.

BK: I am hearing names and thinking that person was at PWA.

LR: Yeah, Kevin. Yeah, honestly, I don't remember that, because by then my heart was still there but it was – things were, enough things, we knew more what we were doing, so I think people were more confident and there weren't as many surprises. So, it was more stuff like have groups at PWA, all that kind of organizing stuff, it wasn't so much feelings, so many feelings, so much learning, such gratitude. The ground was not shaking anymore.

BK: But of course, people would have still been dying, I imagine.

LR: Yeah

BK: But that had just become maybe… normal by then?

LR: More normal, yeah.

BK: You must have seen AIDS Vancouver change a lot over that period, going from this little group of eight people to something more like an organization, I guess.

LR: Yeah, it wasn't so… It is interesting, this keeps happening, my husband died a year ago, and every time I hear a siren, I think it is him, he is in there. Yeah, I guess because we are by the hospital – I am sorry.

BK: I was just commenting on how the organization would have changed while you were there.

LR: Yeah, because we got more confident. We knew more, everybody knew each other better. There was no model to come onto the next stage, but basically, we trusted that we were doing the right thing. I don't remember that part so much.

BK: Do you recall what other types of programs AIDS Vancouver was doing back then, or what other initiatives they had?

LR: Not really. Do you? Were there some?

BK: I imagine. The buddy program was going on at some point and that would have started sometime in the mid to late '80s. There were safe sex workshops.

LR: Oh yes, I was the condom lady. That is what I learned in San Francisco, we learned how to use condoms. And I went, oh my gosh, I would go to the bars and I would do my little thing, where I would show people, and they were drinking and they didn't want to hear about the damn condoms. I went to the bars on Davie Street, and I went in there and I would talk to the chief of the bar before. and I would say, I could come in and do some condom information in here and

they would look, they would not know what to say. They would say, okay, you could try – yeah, okay, you could try. So, I would go, and I would do my little thing, and nobody listened, nobody wanted to hear about it when they were in the bar, so I stopped doing that. So, there was not much, not much after.

BK: I guess people are, maybe don't want to think about HIV when they are socializing in a bar.

LR: Yeah, exactly, they would yell out stuff. But I did do some education at the Justice Institute around HIV and AIDS for correctional officers. I made up some brochures that I brought here, but I did, I continued to do some education around – because if you are going into the prison system, then you have to do something with the correctional officers, because you just need to. Nobody else was going to do that, so I did that, which was very interesting, too.

BK: It sounds like a really interesting role.

LR: It was really interesting. And still, at that time, there still wasn't much going on in prison outreach and education. So, pretty important for correctional officers to know about that.

BK: I had something else in mind, and feel free to jump in here because I am just trying to prompt you to tell more of your story. Do you have any recollections of how people outside the gay community were reacting to HIV, like mainstream responses, what those looked like at the time? Any recollections around that?

LR: Yes, I did other things. I need my papers, I think. Here is the *Cats* benefit, it was in the *Vancouver Sun*. There is Leslie Wagman, here is everybody, oh…

BK: Is that out of *Angles*?

LR: Yeah.

BK: What year was this? This is wonderful.

LR: Isn't it? These are all the people, we worked together, that is all of them. And here is an AIDS Vancouver newsletter where I won the Canadian volunteer award, and it tells all what I did. See, telephone volunteer, written and designed AIDS information brochures, countless hours fundraising, tireless volunteer. I am pretty tired now.

BK: So, you were helping to design information. That must have been interesting.

LR: Woman of distinction award, I was nominated for? Can we talk, text, yes, I was doing this with [name] and [name] – I forgot they were involved. I had to input into all of this, from being at the institute, that I why…

BK: I haven't seen some of these.

LR: Oh my god, here we go. Here is the "Sexuality and Disability" brochure.

BK: Can I take a couple pictures of some of these later?

LR: AIDS education and awareness, oh yeah here, the national sex forum – in 1985, that is when I went to the sex institute.

BK: That makes sense.

LR: My successful training in crisis intervention at the Justice Institute, membership in the criminal – I hung out with these guys who worked in the prison systems, so I am a certified member of the Canadian Criminal Justice Association.

BK: Well, that makes sense.

LR: Here is one. Oh, Elaine, the minister of National Health and Welfare. I got the Canada Volunteer Award of Merit, they just kept coming in. I didn't think it was anything big, I just thought I did the next right thing, really.

BK: It sounds like you were doing an awful lot.

LR: I was in love, I couldn't stop, there was no reason to stop. It really touched me because it could have been me, that is what it was.

BK: What was it like being a woman?

LR: Fabulous, because people were really surprised. That is why they listened because they were really surprise. And look at me, I mean, I am just little.

BK: And it wasn't challenging working in HIV work?

LR: You know what, the most challenging thing was I was going to do this thing at the West End Community Centre on a panel and I got this – I wore a very nice outfit because there were going to be some professional people there that I knew, but I thought I will dress nicely, I won't wear jeans. And so, I get to the door. Now, remember I have all sorts of sex object in the trunk of my car, and I brought the dildo with me because they told me I was going to do condom education. And I get to the door and there is this really butch woman and she is tough, tall, and she is not wearing a dress. So, she says – I say to her, "I am coming here to the conference for today," and she said, "You can't come in here, you aren't allowed here. It is men that are coming in here." So, I had the dildo in my pocket, I pulled out the dildo and she just about fainted – she did, she just about fainted. She said just go away, just go inside. This was at the West End Community Centre. I cracked up, I thought that was just hysterical.

BK: That is something.

LR: Oh, the Minister of National Health and Welfare in Ottawa. "I am pleased to inform you that you have been chosen to receive the Canadian Volunteer Award." Oh, this is my thank you

letter to AIDS Vancouver. Here are some of the – I have two people who I have their, what was in the paper, my two people that I loved best. One of their names was [name], and one of them was Pei Lim, and there they are, there they are. Oh, that is a speech, oh my god, I never saw this in a long time. Oh, here is my speech. Oh, shall I read this to you?

BK: Do you want to get it on the camera?

LR: We can cut it out if…

BK: Sure.

LR: Okay, so I think it is funny.

BK: Sure.

LR: Okay. "This is the closest I will ever come to fulfilling my Florence Nightingale fantasy. She was a heroin to me when I was growing up because of her dedication and caring, like my grandma Jean Rose – some of you may have known her. When I get up in front of a group of people, my instincts tell me to pull out a condom and give people the information they need to stay healthy. It is a constant battle. Don't worry, I won't. I am honoured and humbled to be nominated by an organization whose foundation comes from caring, AIDS Vancouver. People say, 'Nice of you to help. Isn't it depressing?' Working in the AIDS community has changed my life, has made me understand what is really important – sincerity, honesty, love, caring, dignity, and respect for one's self and others. I have to tell you that when I was called by AIDS Vancouver to ask if I would agree to be nominated, I forgot everything that was important. I went through the list of all the things that I didn't have that certainly a woman of distinction would have – a new car, a husband, children, my own home, etc. I called a friend to check if I was a person of that calibre.

AIDS Vancouver and the People With AIDS Coalition continue to have funding problems. AIDS is not a popular, and yet it is an issue that will touch us all, if it hasn't already. I encourage you to send donations to these organizations. They are educating and supporting people both within and without the AIDS community. You can tell I work on the fundraising committee at AIDS Vancouver – that is okay. The most exciting initiative this year is a combined effort between the Vancouver Art Gallery and twelve community organizations. The gallery has donated the first floor in July to show the NAMES project, the AIDS quilt. I encourage you to see it. It has depth and impact. This project needs money, and if anyone would like to act as a corporate sponsor, please call. Community support is always appreciated. In closing, I want to acknowledge a young and courageous man who died this week, Kevin Brown. I thank my family for their support. I also want to say that I share this award with two people who are here tonight, two people who are dedicated and whose hearts lie in AIDS work: Shawn Stephenson and Elaine Smith. Working with AIDS Vancouver is a gift that I treasure." I was a pretty good writer, I remember that.

BK: You are, wow.

LR: It was just in my bones, it was in my bones, it was just inside me. And I wish I could say that some of it has gone away, but it never will – it never will.

BK: Just those feelings of loss?

LR: Yeah. Loss, and it is also the beauty of how it all went, just the beauty of people just giving so much, you know, of themselves to help. How people just put their hearts into it, and were kinder, and I think our world changed. Our world changed.

BK: Was this something that brought the community together in some ways or different communities together somehow?

LR: I think so. I think that a lot of the homophobia that was around at the time started to fall away, because you know how it is now. That was a big part of it, I really believe that, because every single person that had anything to do with AIDS did it from their heart, and that, it is a model. People saw things, people saw things in people that they liked how they behaved, how respectful, how kind. I think a lot of people wanted to be like that too, so they joined or they did something to help. Or maybe they just stopped thinking about people who are gay or lesbian, or other – transgender – well, we weren't there yet, but we are now.

BK: It humanized a lot of people.

LR: Yes, hopefully one day it will be everybody.

BK: Speaking of people in the general public coming around to this issue and to gay people, did you see more people who weren't gay men getting involved with AIDS Vancouver and PWA?

LR: Well, Hedy Fry, she came and got in there, she jumped right in – she knew. That is because she is a brown person. If only we could do this with the Indigenous people in our midst, wouldn't that be lovely.

BK: What was it like when the quilt came here? What was that experience like?

LR: A lot of people said that when the quilt came, it was like being surrounded by all the people who had died. It was a really respectful way of helping people to understand that there was a lot of people who had died, because people who hadn't come in contact with anything, they didn't really feel that, even though they might read about it in the paper. So, I think it helped people to see that this is real. It is at the Art Gallery, it must be real.

BK: Do you remember how the government was responding at all?

LR: No, I – no, I don't remember.

BK: I think you were really involved in people's lives and maybe not paying attention to what was going on outside of that, which makes complete sense to me. Feel free to jump in here with

any other stories or thoughts that you want to share. Did you see AIDS activism happening during this period in Vancouver that you recall?

LR: No, people didn't – well, except for what we did at Las Tapas restaurant, we had the *Cats* come, because *Cats* was a big deal then. People from the outside came. I don't think they were involved much in reading about it anymore or, you know, all those comments about people who are homophobic. I think it wasn't so much after a while. It lessened, it helped the process of where we are now, you know – it may have started then. It may have started then.

BK: How did HIV change the communities that you were a part of? Looking on a larger scale, what did it do to those communities?

LR: I am not sure about what it did to communities.

BK: Or to your community?

LR: I think that people had – I think that friendship became more important, being intimate with people, and I don't mean sexually. I mean just people telling people who they were, just the conversations were deeper than usual. I don't know, I don't really know.

BK: From what you have said, it seemed to draw a lot of love and care out of people that was probably already there, but that idea of at least parts of the community coming together, caring for each other more intimately or something. I don't feel like we need to go through these questions one by one, but I am sure there are lots of other aspects of your story that we haven't touched on. Are there any things that you thought that I would ask about that we haven't talked about yet, or things that we have touched on that you want to expand upon before we stop the recoding for a little bit?

LR: I don't think so.

BK: Okay, well if you think of anything else, we can always turn the recording back on, but for now, maybe I will stop this.

LR: Okay.