

**“HIV in My Day” – Interview 41**

**August 7, 2018**

**Interviewee: Anonymous (P); Interviewer: Robert Ablenas (RA)**

**Robert Ablenas:** Thank you for consenting to interview for this oral history project regarding AIDS back in the day in Vancouver. Just to break the ice, can you tell me a little about yourself, for example, what’s your connection to Vancouver?

**Participant:** I’m a fourth-generation Canadian-born Chinese. My family’s lived here for four generations. I was born and raised here in Vancouver.

**RA:** Okay, what would be a very concise way of describing yourself in terms of maybe how you spanned out. For example, do you identify as gay?

**P:** Oh, definitely gay.

**RA:** Okay. It’s always good to ask, to make sure. If that’s the case, then what has been your connection to the gay community, say, before the AIDS crisis started?

**P:** Not much.

**RA:** Not much?

**P:** I was never very involved with the gay community—well no, let’s put it—back in the eighties, I first volunteered for Friends for Life, when Lorne Mayencourt did it out of his Beach Avenue apartment. And I did some volunteer work for him back in the eighties when he first started, that was my only sort of connection to the community, shall we say.

**RA:** Any other connection to the community? Whether it’s patronizing businesses or—

**P:** Oh yeah.

**RA:** --part of any groups?

**P:** I was not really part of any groups per se, a couple back in the eighties they used—I used to attend a couple meetings of the gay business association.

**RA:** Okay.

**P:** They had like, sort of like meetup groups at the Fountainhead where people would pitch their business.

**RA:** Okay. When did you actually first hear about AIDS?

**P:** Oh, back in high school.

**RA:** Back in high school?

**P:** Yeah. In the eighties.

**RA:** What were you hearing about it at the time? How were you hearing about it?

**P:** I don't remember a lot of it. It was—I—what I do remember? People did talk about it on the news a lot. I'm sure it was brought up in school, it was very like, mentioned very sort of like in passing. Not a lot of education was dealt with specifically on that.

**RA:** When you'd hear about on the news, was this television or radio—

**P:** Oh yeah, regular news and whatever. Personally, I didn't know anyone who died of AIDS or had AIDS or anything like that back in the day.

**RA:** But when did you first meet somebody who either had AIDS or was experiencing it?

**P:** I heard about it through Friends for Life, back when I started volunteering because they help people who are in their final state, terminal stages of their illness. So, that's when I sort of first got exposed to people who were sick.

**RA:** So, some of that was just meeting people in person, right? At Friends for Life, at the Beach Avenue, right where it started? Any other places possibly?

**P:** Not really.

**RA:** Okay, so really there's the news, there's Friends for Life...

**P:** And just stuff I read in the gay paper.

**RA:** Okay, which paper is that?

**P:** The one that just got – just got finished, I forgot the name of it, you know the main—*Xtra!* *Xtra. Xtra West*, that one.

**RA:** Okay.

**P:** That's where I got most of my news from.

**RA:** When you were hearing things about AIDS, you weren't hearing it from a lot of sources, say from Friends for Life?

**P:** Just in general I'm—I just read—hmm, I just heard about it through—I talked to friends of course, I had friends. Well see, I moved to Toronto in the early nineties, I was only here in

Vancouver from '80, 1980 to '88, and then in '88 I moved to Toronto and lived there for like ten years.

**RA:** Okay.

**P:** But back here, I was very minimal.

**RA:** Okay. The sort of things that you heard, do you remember what kind of things you were finding out—

**P:** Oh, people were going to die and stuff like that. If you have AIDS, you had like three years to live and people were on—well, I heard sort of—and then there was... And then I went to Toronto and I learned more about it. And then when I came back here, then I heard the other side, the contrarians, which a lot of people at that time thought HIV did not cause AIDS and it was the co-factors, and that as long as you didn't need to be on what was AZT at the time—AZT was the one that killed you—and as long as you kept your immune system in check and you ate lots of vitamins and health foods, you should be fine without taking medication. And that the test itself was wrong. So, I heard a lot of that, and I even went to a couple meetings with people, the HIV does not equal AIDS group.

**RA:** Okay what kind of meetings—who's organizing the meetings?

**P:** I don't remember. It was some woman from LA who got tested three times—the first time she got tested was positive, then she got tested again like six or seven months later and it came out negative, and then she got tested another six or seven months later and it came out undeterminate [sic]. And so, she started writing these articles and online stuff, and she started going from city to city. And she came to Vancouver and she gave a lecture, over at some—the church down on Davie Street that's torn down condos there—and she had a website up and a lot of people were at that meeting. I remember just like in the nineties, HIV does not cause AIDS, they thought AIDS was like a hoax, it was all about the government wanted—the pharmaceuticals wanted money.

**RA:** How did you feel at the time when you were hearing these things?

**P:** I actually agreed with it, I thought it was a big conspiracy. And I—and I never went—I never got tested, for the longest time, until the nineties, and—I guess it's time to talk about how I found out I was HIV—'cause I didn't believe in... I was in—I didn't believe in getting tested 'cause I thought the tests were incorrect. And I didn't want to be on the—even if I thought I was positive—I didn't want to be on any meds, 'cause the meds would kill you. And so, I just pretended I was negative, and that's what—even in Toronto, there was a bunch of people who thought like that.

**RA:** When you got tested—why did you get tested?

**P:** Okay, it was a long story. I didn't—I got tested against my will actually, and it wasn't here. What happened was I had an offer, my parents had this friend of a friend of a friend, this woman who lived in China, and she wanted to immigrate to Vancouver. And they were going to pay me

\$10,000 to marry this woman, like a fake marriage, just so she could pretend to be my husband and immigrate here. But when I went to China to marry her, they forced me to get—before they could issue a marriage license, I had to take a blood test for HIV. Yeah, they have to, back in China you have to take an HIV test before they'll issue a marriage certificate, or one of the requirements, so that's how I found out I was positive. And they said, "Oh, you only have two years to live, you're going to die. You shouldn't even get married." And I said, "No, no, no, I come from Canada. We have—our medical technology's more advanced than you guys, so we'll figure this out." And then my wife was standing—they asked her, "Do you still want to marry this guy. He's going to die in two years." And she said, "Yes." And so, they issued me the marriage certificate anyway, and that's how I found out. And so, I got tested. They didn't give me any support at all, they said, "Oh well, you have AIDS. You're gonna die. Have a—enjoy the rest of your two years."

**RA:** Please confirm—you were tested in Canada or in China?

**P:** No, in China.

**RA:** In China.

**P:** Yeah, 'cause I was supposed to marry this woman. Otherwise I would never have gotten tested.

**RA:** Well, after you were tested, and after you're back in British Columbia, then—

**P:** I just pretended I was negative. I just went on about my life as if I were still negative.

**RA:** Did it make a difference when you were accessing health care?

**P:** I didn't need to access health care. I was negative as far as everyone else was concerned.

**RA:** Yeah, but you still have to go to the family doctor—

**P:** No, I didn't go to the family doctor. I just went to walk-in clinic whenever I needed to. I didn't have a family doctor. No one in Canada knew I had HIV for the longest time, because I was tested in China, so no one—and I didn't get tested here, so why would anyone know?

**RA:** Did that change at any point?

**P:** Yes, until I got sick three years ago with pneumonia and I nearly died, and they tested me at St. Paul's and said, oh, I have HIV. So, I knew that—I knew that like ten years ago. But I wasn't on any meds until three years ago, and they put me on whatever, and then it was fine.

**RA:** Okay, when you were first hearing about AIDS, you were in high school, a young kid, you would possibly have observed or heard and seen various responses from maybe the mainstream such as government or health care. Just wondering, is there any of that that you can tell us about? It's been a while.

**P:** Just what I read in the newspaper, was very—I don't think we got very much support from anybody. And it was sort of like, back then, it was a death sentence. If you got AIDS, you're gonna die. So, that's what I kept hearing.

**RA:** When you're here in British Columbia, do you feel that you're a part of the gay community, or do you feel you belong to any communities?

**P:** Yes and no, a part of—but I'm not like deeply entrenched into gay community. I mean I access—not like I go to bars every week or—I have a friends who, a couple friends who are gay I have a very small, close-knit group of gay—I don't hang out with a lot of gay people, most of my friends are straight. You know, so I do consider myself part of the gay community, even though I don't—I'm not with a lot of gay people all the time. You know what I mean?

**RA:** So, even if you're not with a lot of—I'm thinking back to high school for example—even if you weren't with a lot of gay people back then right, did you still have a sense of what the community looked like, or whether it's first-hand or second-hand, or did you have some sort of imagined picture of the community? I'm just wondering did you have any sense of—

**P:** Well, I think that over the years the gay community has changed a lot. If you're talking in general, I found that people were much more friendly back in the eighties than on here right now. It was a lot easier to meet people and network. Now everyone's on Grindr, whatever, all these apps—we didn't have internet back then. Well, it's a very different way of getting news, and we relied a lot on the paper, instead of the internet. That what you're getting at, stuff like that, or you—

**RA:** That's a part of it. Well, actually meeting people or connecting with people, was any of it, was it just to be with other gay men or gay youth or...?

**P:** I didn't really get involved with any gay groups until I moved to Toronto. The first group I joined was the gay Asians of Toronto. So, I was involved in—in the Toronto side.

**RA:** Did any of that follow here when you came back. Did you get into anything?

**P:** No. Once I came back, I was busy working. I had a—was in a relationship. So, it was—for many years, I had no contact with the gay community whatsoever, because we were very in our own little bubble and we didn't want to associate with other gay people. We were very happy being with each other.

**RA:** And to be clear, when you're talking about in a relationship, this is not the wife—

**P:** No, this is my boyfriend.

**RA:** This is your boyfriend. Okay.

**P:** We actually didn't—it ended up, I tried to sponsor, but the government, the Canadian government wouldn't allow her to come so that all went to pieces, because I had tax problems and I wasn't making enough money to support her and anyway, she never got her immigration. I had to give her back her \$10,000.

**RA:** What years are you talking about—say your relationship with your boyfriend?

**P:** Oh, it was after I came back from Toronto. Like ninety-five to two-thousand-and-five, about ten years. And then he died of AIDS. Well, he wasn't tested either. I guess he died of HIV complications. He was also one of those who didn't believe in getting tested. And he was on meds, and you know, we just pretended we were negative.

**RA:** Just wondering when you were in a relationship if you're seeing things differently around you, with respect to AIDS and HIV—I mean this is later on too, right. I'm just wondering, there are differences before and once you're in a relationship, if that affected you in any way with respect to...

**P:** No, it didn't, no.

**RA:** ...watching, putting your ear to the tracks, just observing what's going on, trying to make sense of it all.

**P:** We knew that like ten years later there were advances in the medications, but we didn't feel like we needed to be tested, because we still thought the tests were wrong, that HIV does not equal AIDS. That just because you were HIV didn't mean anything, as long as you kept your immune system in check, you were fine. That's what we thought.

**RA:** With your partner, when we're talking about being a caregiver, it's providing somebody support, whether it's practical or emotional, helping someone get groceries or move around if they're sick, not feeling well, so I'm just wondering—

**P:** It was none of that, he just died very suddenly.

**RA:** Just very suddenly?

**P:** Yeah, he had a—a what do you call it—he died of pneumonia and it was very sudden. He just got sick and he died like three days later. So, there was not like—cared for him for like a week or a couple days or you know. We just thought he was sick, you know.

**RA:** Well, let's go back in time to Friends for Life [inaudible], you were a volunteer there, right? What was the nature of your volunteer work there?

**P:** Oh, I just helped out, did some administrative work. Data entry and stuff like that for them.

**RA:** Did you ever have to interact with some of the people going there for help?

**P:** Not really.

**RA:** Not really?

**P:** No, I just did my own thing. I worked at another volunteer's place. I wasn't there dealing with the public, it was very administrative, back-end.

**RA:** But you were still there playing a part of this, it was just not on-site?

**P:** Yeah.

**RA:** How did you even get involved in that in the first place?

**P:** Uh, I had a—at the time I was promoting some vita—some health food. And I had a friend of a friend who was involved and I wanted to reach more people to sell them this health food. And so, I volunteered to get to know more people, so I could make some money.

**RA:** And it could still do good if it was sort of like a health food?

**P:** Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. It was sort of like a family business, like family had invested money in this company and they had this sort of fermented soybean product, which helps your immune system, and it could help improve people with HIV and stuff like that, so...

**RA:** Right. Back then, there wasn't a lot of information available to you. Now a certain of number of years later, are there any changes in terms of how you actually access information that could be helpful regarding—

**P:** Right now, it's everything's online. Back—even back then when the internet was still in its early stages, I still got a lot of information online.

**RA:** Was that in the eighties?

**P:** Oh, no—nineties, nineties. Late nineties I started getting online.

**RA:** There wasn't anything quite like—was there anything quite like that before you went to Toronto?

**P:** No, no, of course. No, no, definitely not. There was no internet—I didn't have internet until I came back from Toronto in Vancouver. So, during all of my years in Toronto, I had no internet.

**RA:** In Toronto—I may have asked this already, but just in case—when you were in Toronto, health organizations, any stand out? Or was that meaningful?

**P:** ACT UP was big in Toronto. They were the main, and they marched in the parade, but I never really, you know, got involved in any health organization.

**RA:** Well, over here, I never saw what ACT UP was doing in Toronto—do you have a sense of what they were doing?

**P:** They were just protesting a lot?

**RA:** Do you know what they were protesting?

**P:** Government funding.

**RA:** Okay.

**P:** That's all I remember.

**RA:** Do you have a sense of if they made a difference, or if the government responded or what happened?

**P:** I think over long-term it did. But the more people died, the more the government paid attention, I think that's what happened. I was very not very politically aware in those days.

**RA:** What actually brought you back from Toronto to Vancouver?

**P:** Oh um... Just work, my parents missed me, and they had [inaudible], they were investing the business and they wanted me to come back and help them, help them with the business, so that's why I came back.

**RA:** Okay. There are some questions regarding what you've seen with the community, but just based with the conversation so far, you haven't necessarily seen a lot of what the community has done. Say, one of the questions is about what forms of support you've seen the community doing for its own people during the crisis.

**P:** Well, I remember in Toronto they had the equivalent of the Dr. Peter's Centre, it's called Casey House, and that was really big back in the day. It was like a hospice for people who were in their terminal stages, so that much, I knew.

**RA:** Well, jumping around a bit so—since you mentioned Dr. Peter's Centre—jumping back to information and where you went to find out things, you mentioned I think radio and television. Did you see Dr. Peter back then when he was on the CBC?

**P:** I'm sure I did, interviews with people, because they were just getting started, they had just built it or something. And so, yeah, I definitely heard about it.

**RA:** What do you think the community may have learned from the epidemic?

**P:** A lot of things, actually. I think in general, compassion, I guess. They learned how to care for their own, more, and I think they learned how to fundraise, or learned smarter ways of raising or



getting money for these organizations, because they all need money. And just general awareness of the epidemic.

**RA:** What about healthcare people—doctors, nurses, people who work in hospitals?

**P:** What about them?

**RA:** What do you suppose that they've picked up or learned from all of this?

**P:** A lot, actually. I'm pretty sure I've heard horror stories back then, or read about back then, when the nurses wouldn't go near you if you had HIV, and the doctors wouldn't know what to do with you, and stuff. And over the years they've had lots of training and they've had lots of education. And now they—by the time I got sick in the hospital three years ago it was—I'm sure it was—would've been different had I gone to hospitals in the eighties. I'm sure if I had got tested in the eighties—well, which I did, but it was just not here. If I got tested here, they would've put me on AZT or whatever you know. But it was a different—it was a lot of fear back then, I think. It was a lot of unknowing, because people didn't know what this virus was or anything, and now people seem very educated about things like that.

**RA:** If I'm remembering you correctly, you're saying – okay, so right now you don't have a family doctor—

**P:** I do have a family doctor.

**RA:** You do have one now?

**P:** Yeah.

**RA:** Does the doctor know you're...

**P:** Oh, of course.

**RA:** Okay, so what's your experience now with that doctor?

**P:** Well, that doctor's at St. Paul's and so she deals with...

**RA:** Okay, so do you feel comfortable, do you feel worried?

**P:** Oh, I feel very comfortable, I have nothing to worry about. I tru—I have quiet faith in them and I trust them.

**RA:** Would that have been what you would've expected back when you were in China and were tested, and even though you knew you were coming back here, would you have expected that kind of experience with a doctor?

**P:** No, I would not have, that's why I avoided doctors. And I did not get tested here, I only got tested here because I was—I had pneumonia, and that's when—and then they tested me—did a HIV test here at St. Paul's, and that's how they found out I was HIV positive. If I didn't have pneumonia, I would not have gotten tested here. And I would still continue as if I were negative.

**RA:** You had certain feelings about health care then, and in hindsight, do you feel that you were probably bang on in terms of how you would've been treated then versus now?

**P:** Yes. It's a lot different world. You know, the nurses are great, they're educated, they know what's going on.

**RA:** Just thinking of other places that you can hear about HIV—further back in time, in the eighties, right—just an attempt to jog your memory in case there may have been some other possibilities. For example, movies or television, did that even crop up anywhere, in anything like that?

**P:** Oh yeah *Philadelphia*. That was the AIDS movie.

**RA:** I forgot what year that was.

**P:** I don't know. That was Tom Hanks.

**RA:** Did you see that?

**P:** Yes, I did.

**RA:** Did you have any kind of response to that?

**P:** I think it brought awareness that people knew that there was a disease. And then at the same time *Angels in America* came out. And then there was another one—*Torch Song Trilogy*—yes, that dealt with AIDS, I believe. These were the main cultural...

**RA:** Did you see these?

**P:** Yeah, I saw all of them.

**RA:** Did they have an impact on you?

**P:** Not personally, no. But just awareness, you know. It's like, oh, pop culture, so culture's talking about this disease, more and more people know about it. From some great mystery to, okay, here's now you know, as we advance scientifically more and more, people have—their understanding grows of what this disease is all about.

**RA:** You're a kid in high school right, you're not necessarily going to be seeing or hearing a lot of things?

**P:** No, but I read—even back then I read, even when I was a teenager I tried to read as much, about *Xtra West* as much as possible. That was like my only outlet into the gay community was *Xtra West*. And the radio, the gay radio station they have here.

**RA:** Were there some things that *Xtra West* covered that sort of illuminated what's going on? For example, any writing about politics?

**P:** There were lots of stuff about politics.

**RA:** But any of that relevant to the epidemic?

**P:** Yes, yeah. Well, they also talked about what happened—write about what happened in other cities, like San Francisco and New York, stuff like that. And there was lots of political activism happening at that time.

**RA:** Did anything stand out from the political coverage that they did? Toronto is one way, Vancouver is another way, so things aren't...

**P:** I think a lot of it is just lobb—from my recollection, people are lobbying the government for money, and we needed government to put more funds into research. That was the biggest issue, according to my recollection.

**RA:** Your thoughts on what was going on back then—because you saw some of it, right—I'm not sure if it looked scary, or just another health issue?

**P:** It was very scary, but at the same time, I know part of me thought it was much ado about nothing. When otherwise I would've gotten tested, back then, because I didn't believe that HIV caused AIDS, so I didn't bother with any of that. I just sort of lived my life in a bubble. Be nice if they found a cure of course, but you know... Or they had—or on one hand, I wanted to wait until the medication was better before I started getting on them. If that makes sense.

**RA:** You think, better in what ways?

**P:** Way less side effects. Because AZT was deadly, a lot of people died from it, rather than the disease itself. So, that was my biggest fear back then was the AZT.

**RA:** Had you met anybody experiencing that? Just curious.

**P:** I saw people on the street who were—they looked really bad.

**RA:** So, you saw how things looked. Are you surprised—it sounds as if it looked pretty bad, right?

**P:** Yeah, well I read in the newspaper a lot of people were dying, and they—personally, I didn't know anyone who had HIV, I didn't know anyone who died of AIDS until like ten years ago, when my boyfriend my died of—died of—what we guess, what we think was HIV, 'cause he

never got tested so we don't know how he died. So, pneumonia. But then my mother died of pneumonia, my grandmother died of pneumonia as well.

**RA:** Are you surprised that given how bad things looked, that we're here, we're still queer, get used to it—I mean, we've survived?

**P:** We're survivors, we get through it, we're strong people. But back—I remember not—I haven't gone to any AIDS-related funeral, or any—or knew of anyone who died, except very, oh such and—not anyone personal I knew. Like, oh, so and so this store, or that person worked here as a waiter in that restaurant and, oh, he's gone. Okay, you know, like that was the extent that...

**RA:** So, some of your awareness of the severity of the epidemic is people disappearing, which you just mentioned?

**P:** Yes, yes, there wasn't as much because I wasn't as involved in the gay community. So, there was less of that, but then you read about in the papers, right.

**RA:** How close did you live to the gay village?

**P:** Oh, I lived in Yaletown.

**RA:** Yaletown?

**P:** For a number of years. I hardly went into gay village. On occasion, we didn't have any—when I was in my relationship, we didn't have any gay friends at all, it was just the two of us.

**RA:** When you were in Yaletown, were there any clubs? I'm just thinking of—

**P:** Not really. There hardly anything gay in Yaletown.

**RA:** Thinking of establishments, the Gandy Dancer—

**P:** Oh, back in the eighties, yes, I used to go there when I was in high school. I went to Gandy and Dufferin and what not.

**RA:** There was Dufferin—

**P:** The Odyssey, The Shaggy Horse.

**RA:** The Shaggy Horse. Tell us more. Okay, any recollections of the clubs when you went to the clubs?

**P:** Oh, the music was way better back then than it is today.

**RA:** People friendly?

**P:** Way more friendlier.

**RA:** You did say that, compared to now. What's a night at the clubs look like?

**P:** People were just friendly, they talk to you. Nowadays, you go to the club and you don't talk to anybody. I'm talking like way in the eighties, like at The Odyssey, people like strangers would just strike up conversations. It was just easier to strike up conversations than it is today. And the music was much better, that's all I remember. But more people were in the closet back then, I remember. Comparatively speaking, there's way more people out than back then.

**RA:** There's this word identity. Okay, so how do you define yourself? For example, I see myself as a gay man, but I also see myself in other ways, some of that having to do with other people with whom I identify, who I have things in common. I'm just wondering, do you feel yourself to various degrees, a part of other communities?

**P:** Oh yeah, of course.

**RA:** Can you tell us a bit about that?

**P:** Well I'm Asian, so that's a big part of my identity.

**RA:** Right. Is that compatible with or at odds, or is it a comfortable or uncomfortable fit with being a gay guy?

**P:** That's a loaded question. Because we're obviously a minority within a minority, so we're sort of like, we're just like a rung lower on the totem pole, relatively speaking. But you're always aware that you're a minority in a minority.

**RA:** If you're a minority, are you treated well or—

**P:** I wouldn't say well or not. I mean—you mean as speaking as an Asian man in the gay community?

**RA:** An Asian man within the Asian community who's gay.

**P:** Well, no one in Asian community knows I'm gay. I'm not out to anybody, except my gay friends. I'm not out to my family. Basically, I have my gay friends and I have my straight friends. Some of my straight friends know, but not everybody knows.

**RA:** Do you have an expectation of how you would be—people would feel about you or treat you if they did know, within the Asian community?

**P:** I think there would be some prejudice involved. If they—some people would know because I know some people have some really conservative thinking.

**RA:** Uhm, are there some who have really—opposite of conservative—liberal thinking within the Asian community?

**P:** Right, it's hard to paint people with—everyone's different, right? So, it depends on the person.

**RA:** Do you feel you have something in common with maybe some other communities?

**P:** Um, lots of communities. I'm—spiritual communities, I'm Buddhist, so I have a lot of affinity with the Buddhist community, that's one community that I'm sort of part of.

**RA:** So far, is it a comfortable fit, are there any issues being Buddhist and gay?

**P:** No, I don't see any complications.

**RA:** Any other communities, just curious? We're complicated creatures.

**P:** Mhm. What other communities are you talking about?

**RA:** There might not be, but if those are the ones that come to mind, for you—

**P:** Um, well, I'm into music, right, I'm into classical music, that's—I don't know if that's a community.

**RA:** It may be, maybe it's a community based on shared cultural interest, right? Maybe you see the same backs of heads in the concert hall all the time. Maybe you chat with them or have some sort of relationship, love or hate with them.

**P:** Okay, so you'd say I'm classical music lover. I also like jazz.

**RA:** Well, Tchaikovsky was gay, so they better make room for you.

**P:** I also like jazz, so I'm in the jazz community.

**RA:** So, there are all these things that overlap, and you are who you are through that.

**P:** Yes.

**RA:** Does your relationship to Buddhism have any impact on how you may have dealt with or responded to things that I would say some people would consider stressful—such as loss of a partner for example—does any aspect of your spirituality helpful or playing some sort of part from your perspective, in some of the things you've gone through? And you've gone through a lot of things—in the late eighties, you're hearing of things going on around you that don't necessarily sound very good, then in Toronto you're seeing a bit more, and then you come back here and then maybe you're still not seeing much, but then you're with your partner and your partner takes ill very quickly. So, anything within your Buddhist self that plays a role in your...?

**P:** A lot, I would say it's all of me. I meditate on a regular basis, and that sort is not only is a stress reliever, but it's a practice of letting go of attachments, and learning to not overly attach yourself—even it's a partner or boyfriend or whatever—that's why a lot of Buddhists don't get into relationships because they don't want to have to go through the pain of letting go of a loved one.

**RA:** I didn't know that.

**P:** That's why a lot of people become monks or become celibate, because they don't need to deal with the agony of someone—what if your spouse dies on you or gets sick or whatever. It's better to focus on your own sort of, like, spirituality.

**RA:** Is this a big part of you, would you say?

**P:** Starting to. I haven't been in a relationship since after my boyfriend passed away, and I'm leaning more towards, you know, just other things rather than, oh, finding a new boyfriend or whatever. It's not a big part of my life.

**RA:** Anything else to add regarding the Chinese community, or Chinese communities? Because we're talking about a very big community, right.

**P:** Well, my only—I was sort of involved in the Gay Asians in Toronto, and when I came back here, I knew—I didn't get involved but I knew people in the Gay Asian community here, but I didn't really network with them or anything like that. As far as the vast majority of the Asian community, I'm straight, they think I'm straight, so I find they don't need to know. I like to keep my life very compartmentalized.

**RA:** Do you—if you need help, do you have a bit of a network out there? When your partner passed away, were there any kinds of support?

**P:** Oh yeah, well, I had lots of support. I have friends at the time who gave me lots of support. And plus, my faith had helped me a lot in not—it—it sounds weird but it's like not to become overly emotional, or like death is a part of life, so everybody dies, so it's like, you know, you move on, right? I know some people's partners died and they've never been able to get past that.

**RA:** Alright, well, I've asked about identity, community, support, and some of that support has been information that you've received, say news and other sources.

**P:** I also have lots of friends, they're support too.

**RA:** So, they give you maybe emotional support?

**P:** Mhm, I have a very good network of friends I rely on for support.

**RA:** I'm going to go back to the information as support. You've heard things—there was the one woman from Los Angeles who gave some sort of presentation, you were hearing things on the news. Did you have a feeling, a sense or a way of telling if something you're hearing was on the mark, you know, accurate, or that's just crazy—

**P:** No. Well, now looking back, it was totally wrong.

**RA:** But at the time, right? At the time—

**P:** At the time, I didn't know what to believe. There was all these different conflicting sources of information. And then at the time, everyone got—had to—they believed in getting tested and all that, and I was still holding out, even though I got tested in China, but I didn't believe them because they were ten years behind us scientifically, so... And they said I two years to live and I'm still here. And I only got on medication three years ago.

**RA:** And that's only because you were really sick the one time?

**P:** Yeah, yeah, exactly. So...

**RA:** Anything from any of this that maybe changed your approach to anything in life in terms of how you interact with other people or how you receive support from other people, or give support to other people?

**P:** Well, now that I'm part of the positive community, I do have—made it to seek support much more than ever before. When I got tested in China and I came back, I didn't get any—I didn't seek out any support on purpose, because I didn't believe I was really sick. I just thought, oh, I'm positive, like, you know. I didn't treat it very seriously whatsoever until I actually got sick. And so, I networked again with Friends for Life, and I got involved, in like, Positive Living and AIDS Vancouver and all of those kind of communities. I even for a while, I wanted to live at the Dr. Peter's Centre, but they turned me down because I didn't have a downtown address, I lived in Richmond.

**RA:** Okay, you're accessing these organizations—Friends for Life and PW—

**P:** As a patient.

**RA:** As a patient. And Positive Living you said?

**P:** Yeah, and I'm a member of AIDS Vancouver.

**RA:** So, do you access—what's the draw for you for the organizations? What do you use, or take part in?

**P:** Well, mainly because they have—Positive Living has forums where they have the latest research on HIV and the latest updates, and that's where I go to get information.



**RA:** Is it presented in a way that you don't have to be a rocket scientist or a doctor to understand?

**P:** A lot of things change when you become—when you're positive then you're not, when you're, you know you have to be on meds then you have to be plugged into all these things. So yeah, I've been getting lots of great support. Also, when I was sick, I had really good—what do they call them—health care case support workers and case managers and stuff like that.

**RA:** Is there anything that we've not talked about yet that you think would be of value and interest to others, just regarding your place in this whole experience of the epidemic?

**P:** I think if I got tested earlier, it would've been a very different story. I don't—I don't know, part of me, if I got tested in the eighties and they put me on AZT, I would probably—might not—there'd be a chance I might not be here today, 'cause the medication back then wasn't as good as what they're giving now, and there's like way less side effects. And that's what I was worried about, the side effects of the medications.

**RA:** Do you have a sense of when that got better, in terms of medication?

**P:** Only past five years ago. Past five years. So, I would've been—I don't know, I could've been more proactive in—in getting involved in these AIDS organizations and then helping other people, but for the longest time I was in denial, right? I thought I treated myself as if I was negative, so I didn't need to deal with any of these organizations or become you know, that politically, like, aware. I think that was my biggest thing.

**RA:** Would you say you're out—like have come out—now? And I'm not talking about living with HIV but actually being a gay guy? Would you say you're out now or not?

**P:** I'm out to some people not to others. Not completely—let's put it this way, not publicly, anyway.

**RA:** When did that actually start, would you say?

**P:** What do you mean?

**RA:** When did you actually start coming out?

**P:** At work a few—even back in Toronto, when I first moved to Toronto, I was out to everybody at work. And I had—and when I—at work here, I worked at a lot of different companies, some I was, some I wasn't, you know. But not to family. Family I was never out, ever.

**RA:** So, what made you comfortable in work?

**P:** Because half the people I worked for are gay.

**RA:** Oh. Okay.

**P:** So, I worked in a lot of gay-friendly companies, and you know, it was no problem there.

**RA:** Regardless of how you felt about the information that you were hearing, in the late eighties and maybe even Toronto in the nineties, would you say there was any type of change in your behaviour in anyway, regarding anything that could somehow be related to AIDS or HIV? Because this is still—oh, what is Toronto relative to when you were diagnosed?

**P:** It was while I was in Toronto that I went to China.

**RA:** Okay, so before you went to China, is there anything that you were observing or reading or hearing, regardless of if you thought something was accurate or not, is there anything that was affecting your behaviour?

**P:** You mean sexually?

**RA:** Well, in any way, so it could be sexually.

**P:** Back then in Toronto, everyone wore condoms.

**RA:** Everyone was already wearing condoms?

**P:** Yeah, it was very safe sex.

**RA:** Okay, I don't know, did you do drugs at all?

**P:** No, I never did drugs. I don't even drink, I don't smoke.

**RA:** I was about to ask about smoking and alcohol. Never?

**P:** Never.

**RA:** Okay. Anything, where you might've just started doing things a bit differently, based on whatever you were observing?

**P:** Well, the only thing, I didn't like wearing condoms, despite what they said, I did, and I'll always practice safe sex. That was the thing, because I didn't think I would ever get it, or it's sort of like if you get, you just keep your immune system up and you would never get sick. Because there were supposedly people who were—tested positive and didn't go medications and they survived, apparently. And so, if I even—I thought if I got tested, I would not get sick. And it happened, like for ten years, I didn't get sick, after I got tested. And I just got on meds three years ago.

**RA:** So, part of your experience was actually getting very sick and then that one change was to go on meds—

**P:** I had no choice, because I was going to die.

**RA:** Are you still on meds?

**P:** Yes, oh yeah.

**RA:** Are you happy with your doctor?

**P:** Yeah, very happy.

**RA:** What about attitude changes—feeling differently about some things? Any stage in all of this, say back in the eighties or when you were in Toronto before China, that moment when you were in China and you're diagnosed, still coming back to Toronto and then back to Vancouver—any times within that, but maybe start further back when you were in Vancouver in the eighties, any attitude changes about anything, anybody?

**P:** Well, what of it, in terms of what I would've done differently or...?

**RA:** No, just in terms of how you—during those particular times, did you see your attitude changing regarding anything that was somehow related to the epidemic? And I know that even when we're going back to the eighties, you're just a kid in school.

**P:** But there was way more fear back then than there is now, and now we look at it as a manageable—a managed disease. Back then, it was a death sentence. So back then, there was like a lot of fear, so I would say a lot less fear these days than when I was kid, over the years.

**RA:** Did it change your way about thinking about anything in general though? Say—

**P:** Give me an example. There's been lots of changes. People change, you know.

**RA:** Yeah, I know. But in response to that, but had you seen or heard about anything like it before?

**P:** No, I was in high school very little, just what the little I had heard and then once I was in Toronto, and then I heard people died, like not anyone I knew, but I heard people were dying in Toronto, and that was scary. So yeah, there was a lot of fear and unknowingness back then. Now I'm a lot more—because of the internet—I'm a lot more caught up on a lot of things, and I understand a lot more than I did ever before. Back then it was like I didn't know—no one knew what was going on.

**RA:** Whatever I was asking about, changes of behaviour for yourself, maybe the same question regarding any of your friends or acquaintances within the community, their changes in behaviour perhaps?

**P:** Because of the AIDS crisis?

**RA:** Because of—yeah. So, you said you were going to some of these clubs in Yaletown back when you're in high school though, right? So, I'm just wondering, did anybody talk about any of that? I mean, you've told how there's been a few changes in your behaviour, but just any of your acquaintances, meeting people in any of the clubs, if was there any conversations or...?

**P:** Not really, we didn't really discuss—not in the circles I was with—didn't discuss. Not until I went to Toronto, and then we had a more political—political or health-related discussions, and back in Toronto everyone was into safe sex. And here too, but now people have changed because they have PrEP, right? So, that's the biggest change I've seen here.

**RA:** Okay, do you have any hopes that the current generation has learned something from the experience of previous generations, when this crisis was taking place to the degree that it was?

**P:** I'm going to be pessimistic and say no, because I mean, it brought us to the place we are now with the government funding and the research and whatnot, but now, in terms of disease, nowadays younger generation can just take a pill and they can take their PrEP and be—I mean, back then if we had—if we knew, if we had it, we would've all been on PrEP too and then we wouldn't have to get sick and die.

**RA:** Do you know any young kids, by the way, in the community?

**P:** No, I don't.

**RA:** If you go out the odd time, do you socialize—do you still go to the clubs actually?

**P:** No, I don't. But I have friends who go to clubs, and I have heard you know, through friends that now the younger generation are more in a way selfish, and they're more sort of like, they look upon us like, oh yeah, we did... I don't know, there's two ways that the youth, you know, you can say, oh, a lot of people died and that, some people had to die in order to get us where we are today, in order to have these medications. I don't know, and some kids are—I don't know, I've heard—I don't know personally, not through experience. I've have friends who have talked to people, the younger generation, they're very self-absorbed, and you know, they're even less politically aware than—than—than our generation, because I know a lot of people in our generation, their whole world was revolved—some people revolved around battling the AIDS crisis and activism, and stuff like that. I just wasn't a part of it.

**RA:** Well, you were in your way early on, say with Friends for Life doing your administrative work, that you described. You were in your way, even though your partner passed away very quickly.

**P:** I didn't march in any parades or anything, I didn't, you know, lobby the government or anything.

**RA:** Yeah, but it takes different forms. Have you had any other opportunities to support others, or receive support, would you say?

**P:** What do you mean, in the gay community?

**RA:** In the gay community.

**P:** Yeah, I frequent gay establishments, I support them as much as I can.

**RA:** You mentioned Positive Living, AIDS Vancouver—

**P:** AIDS Vancouver and stuff like that, I go to [inaudible], you know stuff like that. And I donate to them from time to time, so I do give back.

**RA:** Great. Anything else that you might want to relate that you feel maybe isn't heard, and might be possibly unique to your experience? Just in terms of getting this history out there, and getting all stories told?

**P:** I don't think my story's that interesting compared to a lot of people you've interviewed, I'm sure, who were actually in the trenches so to speak. Because I never—part of my problem is I never got to experience the health care that other people got in the eighties when they first got sick. So I'm, you know, I'm sorry my story was very different. Had I got tested again in Vancouver right after I came back from China, and—and who knows what my life would've been like. And also, because had I known, I would've done a lot of things differently. Like for instance, my boyfriend I would've put him on meds—we didn't know he had pneumonia, he was just—had trouble breathing. And because the same thing happened to me when I got sick now looking back. I should've sent him to emergency at St. Paul's Hospital and he would still be alive today. They would've tested him for HIV or put him on meds, and they would've like, sent him to Dr. Peter's or somewhere like that.

**RA:** When you got sick, you went much more quickly to get help, correct?

**P:** Yeah, 'cause I had a friend who drove me and said you must go to the emergency. Because I wasn't about to go, I was fine. He said, "Oh, you're not fine. You need to go." And then I went, and I knew—apparently, I nearly died, had I not, my friend not dragged me to emergency. And that's what happened with my boyfriend, I just gave him a breathing thing and then he was dead the next morning. So, I'm kind of lucky to be alive. I could've easily been a statistic. Well, now I'm a statistic of being HIV positive. I didn't want to be a statistic, that's why I never got tested.

**RA:** I think maybe we can wrap this?

**P:** Is there any other questions you want to ask me?

**RA:** I think at this point it was if you wanted to tell us anything else that we can't even imagine is a great question until you come up with something to talk about possibly.

**P:** I don't know what to say. I'm not a very good talker.

**RA:** Okay, I think, then I will thank you for your participation in this project, and we will call this a wrap.