

“HIV in My Day” – Victoria Interview 6

January 31, 2019

Interviewee: Colin Craig (CC); Interviewer: Bruce Budden (BB); Also present: Art Holbrook (AH)

Bruce Budden: Alright well thanks for being here, Colin. And you’ve already met, Art, Bruce. Today is the thirty-first, and so have you always been in Victoria? You said that you’ve always been in Victoria?

Colin Craig: I was born and raised in Victoria, yes.

BB: So, what year was that?

CC: What year was that? That was ah, none of your business. That is April 21, 1957. I was born on Easter Sunday.

BB: Wow.

CC: Yeah, and this year, April 21, it will be the first time I will land on Easter again in sixty-two years. Because Easter moves around throughout March and April, and I’ve known this for about ten years, a friend of mine checked it in the computer. And because Easter’s usually not late in April, but this year, for the first time in sixty-two years, I will be having my birthday on Easter again. So, this is a special year. ‘Cause it has to be on a Sunday, and my birthday will only be on a Sunday once every seven years, Easter’s always on a Sunday. Yeah, this is pretty cool. So, I’m looking forward to that.

BB: Nice. Got any special plans?

CC: I’m hoping to go up to Comox where my nephew and my niece, the two oldest ones, and my great-niece and great-nephew are, and celebrate up there, with my older brother. So, I’m looking forward to that. I’m one of these great uncles, and the gay uncles are always the best because they always bring presents.

BB: And good ones too.

CC: And good ones. And I’ve always been totally out to my family and to my nieces and nephews. And they love their gay uncle, way back when nobody else did.

BB: Alright. So, when did you first start to hear about HIV/AIDS? What was your first clue about that?

CC: I was thinking about that, probably about three – one of three different times. And one was reading about it in *Angles* which turned into *Xtra West* in Vancouver, a newspaper in Vancouver, or a gay newspaper in Vancouver. Read about it in there way back in the early, early eighties. Also, when I travelled to Hawaii, I did about three trips in my early twenties for fun times over

there, I heard about it coming to Hawaii before I heard about it came to the United States and Canada. But it was still something kind of far away, so you didn't think it was going to come to us. And we still didn't know that much about it back then. Also, I can remember, like one of our gay bars in Victoria, the Queen's Head, which was in Esquimalt—and a friend was reminding me about this today—our bar was across the street from a bar called The Bacchanalia, which was a motorcycle bar. And funny enough that the only gay bar was right across the street so there were sometimes some conflicts. And he was reminding me, and I'd forgotten how the cops were kinda almost hoping we'd fight, and kind of standing back, and at the same time he reminded me that the... whenever there was a fight, the paramedics and the firemen and stuff were hesitant about treating us or touching us, because of HIV. Because at that time, nobody knew much about it, and it was totally contagious, and we were gay guys, and the whole bit.

BB: That was '83?

CC: I would go back '82, '83, something like that. Yeah, yeah.

BB: Okay.

CC: And that's the first time we kinda heard about. And also around that time, or the mid-'80s, we had a gay café in Victoria, which was first at the Fernwood Community Centre and then we moved into the James Bay Community Centre, and that was every Sunday. And we had, I think his name, his last name was Tivey – do you remember a Tivey? I think David Tivey, Rob Tivey, I can't remember [AIDS Vancouver's Bob Tivey]. He came from Vancouver to talk to us about this mysterious disease. And I can remember us all sitting there so quiet as he warned us that this disease had come into Vancouver, and it was going to come to Victoria as well. Again, it was something you kind of wanted to be in denial about that it was actually going to happen. And then all of a sudden, we had our first person die of AIDS.

BB: Do you remember what year it was that they died?

CC: I think it was about '85... '85, I think. I wish I could remember the guy's name, 'cause he owned a travel agency, two different ones in Victoria. And I remember all of a sudden, he started coming to the Crystal Pool, our rec centre in Victoria, I started going there at twenty-two, I'm still going there at sixty-one, everyday. And he started coming there and exercising. I guess he was thinking if he exercised, he wouldn't die of AIDS. And then all of a sudden, he disappeared, and I he had passed away. I wish I could remember his name though, darn it.

BB: Ah, okay.

CC: I need my water because one of my meds gives me dry mouth. Sorry.

BB: No worries, no apologies necessary. What's your perception of how the community reacted—both the gay community and the outside community here in Victoria, specifically.

CC: Well it was, I don't know, um... It took a while to soak in for our community. The outside community—the straight community—was getting all sorts of kinds of news from the media, and

not necessarily the correct news. At the same time, we didn't know everything about AIDS. It had a different name in that day. My GP actually was trained in Ireland, and I don't know whether you know the name it was first called, I wish I could remember... It starts with G... GERD, GERD [sic]. Yeah.

BB: Oh yeah, I've heard that.

CC: GERD was the first name, and then it switched to AIDS.

BB: What did that stand for?

CC: I can't remember, my doctor'd be kicking me now for not remembering.

BB: Yeah, I've heard it in documentaries before.

CC: GERD, GERD.

Art Holbrook: Not GRID [gay-related immune deficiency]?

CC: GERD. I'm positive it was GERD. So yeah, the doctors didn't know everything about it either. And at the time to begin with, there was no drug except AZT to give. And we can talk more about that later, but they ended up overdosing a lot of these guys with AZT thinking more the better, more the better, and that's really what killed a lot of them.

BB: Yeah, okay.

AH: So how did you personally respond to – any changes in your own behaviour?

CC: I don't think I understand your question.

AH: When you realized this was coming at the gay community, did you change your own behaviour in any way?

CC: By the time it had gotten, we knew that it was really here, I'd gotten together with my long-term partner. And when we got together, I kind of said to my partner, Roger, I said, "Let's not bother getting tested unless one of us gets sick." I guess that was a bit stupid at the time, but we thought, hey, we're going to be in a monogamous relationship, we don't have to. That was very naïve, because about five years into our relationship, my partner Roger did get sick. So, he was tested, he turned out to be HIV. And that's what made me go get tested, after that, and it turned out that I was HIV as well. So, something in our pasts, and we weren't, you know we were quite – in that day, we gay men were kind of quite promiscuous. And Roger and me hadn't thought that something in our past would catch up with us, and something did. And I always remember going into the doctor's office, his doctor's office, telling us, you know, that he was HIV. And we hoped he wasn't going to get really sick, 'cause at that time he wasn't. And then as I said, I went and got tested, and my doctor said, "Well, then you can come in and find out if you're HIV or not." And I said, "Oh, just phone me, just phone me." And he phoned and he said, "You're

HIV.” And I said, “Oh good, thanks.” And I put down the phone and I went to—and I know this sounds crazy—and I went to the living room and I said, “Sweetheart, I’m HIV too!” And he looked at me with this strange look on his face, like are you crazy. And I said, “No, now we both have it now.” And this is how when you’re in love, and as a couple, and now you’re going to be sharing this together. And that was the start of a nightmare.

BB: Wow. So, you just walked in like, I’ve got it too, yay! We’re in this together.

CC: Yeah, you’re gonna share this together. Thinking you’re going to beat it, you’re not thinking like, we’re going to die or anything.

BB: So... how did the nightmare progress?

CC: He ended up getting the pneumonia, which I can’t remember what it was, the gay pneumonia—

AH: Pneumocystis.

CC: Yeah.

BB: What was it called?

AH: Pneumocystis.

CC: Yeah, and ended up in the hospital, it was like, bang! All of a sudden, he said, “Sweetheart, I have to go to the hospital.” We went to emergency and they just booked him in, like really fast, into one of the little rooms. And we were so lucky they acknowledged our relationship, which was really unusual for that time. If they hadn’t, I would’ve just barged in there, like, I’m a Taurus and don’t tell me. And went in there and that was the first time I cried, like he was hooked up to this and that and whatever. And he was in the hospital for two three weeks, I think, and here I was working full-time at a fancy restaurant, I was a dining room waiter, all my life. And this restaurant, I was wearing a full tuxedo, and working at the Oak Bay Marina Restaurant, flambeing Spanish coffees and all this stuff, and I’d go from work in my tuxedo at one o’clock in the morning and go visit him at the hospital before he’d go to bed – he wouldn’t go to bed until he saw me. And of course, I’d bake cookies for the nurses, and they thought, oh, you’ve got such a sexy boyfriend. So, that part, he got better, but it was really hard to go home at night, by yourself, knowing he was in the hospital. Finally, we got him home. And then things kind of got worse. He got the cancer, what’s the cancer called? Sarcoma...?

AH: Kaposi’s sarcoma? Skin cancer.

CC: Yes, the skin cancer. So, getting lesions all over his face, and all over his entire body, and that’s the worst thing for a gay man, not to look good. So that was nasty. So, he got radiation for that, which made him sick, and so on. And then yeah, he just lost all muscle and everything, and he was like a tall basketball player kind of guy. And just got sicker and sicker, as they gave him more AZT, and so on. And then he was going to have a blood transfusion one morning, his older

sister arrived from Saskatchewan thinking, maybe. And uh, and they set it up for six o'clock in the morning which I thought was stupid. And I woke him up in the morning, and he said a couple of words to me, and those were the last words he ever said. I had to... he couldn't walk, I picked him up, I don't know how I carried him to the car, and by the time we got to the hospital he was in a coma. And luckily when we first talked to his doctor, and I haven't told you any last names? Good. That doctor, who I won't name, we asked him to help us if it came down to this. And so, he set up an ambulance for us to go back to our house, our little house, with our two cats and our white picket fence, and uh, he came over and helped Roger out of his misery.

BB: Oh, wow.

AH: Best not to have a name.

CC: Nope. I've never told anybody. And never will.

BB: Wow... I don't know where to go from there.

CC: I had great support from his family and stuff, which made things a little bit easier. When we were doing the thing for the newspaper, the obit, I had to really push to have that we were partners in there.

BB: Oh wow. What paper?

CC: *Times Colonist*. I'm always the first guy that has to be in there. It took a little bit of doing, but not too much, luckily.

BB: Was it the newspaper itself that resisted that or—

CC: No, the family. Most families wouldn't dare let that be known, any family. And I also, in lieu of flowers, a donation to AIDS Vancouver Island – there was no PWA I don't think at that time, I can't remember, and that was hard to push that. And then I found out that that was the first time that anybody had put that in the obit. "In lieu of flowers, a donation to AIDS Vancouver Island."

AH: What year was that?

CC: 1990. He died October 16, at 6:02 in the morning, 1990. And his doctor, when he left after helping, which was about nine o'clock at night, he didn't go right away. I woke up, he took his last breath, and he was gone. And the doctor said, "I'll be in my office. You call me." He stayed in his office the whole night 'till I could call him to say, and then he came over to write the thing.

AH: That's pretty impressive.

CC: Yeah, really nice guy.

AH: One of the questions here is how did the medical response to—

CC: We were very lucky compared to other people. You know, there's nightmare stories out there. But, you know, everything was very secret. You know you couldn't go running around saying stuff.

AH: But you also mentioned the nurses at the hospital were accepting?

CC: Yeah, but Roger was a really, really nice guy. Like, he had no enemies, so people really liked him, that makes a huge difference too. And I'm a nice person too, he was nicer though. I'd always say, "I'm going to tell people you did that." And he'd say, "Nobody is going to believe you."

BB: Oh, that's funny.

CC: And I'm thirty years HIV now. And the only reason why I think I'm alive is because when I was tested, my blood counts or whatever were okay, so I didn't need to go on AZT, and by the time I needed to go on something, the antivirals were out. Otherwise, I probably would've died too.

AH: '95, '96, somewhere around there?

CC: Yeah, because guys said I think in '96 the antivirals came out?

BB: Yeah.

CC: Yeah, so I was very lucky.

BB: Did you get involved in any sort of community activism, or things like PWA, AVI, or anything like that?

CC: No, I didn't. And the reason why I didn't, I found I didn't want to dwell on what I had, and I still don't today. I didn't want to be around a place that was always talking about it or dwelling on it. I'm a very optimistic person, a positive-thinking person, so I didn't want to be reminded. I've never let HIV run my life in any way – I take my one pill now, with my vitamins, in my little thingy, and carry on. And I'm very outspoken about, about the history of it and how I deal with it. Very open about it, so to get rid of the stigma of HIV, particularly today, that you don't die anymore if you take your medicine kind of thing.

BB: It's more on a personal level, if you come across someone that doesn't know what they're talking about and makes some comment—

CC: Or if somebody asks, like a younger person asks, I just kind of say it, because I'm very open about it. I go to Vancouver to see my specialist now, so I'll say, "Oh, I was over in Vancouver seeing my specialist," and if somebody says, "What do you mean?" then I just tell 'em. I'm a little scared for the young people today, more so now because of PrEP coming out, that they think they can just take PrEP and bareback and do whatever they want out there, especially the

younger people that weren't around for the gay plague. They never saw their friends dying like we did. So, it's kind of scary to think they can just take the PrEP and take their chances, 'cause nothing's one-hundred-percent for sure. And what if you forget. And it's – yeah, and uh, then if you do get HIV, you just take these pills. Well, it's not just these pills – there's side effects of them and if you don't get on a pill right away, or antiviral right away, then you might be on some heavy-duty drugs. 'Cause if you leave it too long and get AIDS itself, then you're on heavy-duty drugs. I mean, you look at Joe Average. I mean, he's one of the really longest of all of them, I don't know what he takes now, but he was taking like twelve pills in the beginning, after AZT, just to keep him alive. So, it's not fun having the side effects of a lot of these drugs, and the things that can happen later on.

I've had quadruple bypass surgery. I found out through my specialist in Vancouver – I left a certain doctor in Victoria who's not very well liked, I left him after eighteen years and went to Vancouver, see the big-time specialist at St. Paul's. I thought, hey, I'm a survivor, this is at eighteen years, and I saw, I can't remember what he's called – he's ocontologist, but sounds like ocontologist, he's something else. But he deals with my neuropathy in my feet caused by diabetes, caused by one of my antivirals, gave me this, and long-time survivors of HIV can come down with heart disease before the regular population. This doctor in Victoria, I was having heartburn, heartburn, acid reflux, and he said something nasty about, "Oh, you guys with HIV and AIDS, you're complaining about your acid reflux." And uh, so, I went, my regular GP says, "Well, why don't we check out your heart." So, I went on a treadmill, I lasted about five minutes. And he said, "Well, let's send you for an angioplasty," you know, where they stick the thing up here? Yeah, and uh, all of a sudden, all the computers went off around me and everybody stopped chatting, because I'm a chatter, particularly if you're in a nervous situation.

And my cardiologist, who I'd just met a couple of times, knew that I'd been in the restaurant business, and he said, "Colin"—I thought I'd maybe get a stint or something—he said, "Colin, you've eaten too many steak Oscars in your life," which is steak and crab and asparagus and Béarnaise sauce, which is not good for your heart. What a sense of humour, you know. So, I said "Okay fine, I'll come back tomorrow or whatever. I've got to go feed my cats." And he said, "No, you're not going anywhere. We're gonna roll you back in where you were and a surgeon's gonna come and see you." And so, the surgeon came and saw me, and I'm saying, "Fine, fine, I gotta go home and feed my cats." No, sorry, and he's showing me these pictures of what he's gonna do to me – "you're going to have open heart surgery." No, sorry, I gotta go home. Wheeled me into a ward, and I was in there for a week and a half. Yeah, a week to wait for a surgeon, and then out in four days or something, three or four days I was out. Yeah, they open you up, and it's quite an experience. And so, I'd seen this doctor in Vancouver, and he said, "Hey, have you ever had your heart checked?" And then I came back six months later and said, "Lookie, lookie." So, if I'd been in Vancouver earlier to see this specialist, he would've done, I probably would have stints put in or something, I would've changed a lot of stuff. The one in Victoria didn't even say, didn't even get me checked for heart. I could've easily have died.

I had four things done but I could've had more done. The smaller ones are harder to do, it's risky to do small ones. So, they've taken out five veins out of this leg and used four of them, quadruple bypass. And it takes you a long time to get better, mostly 'cause they sawed you open, so all these nerves have to heal, and they take a long time to heal. But it was an experience, it was an

adventure, and that's how I looked at it. This happened in late October, so for Christmas, like you can't drink for four weeks, drive for nine weeks, so I go see Santa Claus at Mayfair Mall, in my Christmas sweater, and I explain to him what happened. And I said, "I want to sit on your knee and have my picture taken with Santa Claus," which I still believe in by the way, and I had these cards made up for family and friends that say, "I still believe and I'm still alive." And sent them to everybody. Yeah, it's a really cute picture.

BB: That's quite the sense of humour.

CC: That's what keeps you alive, keeps you happy, keeps the demons away.

BB: So, what was your perception of how the community dealt with—

CC: Dealt with me or dealt with HIV?

BB: Well, dealt with all of it, with having to care for all these people and...

CC: Hmm. It scared a lot of people, definitely. And definitely people were scared of having sex with a HIV person – it was totally like, you weren't going to have sex with anybody, ever again. That was pretty shocking to a person that was HIV, but then it was pretty understandable at the same time. And I was always honest, and still I'm honest if I'm gonna be engaging in any kind of sex, I always mention it. And I'm undetectable as well, so supposedly, I can't pass it on.

BB: But like, the experience with Roger, that was a positive experience and then you had your experience—well as far as the medical people dealing with it—not that the experience was, and then your experience with the doctor here was shitty, but what ways, I mean you must've heard from other people?

CC: Not really, because you're very, very alone at that time. You didn't know who else was HIV. You didn't go running around telling anybody yourself, and they didn't do it either, just all of a sudden somebody was dead. And you'd go to a funeral. And then another funeral. And then another funeral. It was numbing, at that time. You'd be either in Sands or McCall's or First Memorial, and it was almost like going to a wedding or something and seeing the same people, you had the same friends, it was just awful. And these were guys—like Roger died at thirty-three, thirty-two-years old—I was widowed at thirty-three years old. That is not the norm. It was awful going to these funerals and seeing all these young men, losing their friends at such a young age. That wasn't supposed to happen until you got in your fifties and sixties on up. It was just horrible. And for gay men, they'd already gone through, or were going through, particularly my generation and before my generation, a lot of suicides, for being gay. You know that their families had thrown them out or this or that or whatever. So, at even a younger age, losing friends to suicide and then losing friends to drugs, because a lot of gay guys would get hooked on drugs and alcohol, and so on. So, they'd already seen that. And then AIDS came along, and started killing off some more, and then we got older, and then cancer comes along and then your family's dying. You know, your grandparents and everything. So, for me, my whole life, my first boyfriend, at nineteen after we broke up, he got together with the next boyfriend, and then we don't know whether he committed suicide or accidentally took too many of his prescription

drugs, dead. When I was like, twenty-one years old. That was my first. And then, and then we started with AIDS and so on and it just... Yeah, my whole life's full of people dying. And that's not normal. Did I answer that question right?

BB: There's no right.

AH: You mentioned that your family was quite accepting?

CC: Yeah. And I was very close to Roger's family as well, and very close to his mum, and our mums used to go out to lunch all the time, and we took our mothers out for Mother's Day, not our siblings, it was us, it was quite normal. I don't know what restaurant – the staff were kind of looked like, these two guys and these two mothers having their pictures taken, and trying to figure us out. But, typical gay sons. Uhm, Art right? Ask me that other question one more time.

AH: Uh, I was asking about how accepting your family is.

CC: Well, they had to accept me being gay to begin with. They had no choice, they had absolutely no choice. But the HIV, the HIV thing, I still remember having to tell my parents, sitting them down at the dining room table – I can picture it right now, I had to tell them. I was not going to hide it from them. And they were pretty good about it, but I know my mother was, she'd be heartbroken if she lost one of her siblings, and so then when her friend, Roger's mom lost her son, you know, she had to be there for her, and of course she was there at the funeral and stuff but it just was... Yeah, I think they were more scared for me than I was. I had no time to think about myself, I was only thinking about Roger, and that was probably a good thing in a sense, that I've never felt any fear for myself, and never have actually. So, I'm really lucky that way. I don't know why, that's just me. I'm not going to let it run my life. If it takes me, it takes me.

AH: That's a good attitude.

CC: It's the only attitude anybody should have. I think, when I think of a lot of the guys that did have HIV or AIDS, the ones I saw that weren't fighters, that gave into it, they all died. And I don't think I'm making it up.

BB: I believe you.

CC: True.

AH: But how did the community—

CC: My mom—oh sorry, cute little story on that—

AH: Go ahead.

CC: My mom came to me one day and she said, "Would it be okay if I went and got a little jewellery thing of a red ribbon, like from Birks..." Of course, from Birks, that'd be my mother,

“...And wear that?” I said, “Of course, mother.” I thought that was pretty cool, for my mom to do that. She was also the first mother to come to Pride. We did it at Beacon Hill Park to start with, balloons and everything, and she comes across in her high heels with her purse, yeah, had to be there. And brought my niece and nephew once too. She was so proud of her son.

AH: But how did the community, altogether, deal with the burden of care and support? Have any insight into that? You stayed away from the organizations, so you probably don’t –

CC: AIDS Vancouver Island came before PWA, if I remember correctly, and the guys that set up AIDS Vancouver Island, they all died, the ones that started it. And I can’t remember all their names now. So, they did that all on their own, when there was no government helping or there was no support at all, we had to start all our own stuff, just like Pride. So, I was playing Superman looking after Roger, which was a really dumb idea—

BB: Why was that a dumb idea?

CC: Because I really should’ve been looking after myself as well, because it screwed me up. I was finally diagnosed with PTSD, maybe about five years ago, and I was always repeating it to my doctor, things over and over and over again. And it’s been twenty-nine years. And, by the time Roger was close to dying, and I would never accept that idea anyways, he was on a porta-potty. And it wasn’t ‘til I was taking his porta-potty away and his vitamins had gone straight through him, like straight through, they weren’t dissolved at all. And that’s when I got really scared. We had some care come in and help us, but it was more actually to help clean the place, because I was working and couldn’t keep up with everything. And we lost one caregiver because she fell in love with both of us, as a couple. You know, she couldn’t take it emotionally anymore. Yeah, that was sad. But what was I going to say? Oh yeah, then finally we got a nurse came to check out Roger, and all this time, nobody had asked me how I was doing, that I can ever remember. I might’ve been asked and I might’ve pushed it away. And I was sitting in the living room, and she checked with Roger in the bedroom, and she came into the living where I was sitting, and she said, “How are you doing?” Sorry—and I just fell apart.

And I think she phoned my mother, and then my mother phoned my work, and... four days later Roger was dead. Oh sorry... So yeah, I think holy shit, I might’ve been at work and he could’ve died while I was at work, flambéing Spanish coffees, you know. So, it’s like, thank god for that nurse that somebody finally said how are you doing, and I just fell apart. And then when he died I just had a nervous breakdown. But we had a wonderful service and they said, “Oh, will this room do?” And I said, “Nope, you’ve gotta open those doors, everybody’s gonna be here.” And everybody came, including our neighbours and our neighbours’ kids. Yeah, it’s pretty cool. The kids come over, the kids could come over to our house, as a gay couple in the eighties, you know our immediate six houses around us, and I always baked lots, and sometimes I find a couple of the kids at the back door where my kitchen was standing outside waiting for a cookie. And the neighbours were fantastic, you know, we were really lucky that way as well. So that was pretty cool when they brought their kids to the funeral as well, which wasn’t very happy.

Yeah, I’ll tell you a story, and it’s kind of sad. Our friend [name] was a Minister that was kicked out of the church for being gay – he became kind of a street minister. So, we asked him if Roger

died, you know, would he do his service, and he said yes of course. And so here we're waiting all of a sudden for Laurence to come and do the service, and he was half an hour late coming, and then he arrived. About two months later I'm talking to one of our friends who was a good friend of his, and he said, "Do you want to know why he was late?" And I said, "Yeah." And he says, "Well, remember how we did the gay café?" He said, "Well, he met this gentleman at the gay café years ago, and he said if I ever need you, would you come to me?" And he said yes. And well the night before this guy called him—Reverend [name]—he came to his apartment, and he was all alone, and he was dying of AIDS. His family didn't know about it, no one knew about it. He said, "Can I hold your hand?" And he said, "Yes." And he passed away.

AH: What church was that that kicked him out?

CC: Anglican, but it—yeah, it was Anglican. So, he joined in with that little church on Pandora where they wear robes. Actually, it's on Begbie.

BB: Is it the Buddhist one or...?

CC: It's almost like a Buddhist kind of thing. Yeah. So that's why he was late, he was a complete mess. I thought, isn't it wonderful that he was there for that man, when my Roger had two families and all these friends, and this guy had no one. And that's how nasty AIDS and HIV affected the gay community. He couldn't tell anybody that he was even gay.

BB: Yeah, that's how I felt until I moved away from my little small town.

CC: Yeah, especially guys that lived in small towns.

BB: Yeah, I was terrified. Even though everyone else knew, I just was terrified that people would know. So it's like, yeah, you had a different experience down here for sure.

CC: Even in Victoria though it's still not perfect, but better.

BB: Oh yeah, no, I've had experiences here too. But uh, I don't know, I kind of looked at these questions and a lot of them just seem irrelevant to me. That's why I'm not asking very many. How have your perspectives on HIV and prevention changed over time?

CC: Yeah, that's kind of hard, we've already spoken about PrEP.

BB: Do you have any advice for health professionals?

CC: I don't know how, like HIV doesn't seem to be a major thing anymore. Like, I remember, like when I was, I was going to have another operation or something I was going to have done, and talking to the anesthesiologist—thesiologist—such a hard word to say—

BB: Anaesthesiologist.

CC: Any medical person, I automatically say I'm HIV. And nobody seems to be shocked about that anymore, at all. And to any kind of doctor, even a physiotherapist or whatever, I just always mention it, it doesn't seem to phase anybody anymore. Yeah, it's totally different now. I have had friends say that if it's somebody from a different country that's very religious, uhh, they can be a little bit difficult, whether it's the HIV or presuming gay, they're not sure.

BB: Yeah, okay.

CC: But yeah, it's not – and I brag like when I go, I get my blood tested every six months, supposed to be every three months, but like why bother, it's been twenty-nine years, come on, you know, nothing's going to change. I'll usually bring it up and say, hey, I've been twenty-nine years, thirty years, you know, HIV – I'm alive, hey. And that's a good thing for people to hear on top of that.

BB: Well, it can give people hope, right?

CC: Exactly. And I can remember I've had a couple times where people say you know, like I have a young friend that's HIV, thanks for telling me this and that and so on, so I can go and tell him that you've lived with it this long, so I can tell him that. Because there's still young guys that are getting it, nothing like it was, but it's devastating when you're young, and particularly now it's something brand new to young people today, it's just devastating. They think their whole life is over, of course.

BB: Oh, I did. Yeah. I retreated for about five years. I didn't have sex, anything. I thought life was just hopeless.

CC: How old are you?

BB: Forty-one.

CC: Forty-one. And when did you uh—

BB: 2008.

CC: 2008.

BB: So even at that time—

CC: So, you wasted five years didn't ya?

BB: Yeah, I totally wasted—

CC: I should've talked to you—

BB: Yeah, I just retreated and did drugs and alcohol and the rest of it, just hid from the world, didn't want to have anything to do with... That's why I started volunteering here because I wanted to become more involved.

CC: And that's worked for you?

BB: Oh yeah, and doing this is amazing.

CC: Do you know [name] that used to work here?

BB: I lived in Foundation House with him.

CC: Yeah, [name]'s a good friend of mine. Actually, I got on subsidized housing here because [name] gave up his to go in the house.

BB: Ah, he just got back. He just got it again.

CC: Oh yeah, 'cause he was visiting his—

BB: No, he's still out there, but he went on the – he's got subsidized housing again because someone else lost it. I just got it too.

CC: Oh, you did too? Really?

BB: Yeah, we were both in the – I moved into Foundation House in April and uh, last April, and he was there most of that time.

CC: Oh, that's great because he just went to visit his family in Saskatchewan actually. His mum's not doing too well, his birth mother that he found what, five years ago or something.

BB: Yeah, I've been following the story on Facebook.

CC: Yeah, I'm on Facebook with him of course too. Oh, that's great. Yeah [name]'s a real sweetheart.

BB: Yeah, he is. He was kind of the house mother of the house.

CC: I can see that.

BB: Yeah, I kind of took over that position when he left.

CC: Yeah, when I got subsidized housing, it was just at the right time, just at the right time. I had no money and I had to move out of my Aunt's house because she passed away and my cousins wanted to sell the house, and I had nowhere to go. But I moved into the Chelsea downtown, and the lady there, she loves gay men, and her husband, and she said, "It looks like you don't have any money, Colin." I said, "Oh, I can do it, you know, blah blah blah..." And I didn't have

money. And all of sudden Michael phoned me up and he said, “I loved your application.” I just spilled my guts, and he said, “I have a space just opened up,” and I talk with [name], he says, “Well, that’s gotta be my space.”

BB: Oh, Mike Casson?

CC: Michael, that does the cheques usually, if Penny’s not doing ‘em?

BB: Yeah.

CC: Yeah. Funny story though, I’ll tell you this but you can’t say anything, okay? Oh wait—it’s on tape! I’ll wait till you turn it off.

BB: It can be edited.

AH: Just wait ‘till it’s over. [laughter] You mentioned—you mentioned out there, you had done something with the Pride parade?

CC: No, well there’s – we’re trying to figure out who actually started Pride for sure. I’ve been interviewed a few times, and the last one was in *Jam Magazine* last year. I was on the front of *Times Colonist* the year before that. So, it’s been David Tillson and me fighting it out for years. Uh, Barbara McLaughlin, she did a little parade down the sidewalk even before David did.

AH: This is Queen Victoria?

CC: Uhhh—I can’t remember. And Joe Carlson, he did Queen Victoria... Anyways, in 1991, it was just a few months after I lost Roger that I got back into it, because I was with the Island Gay Society before that, and a few leftovers, one of the lesbians phoned up and said, “Hey, do you want to do a thing for Pride? We’re gonna meet in Beacon Hill Park and have a picnic.” I said, “That sounds like a good idea. Why don’t I make hotdogs and we’ll do this and we’ll do that,” ‘cause I’m an organizer. So, we started in Beacon Hill Park in 1991 with the Pride thing and balloons and stuff and had about two hundred people. And the Tally-Ho’s would come by, and we’d wave and them rather them wave at us, it was a backwards parade almost. It was too early to do a parade back then, you know like it’s done today, it was just too early I thought. Yeah, so first five years, we did it there.

BB: So, it was just an event, a stationary event at Beacon Hill?

CC: So, it was a Pride picnic, yeah, but we were fighting who started Pride. Now, is Pride a picnic, is Pride a parade, is Pride a festival, and so on and so on.

BB: All of the above.

CC: Yeah, exactly. So then David came about three, four years into it and did a bit of a parade, and I didn’t even know that was happening, they never even told us. And then Barb McLaughlin did one down the sidewalk, because they had no money for police escort or whatever like that,

and that was before me. I did a huge cake at Esquimalt Gay Bar and I found a picture of it—‘cause I’m a baker—and it has 1984 on it, and I’d forgotten about it. But I don’t count that, because it was inside a gay bar. I can’t count, you can’t have Pride if you’re sitting in a building, Pride you gotta be outside, saying hey, so I can’t count that one, but I totally forgot I made the cake. So a professional writer, I can’t remember what the guy’s name is, he writes for magazines, David Leeham or something like that. And he wrote for *Jam Magazine*, it’s in the boxes you know, whatever it’s a really nice magazine, and told all the stories actually, so nobody can really claim, I guess Barbara can. But uh, David had to settle that it might not be both of us. Yeah, because they write in the *Times Colonist* or *Monday Magazine* or whatever that he started it, and then I have to write a letter to the editor saying bullshit, bullshit! And that would just piss him off. But then two years ago when they did a history of Pride, starting on the front page, like a big picture for one of them, and then the article started with, “Colin Craig...” and then started from there, which must’ve pissed off David, and then most of it was him actually later on. Yeah, fucking old queens.

BB: Battling it out over Pride.

CC: But he’s done a lot more than me though. I mean it’s so much larger than what we had, he’s been doing it a lot of years. And then Terry Froud, he was the president before then, he’s not doing that well health-wise now. It’s a lot of work that David does, and he’s starting to burn out, it’s a lot of work. I don’t particularly like how Pride’s done now, so commercial now, and it’s a lot of guys getting drunk in a beer garden. I don’t like the segregation of it, of a, you know, what am I saying, entertainment over here and entertainment over there, like in the beer tent they have entertainment and drag shows, X-rated drag shows, and then they have nice entertainment they hire over here, and so everybody’s kind of split. And it’s like....

BB: I haven’t done too many Prides. My first Pride I think was ‘98 or ‘99? And then, I really enjoyed it then, I mean I was just dancing down Government behind the Hush or the Limit or whatever bar had their stereo or speakers set up, and then like you said it’s just gotten so commercial now, I mean banks and stuff—

CC: It’s so large. Now in the beginning, the organizations that were in it were really supporters of us, but then everybody else got on the bandwagon saying, hey, we want some of that gay money too. And you kinda wonder, like, do they really support us at all, or not? And when you think that probably seventy-five percent of the people watching the parade are straight, right? So, if you’re a business owner, you wanna be in it because you wanna show those seventy-five percent straight people that have gay people in their families that we support you, and they may not at all. That’s what kind of scares me.

AH: Wanna shut this thing down, get the real story?

BB: Was there anything else you wanted to put on the record?

CC: Don’t think so.

BB: Any other little interesting tidbits?

CC: When I get home, I'll probably think of something.

BB: You can always email Ben and say you want to do another interview.

CC: You don't want to go through this again.