

“HIV in My Day” - Interview #34

July 5, 2018

Interviewee: Mark Leonard (ML), Interviewer: Ben Klassen (BK)

BK: Great, just sitting down this morning with Mark. Thank you so much for being here and looking forward to hearing your story. Just to get started, when did you first get involved with the gay community, or start engaging in gay life?

ML: When I was in university, in Montreal. Yeah, it was sort of very precarious, how I got involved. I went into a gay bar by mistake, it was next to the YMCA. And it was just like, a shock. And went home with someone and then he told me—I meant was my first gay experience as an adult, I went to a private boys school and of course things happened there—but I denied my sexuality totally. I was being brought up in not so religious family but a one that’s, was very ... conservative is a good word, I guess. Yeah, it was difficult. And almost a fear, and if I knew somebody was gay, growing up, I’d almost be rude to them—I was just—interesting because it was something within me that I felt, until actually I experienced it and then hey, wow, this is something, and the attraction obviously was there. And I did a whole straight scene, you know the women and all that sort of thing, when I was in high school. But that walking into the gay bar, and then he told me where all the gay bars were and everything. And there was a very well-known place called the Peel Pub, in Montreal, and I wandered in there—I remember looking up and down the street so paranoid—walked in and like every eye was on me, I felt. Well I was fresh blood. And it wouldn’t be sitting at the table as I was so scared I was just going right back out—and then sitting at the table was a bunch of gay guys, including the priest from my church—the cathedral, Assistant [inaudible], and this guy [name], who I went to a private boys school in New Jersey, very famous school called Columbus Boy Choir, and [name] was there, he was coming to McGill, just starting to study composition. Well that was—running into [name] was like old home week. He won the piano award the year—I won—you know, musically speaking we were both very gifted. Anyways, it was fate-able in many ways with [name], he came from a very wealthy family and his lifestyle was extremely decadent, from what I was used to anyway. So we went to every gay bar and bathhouses, all a complete orientation that night. And that was like overload, I’d never, of course bathhouses are another experience. And wouldn’t it be, you know his boyfriend at the time fell in love with me. I mean it wasn’t love but he was totally infatuated with me, of course I’m so very new and fresh to the whole scene. [name].

[And anyways, [name]. It became a very challenging year for me that year, to be exploring the gay life and uh when I did go back home it was all still very much closeted stuff back home. I couldn’t do anything, tell very many people. Of course I found where the cruising area was in Fredricton, all that sort of thing. And then, what I did eventually... I had a girlfriend. We were going to get married, I mean I do love [name] to this day, but the gay scene was starting to really ... and then she was going to Winnipeg to do her doctorate, and I was going to follow her. I’d finished my McGill studies, and she ended up going with someone else and going back to Montreal. But I went to Winnipeg. Well, Winnipeg was very, you know, hang out in the bathhouses, I mean I was just like exploring that whole scene. And that was where I [inaudible] you’ll see, so our history goes way back I was very close to my sister-in-law, and she was dying of cancer, so I came out here in seventy-nine. And that was very difficult, the time I was living with her parents. By that time I guess I was really out, and exploring nothing but my gay sexuality, and so, I

Commented [HJ1]: Psychological climate (homonegativity)

Commented [HJ2]: Gay community (Montreal, bathhouses, gay bars, spaces of belonging, pre-AIDS)

Commented [HJ3]: Gay community (Fredericton, coming out), Migration (relocation)

realized I guess, I'm gay. So, that was, it was a struggle between '74, '73 to—when about did I start—[name] came in '72. Right, '72 to seventy—that was the process of coming out, and being gay.

Commented [HJ4]: Gay community (coming out, Winnipeg, bathhouses), Migration (relocation)

BK: Very much a process, isn't it?

ML: It is a process. Yep. Late bloomer in some ways.

BK: Not so late.

ML: Well I guess not that late, no. Yeah. But not totally out until much later, yeah.

BK: So then you kind of have these snapshots in a way of various gay communities across Canada. You have like a little snapshot of Montreal, and Winnipeg and obviously Vancouver. Any thoughts on maybe how Vancouver looked in comparison to these other contexts, in terms of their gay communities?

ML: Well of course this is before toys, the gay scene back in ... well when I came out in seventy-nine particularly, there were many more options, gay bars. Faces, then Castle, there was much more visible gay scene it seemed back then. Bathhouses, there were quite a few of them, and, as far as organizations and connecting with an actual ... I didn't, it was just meeting people and trying to think back now who, you know I did develop friendships, some I still have. I did have a boyfriend who, we're still in touch, he's over in Victoria. But it was, I don't know when I became infected but my postie, the guy who delivered my mail, [name], from New Brunswick, well we became lovers and friends. He would hang out at the Castle after work. Next thing I know I was travelling with him, he spent a great deal of time in bathhouses. So, he went back to New Brunswick before I—he came out before I—I don't know when he came out, something like '75 or '74, when he came to Vancouver. But he left 1981, I stayed on till '83. He went back to New Brunswick. But at that point he didn't know that he was HIV positive. Of course no one knew, there wasn't a test till June 5, 1984, which is my birthday. But I didn't, so, but I was part of a gay study at Spectrum Health with Brian Willoughby. And I think we started that in 1980, I'm not sure, was round that time, to '83, and talking all about your sexual habits, you know anal of course—what you did, what did you take, what drugs, you know all that. It was a whole thing. Because the plague was starting then, it was all this mysterious ailment was happening then, people were just getting ill everywhere in the gay community.

Commented [HJ5]: Gay community (Vancouver, bars, bathhouses, spaces of belonging)

Commented [HJ6]: Diagnosis/disclosure (HIV testing), Sexual activity (risk assessment), Early medical responses (research)

Commented [HJ7]: Proximity of AIDS

So that was that period of time, hard to say who infected me, but I went back to New Brunswick in '83 unaware that that—of course there wasn't a test—that I was actually HIV positive at that time. And then I was on the board of the Canadian Craft Council. I went home and had formed a gallery, I had a large craft gallery in the Maritimes, that wonderful years that I had it. And then I was asked to be on the Board of the Canadian Craft Council, representing New Brunswick, which I did. And then we met out here in '86, for one Expo year. And I went to see Willoughby. You know just thinking... As soon as I walked in the door, Brian said that, 'well I have some bad news: we believe that you are HIV positive.' Because the blood was frozen, my blood and everyone else's as part of this case study. And then when they actually had that test, I came up positive. So, of course I was re-tested in '86, and that did show up positive. You know it just, such a difficult news to receive. I was told five years, maybe I'd have it to live. They didn't know then, they didn't expect you live more than five... Put your whole life in... I had to tell somebody. And I have a nurse friend here who's—[name]'s same age as I am, we grew up together—she's the only person I told. And then I had to tell my parents of course when I went home. Well that was a double wham-o to them. So that would be the fall of '86 I guess it would be, I went home. It was devastating, totally devastating to my mother in particular. Not only having to deal with I was HIV positive but dealing that I was gay. So it was a really rough—my father, he was, actually I heard later in life ran into somebody that was in the army with him said that my father was gay anyways. I don't know how true that was but,

Commented [HJ8]: Death and dying (AIDS as a death sentence)

dad, my mother used to always call him 'you're just a mother's boy.' Who knows. We never talk about that, we never talked about that with my father. But he was very, when I had a lover [brother's name] moved in, everything was fine. He just, he loved [brother's name], I mean really liked [brother's name]. So those are sort of roughly, the time frames sort of thing. Did I answer the question?

Commented [HJ9]: Migration (relocation), Diagnosis/disclosure, Lack of support (Family)

BK: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah. I mean the questions are mostly there to prompt you to share your story so—

ML: I know, and you're wanting mostly Vancouver situation.

BK: Yeah, but I mean it's always interesting also to get like, obviously people's stories don't stay in one place and it's interesting to see the contract between places as well.

ML: Well, [name], we reconnected our friendship in I think '85, he just walked into my gallery in Fredericton. He was in St. John, New Brunswick. And he had word then that he was HIV positive, because you know he was getting ill or whatever. And then I found out the next year. His journey was quite interesting. With [name]. He was the first to go public with the disease in New Brunswick. He formed CIDA Moncton, he was very political, many issues. [His boyfriend, [name], he never tested positive evidently. I don't know if that's true but [boyfriend's name] was much younger too. It was difficult, he died in '92. So he really made a rapid decline, and I blame AZT. Before he was [inaudible] and then after taking, because they didn't know what dosage to give, it was horrible. It was those days—it was such paranoia. Rooms weren't cleaned, he was just left in a corner. It was horrible, horrible how the medical profession dealt with him at that particular time. His death though was—well no death is pleasant—but as far as care and people around him, his family too, were there. I guess it was a peaceful death, but it was quite an opener for me. This is what I'm gonna look forward—this is what's going to happen to me, I guess I felt, somewhat. But you didn't... Because I hadn't really started any medications or anything at that particular time. But then, well I'm trying to think now, because I did eventually develop pneumocystic pneumonia, so things were happening to me too. So there's a local physician there who looked, I liked her and she put me on medications. But I had a, I was pretty ill, I even had last rites, the Archbishop, well I'm quite involved in the clergy back east. [name], he was the metropolitan, came to visit me and gave the last rites. [name]. So that was... an interesting time for me, a difficult time for me. Yeah.

Commented [HJ10]: Activism, Diagnosis/Disclosure

Commented [HJ11]: Treatment (AZT monotherapy), Early medical responses (negative)

Commented [HJ12]: Sources of support (family), Death and dying (premature death)

Commented [HJ13]: Death and dying (AIDS as a death sentence)

BK: And when would that have been?

M: I'm trying to recall when that was. Well, it would've been ... Trying to think because by that time I had closed my gallery, I had a school house... So it would've been early nineties—no—I closed the gallery '89, so yeah, this is after [name] died in '91. So I think it's around '93, '92 or '93, around there. And it had a lot to do with stress that was happening to me, you know, death of my mother. And that death was very strange, dealing with a asshole of a brother is all I can say. My brother is still, that's another story. And having to deal with the issues of my own, you know being HIV, and then there was much that I was having to deal with the stress. And then [brother's name] moved in with us, my brother came and visited us and stole, took everything including my father. Long story there. That was the most awkward time for me. And after that I started getting ill too as well. It's all greed as far as my brother. Partially. I mean had a little bit to blame with it, there's always two sides to the story. Because I was gambling with dad's money. But dad was the gambler, dad loved to gamble. So we would go out and... Yeah those days weren't pleasant, I got royally hooked. See after my mother died I had to go and look after my father. I had a great job out here, I set up the retail shop for the Canadian Craft Museum in 1990. So then mum—just before I set up the first fest of treasures I got a phone call my mother dropped dead just around Christmas time. So I said, 'I have to go back, there's no one to look after my father.' I gave everything up and went back to look after him. And that's when my brother came down to visit, and

because I had about a year where, because dad loved to sit in front of video games and-bbbrrrr-you know, well me too. We got back the first time and took him out to a restaurant, and they had one of those lottery machines there and I always, so I went over and played Keno. I won \$600 in two minutes. Hey this is easy! But it became a very big problem for, more me than dad. Because dad couldn't care less. But my brother's justification of doing what he did was kidnapping him and taking—he took everything, my stuff, moved it out here, with dad—was because I had abused my father with the finances. Which was hogwash. I got him back within a year after he had done his damage. And then I spent the last four years ... I mean dad had his last part of his life very well looked after. But I had to get lawyers involved. Because first thing my brother did was went and get power of attorney. All those issues became so stressful for me, and so, I just had, eventually what the greed and what my brother did to me was enough to kill anyone anyways. But that's what I really believe, when I came down with pneumocystic pneumonia, [brother's name] had just moved out, and then I was very ill. And I did that, and I had a count to like ten or something, it was just rocketing. So they did stabilize it and [brother's name]—I mean I was putting him through university. He was again much younger, there were many issues there with [brother's name] too, you know. I had a good core of friends though, in Fredericton, who knew of my character, who I am, and couldn't believe my brother. There's always two sides to every story as I said.

Commented [HJ14]: Addiction (gambling),

Anyways, I did have support and, and then I eventually ended up in Ottawa after dad died, due to a long friend who is still one of my best closest friends. Because he was diagnosed with cancer, throat cancer. And he always visits his mother in Fredericton every year. And dad had died so she said 'why don't you come and spend Christmas with us, [name] will be here?' So in conversation over Christmas dinner I heard he had cancer and that his mother was paying for him to go to Mexico for two weeks. And why don't I come up and look after his place for the two months? Because there's no need for me to just be in Fredericton. So that's how that happened. I had no idea he lived out in the country with a delinquent son, and two dogs, three cats, and a rabbit. It was an interesting period of my life. And [name]'s still living, and relatively well, though he's had many issues to deal with from the radiation. But they've really been very good friends, so that's support I had too. And then I got a job in Ottawa at the National Arts Centre, with a company called Arts Marketing. I was the best so they wanted callers, you know, what I've been doing now with the opera. And they wanted me to become a manager, which meant moving to Toronto. So I had done that too. I went after spending about five months in Ottawa, then they moved for the summer to Toronto with Arts Marketing. And I hated Toronto. The humidity, didn't like, Arts Marketing was not what it was supposed to be. So, packed everything up and came out here. In Vancouver. That was partially because I knew I would have the support that I needed out here. And of course AIDS Vancouver was flourishing then, and there was much, there was Friends for Life. It was so interesting because I was involved with the Community Arts Council. I was here in the 80s, and one of our projects was Parkside Nineteen, which is where Friends for Life is, and it was so nice to see it completed when I came back. And I guess the last bit of the puzzle was that Friends for Life and Diamond Century Place, but when I became very ill in nineteen-ninety, and that was a misdiagnosis from Brian. I mean I could've sued him to a hilt. I mean I had a reaction to Abacavir was part of the problem. And then, I had a great job and everything, but they didn't know what was wrong with me, and he wasn't around. So they just pumped me full of antibiotics. And of course in those days, St. Paul's was very unclean. I picked up c. difficile and he refused to diagnose it, this Willoughby, so that's when I became... And even my best friends said, because you know with c. difficile everything goes right through you, so I had no nutrients, nothing going. I was dropping my weight, I was down to crutches, he was exiting me on morphine I felt, Willoughby. He was—I was so angry, so angry—none of it needed to have happened. So, this is when I went on disability, and but Friends for Life was a great support at that particular time. I didn't have much connection with AIDS Vancouver, I really didn't like the atmosphere at AIDS Vancouver, back then. So

Commented [HJ15]: Migration (relocation, to available support)

Commented [HJ16]: Emotional impact (Anger), Death and dying (Illness), Early medical responses (negative)

we're talking, this is the nineties I guess, it was a very—you know, I went on their retreats so sometimes they [inaudible]—but I just didn't like hanging out that. There were just some people that were unpleasant I felt. So most of it happened at Friends for Life where I would go for lunch, and have a network, but I did have a core of friends. So I did have support here during that period of time. Yeah, so, we're talking about two-thousand, uhm... when I came down with the two c. difficile, about and, yeah, so we're skipping a little bit aren't we?

[25:00]

BK: That's okay, yeah we can go back and fill in the blanks. And that's totally fine.

ML: Right. But that's when I really became on disability. Very ill. And I lost all faith in medical profession. I went to a homeopathic doctor who was going to be my physician. Oh, and I also had a bipolar attack through it. I mean part of it was staged, through that period, you know being—that's another ulcer because I did have one out here, the first one happened out here. It was a period of my life well a psychiatrist, they diagnosed me of being schizophrenic even. Little you know, there was a lot of fren—I was in the psych ward here at that, trying to think what year that one was, that was traumatic. And those were—part of it came as a result of being severely beaten up. I was coming back from the symphony and, [name] asked me to walk him to his car. Now he was the Director of the then CBC Orchestra, and we both had the same piano teacher. So I [name] Mario to the car—and it was before Expo '86—so because we walked, that was quite a rough area. And I was of course well-dressed, and had a fair amount of money on me for that day for some reason. So these two jumped me and right below there was a hedge so—I was really, my body reacted like three days later into just convulsions and... It was weird how the body, I felt nothing at the time. But I had broken ribs. They were kicking me in the head, kicking me—I've never had such trauma in my life. I rushed around the corner to the bathhouse that was right near there, on Richards or something? It's not there anymore. And there's my boss. There I knew [name] was gay but, 'anyway what happened to you?' I said, 'Oh, I just got beat.' But still I wasn't aware of the severity of it. So he cleaned me all up and then I went to a bar. And I couldn't drink, my mouth was so badly swollen by that time. So that was a turning point for me too. And the episode of the bipolar happened not long after that. And, it also relates to my spiritual journeys, that's part of it, because I was not working, I had a lot of time on my hands. I was doing a lot of heaving readings of Thomas Merton, and meditative prayer and I was becoming quite a church retreat into St. James down here. And I became involved in that community quite a bit. But I started having, not so much visions—well it got to the point you had an energy field that was like, no one can really explain unless you've experienced it—and it's difficult to tell a psychiatrist of what this is all about. Spiritual journeys. I know how powerful it was, was when what happened—I was hearing—I collapsed—I was cata—like I could see people's auras, I could see the energy around people, and it was so overwhelming I would faint. I would go 'poom!' Now that's not normal behaviour. So, actually it was [name] who—they called an ambulance, took me to the St. Gen—as they took me I remember that first experience in the psych ward I looked, there I went, they put you into a room. And there was a woman there, with her back to me, but she looked just like Barbara from the back, who was my sister-in-law who died. I was on quite a ... eventually I lost all my speech, I couldn't talk. The only thing I could say—not Yahweh, that's a completely different part of my life—but that was a very interesting part of my life that enriched me in some ways. But it did result in me being in the psych ward, and they diagnosed me being schizophrenic, because I was hearing voices they said. Finally I was properly diagnosed as being bipolar, although I don't really never—because bi-polar is you get very low, or you get very high, and I've never had the lows. If I have it, I had an episode when I was in Fredericton later. So that was having to deal again with the stress of things, and [brother's name]... I was living with [brother's name] and dad, and I did a huge festival, it was the most magnificent festival

Commented [HJ17]: Lack of support (ASOs), Sources of support (ASOs)

Commented [HJ18]: Treatment, Treatment Advocacy

Commented [HJ19]: Trauma, Psychological climate (Oppression – Violence, Homonegativity)

Commented [HJ20]: Other impacts (mental illness)

they've ever had in Fredericton. Cathedral Festival of the Arts. I had everybody jumping, including a visit from the Royal family, that's we'll see—long story—because I had great connections at the time with the Lieutenant Governor at the time, Margaret McCain. And when she took over that office, it was rumored, that Frank McKenna had, the Queen was coming to Canada. Because that's a process right? And so when Margaret took over the office, by then it had already been done that the Queen was coming to Fredericton. So it was around the time of this festival that I was organizing. I got everybody on board, the art gallery blah-blah-ba-ba-ba. But what happened was Frank McKenna put a wrench into it somehow, we never know what happened but she didn't come to Nova Scotia. As a result we had to do other alternative planning, so we thought 'well let's get Charles here.' So UMB was going to give him an honorary degree, [inaudible] art gallery's going to try to get his artwork, so that's what we worked for. Anyway he came the following year. That was interesting. Because everything on those Royal planning takes time. My festival was tremendously successful though and Margaret was wonderful filling in for the Queen. And she came by the carriage, I was just quite ... I had everybody hopping, but I was manic as they go. But I got a lot done. And of course soon after that I was hospitalized yet again. Christmas time. Because I just—[brother's name] had left me, and I was dealing with dad, blah blah blah. Stress brings these things on too, well. But it's a very creative—I mean I'm sometimes too, they give you, well it's mostly for bipolar a salt thing—but psychotropic drugs are wicked and I always refused medications. And [inaudible] I haven't had an episode now, because you learn from each experience for some time. Yeah those were the days. Yes. But you really want to hear about Vancouver, so.

BK: Yeah, I mean, partially. Like I said, part of what we also are doing here is just trying to gather people's stories, and we realize that those tend to move around a little bit. But I probably will poke at certain parts of your story, because I probably will want to know more about it. Maybe we can circle back to kind of near the start of your story a little bit, when were you first hearing about HIV and AIDS?

ML: Oh that happened when I was out here in '79, when I came out in '79. Although it was a rumor that there was this—because so many people were falling ill... And it was AIDS. They were in San Francisco, it was back then when I came out here. But they didn't—wasn't aware of how epidemic it really was, I think. So that's really when I first heard.

BK: And do you remember where you were hearing about that?

ML: Well the whole gay community was talking. I mean they called it something else, people were coming up with all these dreadful you know, skin disorders and uh—

BK: The gay plague.

ML: The gay plague, yeah.

BK: Gay-related immune deficiency was one of the old terms—GRID.

ML: Yeah, yeah. Right. So I don't know when the alarm—you know when people ... The paranoia was unbelievable and the burden that was put upon the gay community, let's put it that way, in the sense of having to—this is just horrible language—that it's God's punishment for all. The having to deal with the big guilt trip, the whole 'it's your lifestyle, you deserve what you got' blah-blah-blah-blah. There was all that fundamental—there was a great deal of hatred to the gay community that came out of that, in the beginning. And it was—the whole thing about being gay too was still you're—I mean it's wonderful now it's being so accepted. You know, prominent people through history are coming out and who they were and what and now they're realize who was. So it doesn't have it quite—the youth growing up now don't have that, they have peers that they are, there's a lot of role models people can look up to, or realize that

Commented [HJ21]: Sources of information (word of mouth)

it's okay to be gay. And they're still an ongoing, I mean, it's not an easy path to come out. So it's making it a little bit easier. And my times, it was very difficult. Yeah, it just wasn't accepted. So does that sort of answer the HIV sort of are they.

Commented [HJ22]: Intergenerational dialogue

Commented [HJ23]: Psychological climate (homonegativity)

The organizations started forming around that time I heard—'86 AIDS Vancouver. But I wasn't here, I was in New Brunswick. I officially came out to Vancouver again in '91, I came out, as I said, got the job setting up the Canadian Craft Museum Gallery. But then had to go back to New Brunswick after my mother died. So there's that, I didn't come out here 'till late fall of '99 again, and I've been here ever since. So there are those gaps.

BK: And like I said, we definitely don't just have to talk about Vancouver. I will be poking at a couple of those spots just because I'm curious.

ML: Well Montreal has changed dramatically, the gay scene, from those days when I was at McGill in the seventies. And I do travel a great deal, I love to travel, so I've been—and of course the gay scene's always bathhouses are so tempting. I've had my share of bathhouses. Well just because you're only there for a couple days, two or three days. I've had some very pleasant encounters, in fact I did meet a—oh there's so many periods of my life if you're trying to fill it all in—but I did have a relationship with a guy I met in a bathhouse, who wanted me to move in with him. Because I was a musician by profession, I've been given a great gift and talent, and god given, I don't know why, but I have a very wonderful gift. And, John was loved music and that became part of it and then, I moved in with him for a short period of time. In fact, when I came out in ninety—but sadly John—so that, I mean, there can be a relationship outside the bathhouse is what I'm saying. Generally speaking, it's an anonymous situation, but I met some wonderful interesting people from all over the world. Oh, but the many men I've had in my life. They all have a story don't they. But I mean, right.

Commented [HJ24]: Gay community (bathhouses)

[40:00]

It's interesting though because now I know that I'm not—can't transmit the disease to anyone, and that's a very comforting thing to know.

Commented [HJ25]: Impact of effective treatment

BK: Pretty amazing.

ML: It is. I feel although I'm now seventy years old, my sex life is very minor now. I take it or leave it, you know sort of thing. Take it if I can take it, if the opportunity's there. And there occasionally is the opportunity, and I do look on gay sites, Grindr and that sort of thing. But generally speaking it's just ... hopefully for me I would love to have a long-term relationship to share the end of my life. But it'll happen if it happens, if it doesn't it doesn't. But I'm prepared for the end of my life, let's put it that way. I've been prepared for far too long—over a certain—but back then when you get the news and—what was it thirty years ago—you only had ... and death, I have experienced so much death. You know, with the AIDS crisis, with friends, and with Gerard... over those years. But those are difficult because this is the early days when you were losing so many people that you were friends and knew who they were dying then—and it's just like you're still here, so what, you know. I unfortunately have a strong faith. I see things, I mean, life comes out of death, let's put it that way. You can put it in the—there's always the positive to the negative, in the sense that I find when I've experienced so much death in my life, my whole immediate family and my sister-in-law and blah blah blah. So I'm not afraid of death, let's put it that way you know but you are also given a lot of life in a death. Survivors. If they can see that life—that light—another term to say light, there's a light that comes out of all that too. As long as you have a feeling that it's not the end of who you are, there's always another life afterwards. Religion is so hard sometimes and what it has done to the gay community too is pretty difficult, however, I go to our

Commented [HJ26]: Sexual activity (post-AIDS, hooking up and sex-seeking, lack of), Aging with HIV

Commented [HJ27]: Death and dying, Positive thinking (preparing for death)

cathedral here, our Dean is gay. It's all very open. God I've known gay bishops, but a closeted case at a church is pretty sometimes hard to stomach. They're so hypocritical, generally speaking. But being seventy and having to experience what I have experienced it gives you—I feel stronger than I ever have, let's put it that way. I'm prepared with what I have endured over those years. And I've gone through the periods of being the prejudices and the hatreds because you're not only gay but HIV. I've had people you'd never suspect would react that way to you. But there's always the door open to the people who have embraced you for who you are. They're the true people, the true friends that you want. And I'm fortunate to have many of those in my life. When the door slams in your face from ignorance and prejudices, another door opens which usually brings in people. You have people there who will accept, who will nurture you and bring you and make you realize there's always hope at the other end. So I've had that experiences many ways in my life, and a lot of them are in those death experiences that I've had. There's always another door that opens to seeing the wonder of this world. We live in a wonderful world. There's so much unknown elements, but everyday there's another learning curve. So I'm sort of getting sidetracked but I think longevity is an important issue. I mean I still drink, I still smoke, I still have sex, I still have a good life. But I mean, there were times I didn't have all that stuff. I'm not—smoking's a terrible habit agree, and I know—

Commented [HJ28]: Sources of support (faith), Lack of support (faith community)

Commented [HJ29]: Emotional Impact (meaning and purpose), Resiliency

BK: I didn't say—I didn't say that!

[45:52]

ML: No, no, but most people do and I do, it's offensive to so many people, but also the other extreme. But everything in moderation. And I drink I love scotch and I think that I have a quality of life that any day could be taken away from me. I know that sort of thing, but every day seems to be another gift for me. Everything in moderation I guess, but there are—what am I trying to say, there's been two guiding forces in my life. One big guiding force that is I've had some very good mentors—two—in my life that allowed me to stay on a path of wellness. I think the greatest strength for me is the gift of music, which I have in my soul, and I have a wonderful understanding that I've been given so much in that world. Classical. It's a huge world of music, and I'm very fortunate to have that, because it nurtures me continually, and I don't often meet people I can share that with. But when I do it's magical. And although I became very vulnerable about five years back, what was it five years ago I this kid, just a kid actually. And how did I meet him, I'm trying to think, I think I forget how I met him—online, Grindr. Yep. Who said he was a classical pianist. And he was taking a hairdressing course just a block away from me, but he was leaving in the Salvation Army Depot. But anyways [name] came over to my place and he was very gifted, he did a piano performance degree. And I said 'you're living in a shelter, [name]? Well, why don't you move in with me until you find a place, too--?' Not aware that he was heavily into drugs. That was a very challenging—but we had wonderful music, making music, doing duets and he knew the pianos that I knew, we could talk about little innuendos of—all those, because I have all that knowledge and that experience and that's sort of that part of is what... but then the drug situation, it was just bizarre. It was so bizarre. So that was difficult for me. Because he used—I had no idea he was living most of his evenings in the bathhouse, and he would come home and then he would just... I was working regularly, and instead I came home and he'd—you know, I thought he just wanted to get fucked all the—like he just sex, sex, sex—oh [name] no, I don't—it was a little challenging. He was on crystal meth but he just couldn't get enough of it. I guess. I don't know. And then, he got to the point where he almost died. He was in Stanley Park at night getting fucked in the bushes, and the person who—I had another person actually he went to because he knew he couldn't come to me, he was scared, he thought he was going to die. We was only half dressed, and uh, he said he couldn't take him in. Could you please—we're at Tim Horton's round the corner. And I mean he was just real terrible, evil. And so I called the drug

Commented [HJ30]: Sources of support (Musical)

rehabilitation people or you know the crisis line, and, I said where shall I take him, and they said it sounds like he's going to be fine, just keep him awake. But if he's not willing to get help, you got to put him out because I was just enabling him. And that's what I did the next day. And it just tore me apart, to put somebody, a sick animal out in the street. It's what I felt like I was doing. And his life has been, I have no idea. That took a lot out of me. A lot out of me. And he was tested, he never was HIV positive. Bizarrely. I don't know how that ever—I imagine he is now—but it was crystal meth, but his history. I became involved with his parents, I became involved with his former lover, I became—I mean he had a charmed life. He was extremely talented, gifted and good looking. And he got married to this rich lawyer in Winnipeg, took him all over the world they got married in Greece, but the drug scene was moving in then, and then he supported him for a while. When he came the baggage, so much baggage came with him. Literal baggage too. And I was so naïve to all that. So naïve. Anyways, fortunately I've never had that temptation or need. I've had cocaine once, sorry. Guy I picked up in English Bay had cocaine. Oh I didn't sleep for three nights. But only once. I've never had any heavy drugs of any sort. Why should I, I don't need it—or not but I don't need it, it's just that I, I see the evils of it. I don't know why people destroy themselves like that. Must be nice though you know? I don't know, people on crystal meth seem to have a—they're all dull to all pain. It's just all, I don't know what's—what's but it, you wouldn't know how looking the way [name] was. But, brain cells are dead now. As recent as two years ago he knocked on my door and I ended up having to put him on a ... I called his parents and they came and got him and took him home. Because he'd be very soon another obituary. And heard again when I was in Europe, from his mother they had to put him out again, they don't know where he is. Just a dead end street for him. Sad, to see such gift and such talent and intelligence into the sewer. However, people make choices in life and you have consequences.

Commented [HJ31]: Addictions, Substance Use

[53:00]

So, what more, am I really giving you the character of what it was in Vancouver in the eighties down here?

BK: Yeah, I mean I'll probably ask some more questions, ... What did that, so you talked about being in that study early on in 1980 or thereabouts—

ML: Either 1980 I think it started or '79, round that time—I came out in '79, I think it was '80 or '81, yes, right. I was part of it only for two years, but I don't know how often, was it monthly? I don't remember really. We would come and fill out a form of what all our sexual partners we had, what we did, and any drugs we took, blah blah blah, you know, that'd be interesting to see that study now. I don't know where—

BK: Did they draw blood every time, or sometimes?

ML: They drew blood yes. Yeah, yeah.

BK: And do you recall what that study was called? I'm sure I could find it out but—

ML: Well Willoughby was part of it, it was coming out of St. Paul's, there was another doctor and so we're talking about—it was a study with gay men and their sexual habits, back in the early eighties. I don't know if it had a name or whatever.

Commented [HJ32]: Early medical responses (research)

BK: And at that time was the epidemic already starting to show up in Vancouver—

ML: Yep.

BK: --like you actually were seeing people that were getting sick, or?

ML: Yep. Yep. Yeah, I don't know when the crisis alarm was put off what, in the late seventies?

BK: Maybe in some place, I think often it was a little bit later.

ML: Of course they were blaming some Canadian pilot or something.

BK: Yeah, Patient Zero. Who actually lived here for a little while, interestingly, in Vancouver. Was not patient zero of course, but—

ML: Right. Well, this study that we're doing here at Momentum right now, it's a lot of the questions—mostly about condoms, which is so bloody boring, I always skip all those questions, it's ridiculous, but community associations that you go to for support and the gay bar, that sort of thing. And I myself personally, I don't feel I'm part of the identified gay community, because my life, my closest friends are all straight, pretty well. Of course maybe three or four are gay, but I mean I have a pretty full life outside of the—I'm you know, the average joe, coffee shop, all the stuff that's offered by PWA. I don't feel comfortable being around people with all they're saying the gay issues. That's me. That's me. I don't—I mean, they're vicious people. Some of them. In the sense of gossip, they're all just like ooooh—no I don't want have any of these, that kind of you know. I've been very fortunate to go to Loon Lake though, out of PWA. I've been twice, three times. Three times I think, yeah. And that's cause you meet—there's a mixture of women and men, as there is here too, all with the same issue of dealing with HIV and AIDS. And I have met some really interesting people at these retreats. At a time when I needed that support, and I feel now that I am in a position to give that support to someone else and my experiences through life. I haven't had too many come that have come into my life that are dealing with the issues of being HIV positive. But I met a few people—well I met this one guy at the retreat named [name]—what a manipulator. He was only here on a work visa from Croatia for a year. He ended up at this Loon Lake retreat. But he lived with me after that and then we met in Europe. I'm constantly—we're Skyping together all the time—his life, and his being—his lifestyle too is pretty promiscuous. But he's honestly, he calls me grandpa. And what [name] just turned thirty-seven? Pfffft... ha ha! Yeah. But I've met some people, I met [name]... I have a friend you'll meet him Thursday, we go way back from the early days of Winnipeg. In fact I was the one that he—he denies it—but he was in complete denial about his HIV. But we've never had sex. [friend's name] and I, it's the oddest. I mean, we've been naked and been to bed together all the time. Uh, we travel together everywhere. But what I enjoy most about [name]—uh he's very bright, intelligent, and he's very interesting, he's got his doctorate in urban studies and he finds interesting places to go to. But we live opposite lives, I'm a real home-body and he's totally undomesticated. Utterly. He doesn't even know how to cook and he eats junk food and all that. In all sense of his outward appearance, wearing socks with holes, but he's also a very kind person. He had a lover who died of AIDS. He's also very—he doesn't suffer fools, let's put it that way. I mean he's well read, that sort of thing. I enjoy his company, we travel—and we've travelled a lot together, recently. So when he went on disability, of course he is still on disability. So I think he's probably—although I have met people through friends for life that were HIV and given me support. Yep.

[1:00:00]

BK: But most of your support, since early in the epidemic, sounds mostly through friends? And partner—well not partner, but mostly your friends, as opposed to an AIDS service organization?

ML: Well in Fredericton when I was going through that challenging time with [brother's name] and my father, I was very close to the Dean of Nursing, and her husband. Uh, [last name]. Very accepting—[woman's name] was wonderful, [man's name] not so. Although [man's name], is a musical connection with [man's name]. But I was not always been fortunate to have support when we were... and I think I

Commented [HJ33]: Gay community (Lack of)

Commented [HJ34]: Sources of support (ASOs)

related earlier I find the church, my spiritual life has always given me a certain strength when I'm ... So those two paths that I have always kept me upright when things are low. But it's interesting in life, you know, you'll get back what you've given. And I have been—I'm a pretty kind hearted, giving person and I find so much of this generation so selfish. So self-centred. But I do have I think most important—you can't do this alone. You have to have support and friendships. I guess those paths, those people I have had in my life. But things are so—now it's so much easier—I mean back in those early days compliance—after coming down with pneumocystic pneumonia they pile you down—I was given just bizarre drugs. And you know, some with food, some without. And now it's down to one pill evidently. I don't have that, I take three a day. Just seeing the changes over the period of time, of course it's—and I'm, as far as I'm concerned like PWA and AIDS Vancouver are obsolete now. I don't they why they're—I know why they're existing—but I don't really feel, it's not a life-threatening illness, like there's so much, like it was before. It's not a critical thing. There's u globally there's many issues they have to deal with but locally here now, where gay life with HIV is so accepted, and it's no longer a death threat. I mean it's manageable illness.

Commented [HJ35]: Treatment (modern cocktail, cocktail)

Commented [HJ36]: Impact of effective treatment

BK: What has that meant for you personally, that change what HIV means? How has that impacted you on a more personal level?

ML: Well it certainly takes away the elements of fear and the elements of feeling ostracized or guilt. I would say, not guilt, no guilt doesn't really come in, guilt's from the other issues. It's uh, there's now hope, which wasn't there before. Yep.

Commented [HJ37]: Emotional Impact (fear, hope)

BK: Has the stigma gone away?

ML: No. For me, yes. But no, it will never go away, for a lot of people for a long time. Especially the movements that are now happening in the states and we've got to have our radar up all the time now. There's a strong movement out there now that could be scary in the future. I can't believe that somebody like Trump would get—what am I trying to say... whenever there's a turmoil and changes and everything, people have to find scapegoats to accept that, it has to do because of this because of that. And you know, gay-bashing and gays, and that's lifestyle blah blah blah, will always take a long time for that ever to be accepted. It's certainly improved but I feel fortunate that, no, for me... I don't tell people I'm gay, but if they ask I say yes. A lot of them know anyways. I said what do you mean? Well you're so gay! What! I'm just me.

BK: You must've encountered a lot of stigma in the mid-eighties.

ML: Oh yes.

B: What did that—do you have any thoughts on what that looked like, where that was coming from?

M: Well it's... whenever you're dealing with ignorance, I mean I had perfect example, the nurse I told about my HIV status had a brother, who moved back to east to be near [inaudible]. I was unaware that my mother told his step-mother that was HIV positive, totally unaware. My mother had been dead, I didn't know who she told. And it was [name] the wicked step-mother. And he married a nurse, a psych nurse actually, because [name] told because he was ... I found him a place to live near me and my school house blah blah. Then we were all, sharing everything every weekend meals blah blah blah, and then [name] and all her gossip she said 'you know he's HIV positive.' Gay wasn't an issue, HIV positive was, and he named his second daughter after his gay friend, [name], so being gay wasn't an issue but HIV. They freaked out, totally freaked out. They moved away and their sister—I went over with a gift you see, for his [name] their oldest girl and right after this—hers is June fourth—and Ruth told her two to three days

before this, about my status. They wouldn't even let me in the door. I said, 'What is going on here [name]?' And his wife grabs the other one, [daughter's name], and runs upstairs. That's pretty hard to you know, take. But I said, 'who told you, did [name] tell you?' And then when he found out that his is the one that knew about it, he stopped talking to his sister. You know he was so angry, for [name] not telling him. Those were those days. We're not talking now, it's another issue, but the HIV thing is now not an issue. And I had it at church. There were people who said, 'you shouldn't go to the communion anymore. You should stay...' That was a pretty hard rough one to deal with, you know, sharing the cup and the thing with. So I've had my share of that, yes, of stigma and. But not so much, I don't tell too many. I recently told them at work, like, this woman there, because she has health issues and it somewhere came out, I thought she already knew. She understands. There's no need of people needing to know, generally speaking, it's none of their business. But I don't—back then if you told someone you're—[gasp--gasp] keep away from him. You know, there was a lot of terrible loneliness and sadness come out of that. Of people who you thought were your friends would turn their back and would have nothing to do with. You know being gay is one thing but the HIV positive well—you know stay away from—there's too mu—there was a lot of fear. Even in the medical profession, no one. We have come a long way, let's put it that way.

Commented [HJ38]: Diagnosis/Disclosure (Disclosure – Forced)

B: Was that stigma pretty prevalent within the gay community early on too?

M: Oh yes, there was always that unknown element of—I don't really remember so much of that. I mean, I had sex in bathhouses I guess, I had some—but I had a lover, [name]. He knew my status and we always had protected sex. But there is a lot of you people who were—would keep you—I sense that anyways, I could be—maybe it's just paranoia, you know rumors that he's HIV positive. But personally, I don't feel I can recall too many instances where I felt that, I only felt that in the larger picture of close friends, you know the ones I just told you about, the church. No then I was on the board of AIDS Van—AIDS Fredric—AIDS Vancouver. Not AIDS Vancouver sorry. Not on the board of that. I was on the boards of New Brunswick, in Fredericton. So I was pretty out in their faces in my hometown, being on the board. Then I got other people on the board, I was quite active. So I've done my duty on that part of it, at a certain level. But.

Commented [HJ39]: Psychological climate (stigma)

Commented [HJ40]: Emotional impact (Loneliness), Lack of Support

BK: So you were involved in some ASO's in Fredericton in the nineties?

ML: In Fredericton... Uh, no, that would've been in the... Yeah late nineties I guess it was, or—no, I still had my gallery. So it would've been, I felt—around, hmm it would've sorry—it was after [name] died. So that was in '91. 1990 he died. So then I became involved, he, well sort of indirectly I got involved. Well he was involved—he formed CIDA Moncton, and after his death I got very involved with CIDA Moncton helping them. We did a tribute, we did a blank—you know a quilt, for [name] and uhm—which is I believe in the office there. So when I came back to—because of my involvement with CIDA Moncton, resulted in me getting on the board of, I think it was, yeah, how I got on the board of AIDS New Brunswick, out of Fredericton.

Commented [HJ41]: Activism (AIDS Service Organizations, AIDS Quilt)

BK: But that still wasn't like the primary place where you were seeking support?

ML: No, not necessarily. I had a good support network around me that particular time, but I got to know [name] quite well who was the president of AIDS New Brunswick. I got to know a couple of the board members through them then. I guess I had support there too, and I felt I had something I could contribute. And then, be cause I was very high-profile in my hometown and everybody knew who I was. I had an amazing gallery, was the largest gallery in the Maritimes. Craft gallery. I did twenty-eight shows. I was quite connected with the office of the Lieutenant Governor, because I would have important people open my gallery shows, that sort of thing. And Margaret McCain, ah, what a wonderful, and she paid my rent

for two whole years after—amazing woman she was Lieutenant Governor for a short period of time. She's the, McCain foods, you know, extremely wealthy, and she has a gay daughter. She gave what's his name—the gay minister in Toronto like a million and a half. But Margaret, she's a wonderful person, she's up in her eighties now. But she, very open, knew I was gay, knew I was HIV positive.. So any other—what time is it now?

[1:15:30]

BK: We've still got a few minutes I think.

ML: Anything more you want to know? Anything in particular? There must be standard questions you're trying to get out of people.

BK: Yeah, we tend to touch on a lot of them just in the course of our conversations. I was curious what was Friends for Life doing at the time, I think you said around 1990 you were—when?

ML: Well I'm trying to think of how I ended up getting involved with Friends for Life. This when the period I had c.difficile, I was so weak, and that was the closest to go Friends for Life. I mean they've had their ups and downs of people too, of staff and all those issues. And then the Dr. Peter's Centre appeared, which is a different approach, but I think there's an alternative with homeopathic and alternative with massages and the meals were wonderful, they had wonderful ... I remember not being able to eat then you know with everything going right through you. But, I did have supportive friends that were going to Friends for Life. And it was the atmosphere I think that was in there more. I felt more comfortable going to Friends for Life than going, let's say to AIDS Vancouver, during those days.

Commented [HJ42]: Sources of support (AIDS Service Organizations)

BK: And why was that—yeah, why was that exactly?

ML: I think I told you, partially because of, well it was the old building you had to—I don't really... I mean I don't want to feel—I don't know ... I had found there was too many politics that were involved and too many people that were just—security was just bizarre, in the sense of it was gossip, which will follow any community, that I know, but there was a lot there. And I mean I owe much to them, I went on the spiritual retreat through AIDS Vancouver. With Gary, wonderful guy. Gary Patterson, terrific guy. And uh, what's his name came along, his partner, you know, councilman. So those spiritual retreats and also Loon Lake. So don't get me wrong, but as far as just going and hanging out, which many did, I overall didn't find the atmosphere there as comfortable as I felt at Friends for Life.

BK: Yeah I was just a little curious about that. Did it also have to do with the fact that their clientele was changing at all or—

ML: Well that also happened later. Definitely.

BK: Okay. Because Friends for Life my impression is that, I mean it's located in the West End and it kind of serves guys in the West End, right? For the most part?

ML: Well now it's not so either—it's now open to—I don't know what the ratio would be but it's almost fifty-fifty I'm sure [inaudible] of cancer, and a lot of women go there now, so you're not sitting around with a bunch of gay men.

BK: But in the early days?

ML: Early days it was mostly men. Of course what's-his-name founded it, what was his name? Lorne Mayencourt. Didn't have much use for that man—sorry—he had it in his house. Well I can remember two

Commented [HJ43]: Other communities (women), changing demographics

or three instances—I heard later, you know—he was having—it’s sometimes difficult to put your judgment hat on, and your discretion but he was having flings with some of these people. When they’re dying—he wasn’t there to say [inaudible]—I mean he was using, I felt he was using a lot of young people, or people that, in those early days. Because I’d hear these stories afterwards, and then he would just drop them. Because I’m trying to think who—mostly this one person in particular, he’s dead now—but I would visit him in Dr. Peter’s Centre—I think that was the part of Friends for Life also was the people I met who are now dead, women and men, their journey, becoming part of that journey. And sharing that journey. And it’s ongoing, I just lost [name]. Sweet, sweet man. He had cancer he wasn’t even gay. But, knowledgeable of the arts and—but he just loved the atmosphere at Friends for Life and there’s a certain, I mean settings there too. Don’t find that in that AIDS Vancouver so much. Many problems with staff though.

Commented [HJ44]: Sources of support (AIDS Service Organizations – Limitations)

BK: Yeah, all these organizational, structural kind of issues. And were you aware of any aspects of AIDS activism or HIV activism that was going on during this early period, did you get involved in any of it?

ML: I didn’t get involved but I was aware yes.

BK: And any thoughts on any of those activist responses?

ML: No, it was a need that was needed at that time. I got to know this guy in Fredericton, when Dad—I had to put him in the final last year of his life only in a [inaudible] because I couldn’t physically couldn’t handle him anymore. AIDS New Brunswick found me a place to live but I had to share it with this other guy. Who was the ultimate AIDS activist. Uhm, what was his name, but my God he was disgusting. I had no—he was using the whole system—I mean he practically buried—I mean the sense of expenditures—he came out here too and that was so difficult, he got hit by a car and that sort of speeded the end of his life. But he was great friends of—he was on the T.V. I mean he’d be—[name], [name], what was his last name? That sort of turned me off a bit after having to live with this guy. He was the most disgusting room-mate in the sense of being—I mean never looked, place was a room was like a nightmare. I mean that’s alright, you close the door it’s his place. But it was more of how he was using the whole system for his own benefit. He was a—sociopath? Not quite a sociopath. [inaudible] You know he was raising, I saw a side of—he was going off on all these conferences, taking plane trips here doing that all the—it was all for the benefaction of Wayne. Not for the larger picture, I felt. So that did turn me a bit off, you know. When I came out here he was here too. I mean, he burnt so many bridges back there. And then he came out here and then started—he was very involved in the early days here too. Anyway, I think he got dementia too at the end. God spare me having—that’s another sad thing, you know. Seeing this disease can develop dementia early in people.

BK: Yes, that was quite a common occurrence from what we’ve heard from other folks as well.

ML: Uhh Friends for Life I’m trying to think of, three or four that got dementia and are now dead. But seeing that progression is... I mean I’m having to, I’ve lost two dear friends recently who I was the principle caregiver of and it was dementia. Mainly. But [name] was 94 and [second name] had COPD she wasn’t getting oxygen to her brain. But that’s so difficult, because they go through the anger they go through paranoid stages. It was very difficult having to—I had to walk away from [name] at one point. I met her at Friends for Life—name—however that part of it was that she wasn’t getting enough oxygen to her brain. She didn’t have AIDS, she was there because of her life-threatening COPD. And she was a real fighter. But it got to the point —you just can’t—she would call me up, ‘what’d you do with my medication?’ She was so freaked out. And finally got her brother-in-law and her sister to get involved. Finally got him to have power of attorney. But she spent her latter part locked up in a care facility. And it’s just difficult to see somebody who—although both [name] and especially [name] was entertaining

right to the last minute. Although their mind is gone, especially [name] was always the person I remember her from the West End. Always giving, giving, giving. She wouldn't—one minute—you know I would give her a card for her birthday—and about two minutes later she's like, she found another card, and then she'd 'who's birthday is it?' She was happy and she was at peace. And I think Vivian was at peace at the end. I mean it's hard to say, but she had a period of turmoil, I don't know if it's medication or what has created that. But at the end their world gets smaller and smaller and you accept that and ... dementia is an issue that is dealt with a lot of the survivors that are long term, is one of the, you know, whatever happens to the brain with this disease. I only have a little bit of it. No I don't.

Commented [HJ45]: Death and dying (dementia)

BK: You don't seem like it.

ML: Well every so often I'll think, well what was his name? I can't remember, you know, but, comes with age.

BK: That happens to young people too though.

ML: Yes of course. Yes.

BK: Uhm, how has the epidemic changed the community. I guess looking at this longer-duration, this longer-scale piece, how has the epidemic shaped the gay community?

ML: Oh in a positive way or negative way? Well in a positive way I'd say it's created a much more, a stronger community that is now become very political. And they have moved on, that's all very good. The only negative part of the epidemic or the AIDS movement is a narrower—it can be very self-centred and not seeing the other community and accepting their views. It can be a bit aggressive sometimes, I find, and you know... I don't like that kind of persona, or what's the word, I don't know ... I wouldn't have become an activist, there's times for it to be needed. But I find sometimes they're just too in your face.

BK: And that has more to do with the HIV community in particular?

ML: I thought you meant—what was the question?

BK: Well I was asking about the gay community, but were you talking the HIV community more generally there?

ML: Well how the HIV has affected the gay community and has come out it these—you know fighting for the drugs fighting for all these... for money for support blah blah which is ongoing. And that's all very good and positive, but when it gets the other way of not seeing the needs of others, it's seeing—the cause is not mixing with the—the—not saying with the straight community but those who have other religion—it's sometimes too in your face sometimes. I find it, personally.

Commented [HJ46]: Gay Community (post-AIDS)

BK: Uhm, I realize that we're probably running out of a time so—

ML: What time is it?

BK: Probably about 11:35. So maybe we can wrap up for now, and at some point if there's more you want to talk about we can look at—

ML: Well I'm just curious because you do have standard questions right? Have we answered any of those? All of them, or?

BK: We've answered almost all of them, yeah. I mean it's a guide, right? It's a very general, rough—

ML: Oh of course, right.

BK: --and I just want to make sure that you get time to get to where you're going next.

ML: Oh it's just over here. Well thanks Ben. Sure.

BK: I mean if there's anything that you want to add you briefly right now, knowing the time, you're welcome to as well.

ML: Sure, well because it's the part that says, 'looking forward.' Is that to be in part of these interviews, or is it more or less, the looking forward part?

BK: I mean one of the questions we like to end on is if you have advice for future generations of uh gay men but also for recently diagnosed folks.

ML: Oh that's a big question.

BK: Yeah it's a meaty question.

ML: Every case is different but certainly this generation growing up has much more help and support than we had. But I think the one advice I would say to any no matter, is find your true self, and be yourself, no matter what the issues of others say. And find strength within who you are, because we are all a unique person, and you see the uniqueness in others despite what you might not like—you see always trying to find the positive. But most important is to be true to yourself and whatever you do in life. That's not always an easy task to do. But myself, I personally try to be truthful and honest, and dealing with others of not showing, of being—and you get those lessons through life when you suddenly, oh wow, that person's not at all what I thought. Oh, he actually is sort of interesting. Well yeah because there's reasons people behave the way they do in the negative way—or have gone—that have hurt you—and when you learn—I guess we're also talking about forgiveness. And that's a huge lesson in life is forgiveness. Because I've had a lot to deal with that in life, with my brother and... and then you see always the hope after that. I just feel so blessed, I do feel blessed to be my age, having the quality of life I have, having the quality of friends that I have, and having the lifestyle that I have. I can always find something that gives me—reinforces positive energy, and there's so much in life to do that if you're only willing to look. In nature, in people, and people get so wrapped up in their own negative sad world, and it's sad because it comes out in their behaviour to others and everything. You you read all these suicides and destructive habits of drugs and that people go through. I mean why do they do—they're running away from something, and it's usually themselves. Until you find yourself, I don't think you can give to others, you can't do—find yourself, be true to yourself. I think that's the most important thing in life. Yeah. Okay?

Commented [HJ47]: Intergenerational dialogue

BK: Yeah thank you for sharing that.

ML: You're welcome.