"HIV in My Day" – Interview 40

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Interviewee: Jan Joseph Grygier (JG); Interviewer: Ben Klassen (BK)

Ben Klassen: Great, just sitting down this morning with Jan. Thanks so much for being here and for agreeing to share your story with us. Just to get started, we like to ask folks how they first got involved in the gay community or started engaging in gay life.

Jan Joseph Grygier: Hmm, 1976, I was in high school, and I was having difficulty. I was actually probably having a little bit of a nervous breakdown by grade thirteen. I was not social, was very introverted. I knew I was gay and different, but had no context. And not really knowing people on TV or anywhere to turn to, and then I was eventually pulled into the guidance counsellor. And then they mentioned, "Oh, do you happen to—oh, are you gay?" And I was horrified. And then I—they sent me to a psychiatrist, which wasn't a great experience. And then after a horrible year after graduating high school, the anxiety, didn't know where to turn to—horrifying. And then I was calling suici-—phone lines, and they didn't help, people would say, "Oh, you need a woman." Stuff like that. And then, I phoned Toronto Area Gays phoneline, I spoke to someone there. I called again and then I went down—this was in Toronto—to the 519 Church Street Community Center and went to a Halloween party. I started meeting gay people there. And then I moved out of the house and blossomed from there and moved in with a bunch of friends in a co-op in the city, it was very gentle back then. And trying to socialize and understand who I was. Yeah, and then, that didn't happ-—there were community dances back then. I was very young, I was like eighteen, and at that time there was a lot of clubs and bars, and stuff like that. Very supportive back then. And didn't move into that yet, I was way too young.

And then people went out dancing, to discos and stuff like that. So, we did that, and then there was this smaller club called the Manatee which is for young kids, and it was non-alcoholic bar, dance club in Toronto. And that was a sanctuary. And then just community dances, there were GATE dances back then, and slowly socializing. And then I went to school, I started theatre school. And so, I was trying to understand who I was, so I moved out of my parents' house, didn't tell them I was gay. And that was—I was horrified. So, the anxiety was huge. And we were just all outcasts. People coming from parts of the city, from all over, small towns coming and collecting—that also a [inaudible] time period when people were kind of forming—collecting together in the seventies. And we kind of knew it, there was something special happening. So, the little clubs and stuff that existed were sanctuary, you know, once you're in, you're safe. So, we were building that at the time. This is actually downtown Toronto in '76, '77, '78. So, I even— '78 I was in the first there was a thing called Gay Days, and it was held in Toronto. That would be like a Pride day, it was very small, gentle, very peaceful gathering. And I remember being there 1978.

And because the vicinity where I lived, a lot of individuals worked for *The Body Politic*, so I used to know the people from *The Body Politic*. And I was young, not severely articulate, and I studied, I went to school at the time. And I just hung around a bunch of people who are part of that world, but it was such a small world back then, so everybody knew each other. Then by—there was a time when the event—I was living in the Bay and Avenue Co-Op and there was

lesbians living there, by ‘78, ‘79 there was a Anita Bryant demonstration that came up. And then, one of the—we all—we didn’t have the internet back then, so everybody called each other, and I don’t know how we networked it, and so all of us came together and broke off and had little meetings. So I was living in the Bay and Avenue Co-Op and I had a meeting in my apartment—I was very young!—and it was winter, and it was a woman called Pat Murphy, who’s a famous lesbian, she was there in her leather jacket, there was just a few of us, and we were trying to organize a section of the demonstration that was going to happen. And then we all got together and there was a demonstration, I remember being on the Anita Bryant demonstrations. That was seventies. And then eventually—so, I was a bit active, I was going to school, I was studying theatre.

And one of the interesting teachers was Richard Pochinko, and he was—he created a thing called the Pochinko Mask Technique, in Canada with his partner Ian Wallace. And Ian Wallace was living here in Vancouver and who’s passed away last December. And I got to know Ian Wallace as well and Richard created this amazing technique used in theatre, and he was revered in the theatre community across Canada. And so that was part of many individuals who were part of the world—but he died in 1989—and a major light went out in the theatre world. He was an amazing human, he just lit up the room when you were with him. And then one little part, by 1981 the gay steam bath raids happened in Toronto, and I was going to be there on the Thursday night, but I was giving a birthday party, it was cold. And heard about the raids and that devastated a lot of people. But that gelled many people to come together. And so, we all got together again and there was demonstrations. I was on the demonstrations, which were pretty scary places to be during that time period. And so, I was always kind of involved, it was pretty small so you’d just go on them. And this was pre-AIDS time period, and it’s a different time period, much more gentler time period, where we actually just took care of each other. You know, people had meetings in their living rooms, we just got together, and it was very much community-oriented. There was social interest and when they’re in meetings and demonstrations and stuff, I don’t know how we pulled together without the internet, but we did it. Now did I answer your question or…?

BK: Absolutely.

JG: So, for me, I knew I was gay but I was not out to my parents, and then I was—went to school I was out at school. And then I continued going to university and I studied and I was always out in class which was completely fine. And I was studying film and it was gentle—I was at Ryerson—it was the gentlest place to go and everybody was very accepting. Like very, very accepting. And so, it was neve—but I wasn’t, I was just studying all the time, so I was not a wild party guy. And so, I lived downtown, and so I was just a part of the gay bar scene. Just went around dancing, tons of dancing, and then as 1984 came, that’s when we started hearing about AIDS or a disease that was inflicting gay men. It was a—a difficult time period, because you know what was going on at the time, and you would shudder—you would, what’s going on? And suddenly when you started meeting people who tested positive, and then your friends. And then one person I know, a person who’s named [name], who was probably diagnosed in 1984, he’s still alive and I just found out—wow, he’s still alive. And I—his story, I mean knowing him, I knew him in the seventies and then tested positive, and he went through the most difficult time when they were diagnosing people. You know, you were kind of ostracized. And he just, I don’t

know how he did it, he has certain longevity in his family. And just carried on with his life. I was there as a friend, so you'd always talk and be there and be supportive, and have food and talk and hang out, hug, you know, care for each other. And then that was the beginning of many people.

So, all the people I knew in the seventies, we were going—we were young kids, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one—and in Toronto there's a thing called Gay Youth Toronto, over the years they passed away. So, very quickly, a lot of them had gone. And much more than what you would know. So, even an older man, a guy named [name], passed away. And then it just went on. So, it was a—it was really devastating. Being—I couldn't figure out context to put it in, I was still young and immature. It was tangible and intangible. I was negative, it's like, wow. But very young and naïve, and navigating the world, and trying to put it together. And you would actually open up the newspaper, which used to be *The Body Politic*, and you'd see names of people, and that's how mostly you'd find out someone you know has passed away, because you didn't know they were sick. They didn't know—"Oh, where's that person?" "Oh, that person." So the people I actually—two guys I went to high school with, which who I didn't really know were gay, I may have saw one of them once at a club, were one of the first—the first people I knew to pass away. And I was sexually active, I would be going out to steam baths, I was young, very naïve, but I wasn't as—not into wild intercourse that way kind of thing, and what's the other part… I'm trying to figure out if I answered your question or if you have any more.

BK: No, this is great. I think that this is like a good natural transition into talking about the epidemic.

JG: Yeah, there's some context. So, the gay community formed, it formed—it came together it gelled it. So, these gay steam bath raids hit, which gelled, which was our modern day—it was not, they talk about… oh, the one in the States?

BK: Stonewall?

JG: Stonewall, yeah. Well, I didn't hear about Stonewall 'till like 1989. We had our own stuff. Stonewall seems to be fabricated by activists who want to create a narrative, but the gay world was forming much, much more solid before that. And there was a lot of men, particularly white men who formulated that. And there some [inaudible] societies, and stuff like that, and people were fighting before all of that in Toronto, they were out here doing that in Vancouver. Suddenly, we use this thing of Stonewall as a signal, and I'm going, well, that never was my experience. I said, what was that about? And there were demonstrations in Toronto, the St. Charles Tavern in the late sixties, and I knew, eventually came to know a native elder called [name] who's a native elder who just passed away this year. And he was part of that, and he was a native elder who supported the gay community, and was like, in 1969 on demonstrations in front of the St. Charles Tavern in Toronto. And he became a chaplain at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, I got to know him there through a practicum. I don't know how I—it was an amazing experience. Yeah, in the mid-eighties, yeah, it was the most of that time is you're going through this period where you'll see somebody and then suddenly, they've died, and you just don't know where you're going. Or coming and going. And then you're just—I was just going to school and working and getting through life, but that was in the background all the time. And then it—it bloomed. I came out here in '87. I remember opening up newspapers here and seeing

what was going on in the newspapers and meeting people here in Vancouver. And I'd come out yearly until I eventually moved here and… yeah, sometimes you'd—there were people who like, they were like athletes, they passed away, partners—it was just mind-boggling, you know, to be part of that. I was also on some of the demonstrations, the AIDS Activist demonstrations, like some of the famous ones that were in Toronto at the time. There were so many so I couldn't remember or keep up, I just remember being a part, and just being supported by people and their families.

BK: Like AIDS Action now or…?

JG: Yeah, oh yeah.

BK: That organization?

JG: Yeah, ACT [AIDS Committee of Toronto], yeah, back in the eighties. And going on demonstrations. And then, so the families would come in whose sons, you know, were not well, and just supported us being there. We just gelled and came together, you know, and continued. And then my long-term friend [name] was concerned about—it was politics the way he was treated even within ACT, because they were trying to—they would adopt like say, identity politics and try saying, "You're oppressed." He never identified that way, so he was always perplexed. So, he didn't want to go for counselling because they wanted to introduce an ideology to him. And he just never identified—he was just pissed off, because every time he goes for services, "You're a victim, you're this, you're—" I'm going, well, I don't identify that way. So, he—right, it was the beginning of identity politics and social justice warriors coming in and infiltrating counselling. And so, people who didn't identify with that would be perplexed, so they would not go for counselling because they did not see themselves as oppressed or a victim. And that man is still alive. And it's like, oh, interesting. I couldn't understand him at the time, now I look back going, oh yeah, what were we doing in counselling, what were we telling these people? And why do we impose an ideology as opposed to just being where they're at. It's probably difficult for you to understand, but looking back now going, oh, that's what was going on. That's probably my bit of a grunt on that where sometimes the community has gone off the rails. It became very dogmatic in its ideologies, its philosophies. Rather than going, well okay, but you're replacing your identity as an individual with social justice ideology, so you're splitting people's thinking. So, maybe people who think of themselves as oppressed or doubly oppressed, well you're a human being, you're putting yourself into a plantation of oppression. Get out of the plantation. So, that's what I—my wisdom now, looking back during that time period, that's why I never got involved too much. I thought this is—these people are too dogmatic in their ideology.

BK: I mean, I think that's an interesting insight, but also in some respects, wasn't some element of identity politics necessary for these communities to coalesce in the first place?

JG: Of course, in that sense. But what happened was – is – they coalesced before that. We got together, did steam bath raids, we did that. But what happened was that's all we talk about is the narratives, and once you start believing that, you need to believe in other things than just that. No, yeah, but counsel—it just became something other than you're an individual – you're a part

of this tribe, you're part of this, you're that, you're pegged into this little mould, you can't be anything else except that. I'm going, well, wait a minute here. But that scared people from going for therapy. They just freaked out. Yeah, there's just—and things are kind of – it also gelled a lot of services together, totally, which was really good. It was like a waking up at the time. Even Pride, I mean Pride identified itself as coming together in 1981 or something like that. I never saw it that way. It was like Gay Day, you know it was got together. And then it's become something other, and then it's become something, and then it's become like the Gay Communism of corporate whatever. And I'm going people are not even going, they're just tired of it. It's like, okay, it's lost its creativity, it's become corporate, it's become ideology, it's become something other. It used to be a community-oriented coming, taking care of, it used to be a demonstration at one point in time. But we used to have community services, community tables, we used to meet each other, like have a picnic, stuff like that. That was in the early eighties, and then it became this big huge ball of crazy. It's was like—you know rainbows and unicorns and you know like coloured jelly beans. And then corporate stuff, and then people with their own social whatever, political bent, as opposed to a connection between people. It is but it – I don't find it that way anymore. It's just a little too overwhelming. You know, been to many. Yeah, and I think people have broken off into their friendships for many years, and they just cluster together, and they find it a bit harsh. I'm trying to figure out what other things I can say. I mean I can look at my notes.

BK: Sure. I can also ask you some questions and see if that prompts anything. So, when you were first hearing about the epidemic, where were you hearing about that through—was that through the *Body* Politic or was it through…?

JG: It was on the news, and on the *Body Politic*. The boy who brought the news story, who did mainstream media, was coming out that way. And then the whole Rock Hudson thing hit, and that was big. Was a horrifying time in the whole, like, Liberace way. And the Rock Hudson thing was—I wish I knew he was gay in the seventies, it would've helped me tremendously. Looking for role models of who people were who I was, I didn't have anything like that. So, it's like, oh, who knew? Only until now do I realize, you know, what he was up against and what it was like. That was very searing time period, very difficult. Um, so you basically almost have like, PTSD. You had—it traumatized everyone. Like everyone, didn't matter who. During that time period, I think in 1986 or a little bit later, afterwards, I met Jim Bozuk. And Jim Bozuk was a man who has HIV who was kind of an activist. And there's a book written by Jim Colwood called *Jim* and it was about him. And he became famous from that period, point in time. And I knew him, talked to him a few times. And he was very resilient and been through a lot. I remember going to the hospital to visit him and he was playing—singing and playing a guitar in the hospital room. Oh, that's Jim. Very extroverted. And his resiliency and his stamina was really strong. And he said, "Oh, well, you're not HIV, you probably won't become HIV. Just play safe." And he was just talking to me, he was very in—a lot of information came from him. He was in a movie—he was in a movie and I just saw him and said, "Oh, hi, I saw you in a movie." And we started talking and you know, I hung out with him a couple times. And then you know, individuals had come, and met other people. But that was very good.

So, some movies came out—documentaries we made of each other went out and that helped educating people what was going on. That's in the gay world but the straight world didn't have

that. And then eventually I had a straight female friend who became HIV. Her partner, a straight male, was HIV, and he could've been bisexual, I don't know. And then she became HIV and I took care of her, through some rough periods of time that she had, out here. And there's a time period where people were taking AZT, and then it was changed to the cocktail, or whatever new meds that were coming in. And that changed everything, so the people who weren't transferred to the new meds had passed on. So around late eighties, early nineties this was another segment—there was another segment of individuals who passed on, as opposed to the onset of the first segment. And if they were around longer, they probably could still be alive. I was found out—you know, you talk somebody one week and then, next little while later they're no longer around. There's a lot of those. And people who I—because I lived in Toronto-Vancouver, Toronto-Vancouver—I'd be away here and then you go back and then two other people passed on. But you don't find out, you find out either in an obituary or in the newspaper or you find out indirectly. That was very difficult because you don't know what context to put it in. You never know what's going on, so you're like in a war zone all the time. And that was kind of normal. Or you didn't know their family members to talk to.

Or someone—there's no frame of reference to a lot of that. But I was kind of more astute because there was so many years had gone by, so I don't know how I navigated that, but also, where you put all the information, you know? And in the eighties, I put myself in therapy. It's something I like, it was a relationship that didn't work out but during the AIDS epidemic, I put myself in therapy. Did lots of psychotherapy, and then during that time I picked up something called *The Colour of Light*, which was an AIDS meditation booklet, small little square booklet, Hazleton meditation booklet. And I would read that every day and do a lot of inner work – psychotherapy, spirituality, and work on myself, and building a foundation from the inside. And that I think was a turning point in my inner world. It almost like, it kind of like formed a whole other universe inside myself with different thinking. There was support on the inside. And because we weren't alone, and that was connected to the stuff that was coming out of the States in the time period. I studied film, and I could film, but my friend who is a long term survivor, Jim, he goes "Oh, don't make any movies about AIDS. We do other things besides die of AIDS." He just wanted happy stuff. And so, I just made a happy little student film, you know, just you're right. You know it was like, sure we need the doom and gloom, but he wanted fun stuff. He was just tired of all that. And it was very interesting to hear his resiliency and his perspective. Many years ago, I thought he's too shut down, but no, he had a certain way of thinking and it's like, oh, that's really cool. I mean this is like 2018, and I remember 1984 he was diagnosed and sitting with him in a restaurant. Now it's like, wow, you're still here, and I'm still here.

BK: That's crazy.

JG: Yeah, and they're dying of old age more than anything else. Yeah, and yeah, amazing. Let me look at my other notes here…

BK: How were you responding to some of that information? I guess on a personal level, you talked about working on your interior self, but behaviourally, was there any changes for you in terms of, for instance, sex? Was safer sex becoming something that was on your radar?

JG: Oh yeah, safe sex. I didn't really have a lot of anal intercourse because I was like not really into that that much, or I was just terrified. So, and then I wasn't drinking or drugging or anything like that, because I put myself in therapy I just started changing my life and moved away from anything like that. And at that early time, in that time period, like '86, '87, '88, and—so as the outer world was crumbling, I was working on my inner world. Because I didn't fit in, I didn't have HIV, so I didn't have a place to turn to, I was not part of you know, that world. There are services for people that are HIV. Well, where do the rest of the people go? So, I did psychotherapy. You know and kind of continued doing that for a long time. Eventually got a counselling degree and then I have an art therapy degree and then I did a practicum you know for a year at St. Mike's positive care clinic helping individuals with HIV and concurrent disorders, and I did a few years here at Friends for Life Society in Vancouver. And then I did a practicum at Centre for Addiction at Mental Health in Toronto, with individuals with concurrent disorders but usually at least five people in the class would be HIV. Many different things going on. And then my friend [name] who I knew since—who referred me here—since the late seventies, I knew him in the nineties. So, he was going through all his health issues, and being there for him, so always there for people who have health issues. Yeah, I just, I think as I worked on myself my inner world blossomed in a whole different way. I could tell you some of that but not on recording. It's just too crazy. If you want to shut it off and do it again or…?

BK: Yeah, we can definitely do that, or we could talk about it afterwards if you want – whatever you prefer.

JG: Actually, could we stop for a bit. I have to run to the bathroom.

[end of 18-08-02 JG]
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BK: Yeah, go ahead.

JG: Some individuals, kind of a gay couple, I knew one of them in the eighties, and then he had a partner, this was around about '99, and they lived in my building, and it was such a difficult time period. And he was, this person—I won't say their name—but was into trying to find natural healing and would reach out. So, they'd buy all sorts of vitamins and order stuff online—not online—but try ordering stuff. Anything from snake venom to like vitamins and whatever concoctions and they could get, and he could get for himself. It was very difficult, he's somebody who came from a very strict religious family upbringing. But he has—he was a bit antisocial at the time as well, and him and his partner, I helped them come across Canada—naively, I didn't know—but they were moving, and I had a chance to go across Canada. And they were like, because they felt very hard done by, they would actually go into a store and steal stuff. Like food, like in a health food store. I was horrified. You know? And so, you never knew that cast of characters of gay friends you have. Oh my god, you know. I helped them get to Victoria and I had to leave them, I just couldn't handle being around that type anymore. But he's someone who was so horribly—came from a very difficult past of a family, not a lot of depth and support. A very difficult person. And his partner was very nice and helped out, that was just—but it's their struggle, what they were trying to go through, trying to heal themselves. Trying to reach out to any type of healing they could get.

It was an affordable time period to live in but was very difficult. By the time we made it to Victoria, he developed like a breathing issue, or something in his throat. And he had to get a certain vial of medication. But a woman who was part of the HIV/AIDS team in Victoria, she was HIV, and she had a bottle and she gave him his bottle. And we were sat down in the basement for him to inhale it, which is not legal but whatever it is, - at the time, who cared? We were just doing it, just to help him out. She would just say, "Oh it broke," so she'd get another prescription for it, that way she can give it to someone else. But you can see how it was underground. And people were trying and helping each other out. That was not an easy time period. It was a very gentle time period to be in this city, it was very affordable and all that. But a difficult time for proper medications and to access prescriptions and meds that way. Yeah. And then people who had—you know they were—a friend who was a woman who I think I spoke—she became HIV. Her boyfriend was—but she had a hard time telling me, of all the people. And years before that, I used to say, "[Name], here's condoms. You should be using condoms." And it's like, oh my god, you know I—maybe it was too lax, she didn't think she couldn't get HIV, but she became HIV. Oh, don't use her name.

BK: We can take it out.

JG: And that was not easy, and the stress she went under, and then she was trying to heal her partner—this was before the real meds came out. He eventually passed away and she just continued. But when the meds switched over to the cocktail she was [inaudible] it changed a lot. It's changed a lot since then, but that was very good. Yeah, any questions?

BK: Yeah, I mean, you've kind of touched on a few of the things that were going on in terms of how the community was responding, but any other things you want to talk about in terms of how the community was responding on a lager scale, from what you saw from your perspective?

JG: It riveted them together. Many people came together. And then people supporting each other, I mean men, women came supporting each other. Lots of people became active in the centres, a lot of lesbians came, supported people. Things blossomed out of that, groups. I had one, not a great story, I mean in the late eighties, I was working in industrial film and video. Very small company. And I worked for a friend, and then I was on a little teeny film shoot, and I brought coffee to the camera man and to the sound man, and they took it and they just said, "Oh, we don't want AIDS." And just they threw it in the dumpster. And I was horrified, I couldn't understand what was going on. It's like, okay. But you can see the attitude. And those men eventually just started working on AIDS films. Follow the money, you know, but it's like, oh, you can see the ignorance. You can see what you're up against. There was such an outpouring of support at the time like in community, it was huge. But I felt ostracized because I wasn't part of something. So, I just didn't know where to—all thumbs. That's why eventually I started doing volunteer work at Friends for Life, at a point in time – oh, I felt connected. I could be a part of something. And then there are places where you go where they don't want you in. It's like, oh, okay.

BK: What did your role at Friends for Life look like? And what did the organization look like, for one thing, I guess?

JG: This is late nineties—well it still exists—it was a great place when it was there, it was very active. There's a lot of programs. I walked in, a woman named Easter was running it, and she said, "Oh, you can—we want you to do art therapy." Okay. And I knew what to do and I put together a little program and I would just come, and people would show up and I would just do—I was learning to do it solo, myself. And it worked very well, so I did it weekly, as much as I can and created a container for people with life-threatening diseases at the time. And it was very supportive, very laid-back during that time period. Very lucky to have something like that in the West End. Too bad there wasn't places like that everywhere, you know. But just holding a container, you know the set and setting of a place for individuals to come to heal, to do artwork, to do therapy, was very healing. Was also very healing for me to be a part of it as well, because I was connecting that way as well and putting out. Yeah. It was a very supportive place, yeah, it's still going.

BK: Yeah, I think it probably looks a fair bit different than it did back then in its current iteration.

JG: Yeah, it's changed. Yeah, I'm trying to think about… Yeah, and over periods of time, you see people in their younger ages, now they're older, they're all older men with grey hair now. It's different how life hits you, and there are people who are very young and body beautiful, and now they've aged and things have changed. It's quite different, and just accepting where people are at. Sometimes people help each other much more so, the characters in this city becoming active, becoming socially connected with other people. That helps big time. I know my friend [name] became very socially connected and always helping out and doing lots of volunteer work. Amazingly so, and it's the social connections that really help, help individuals, because they have support, as opposed to isolation and feeling ostracized.

BK: And Friends for Life was kind of providing a lot of that kind of social support?

JG: Oh, it does, it still does big time for those individ—oh yeah. Yeah. I got someone who was not HIV to do volunteer work there and he blossomed. He was someone who ostra—social misfit, he went there, and he was washing dishes and he blossomed there beautifully. It was great for him to be a part of something. So, it's funny how it's a spin-off, you know.

BK: Did you get involved with any of the other organizational responses to the epidemic either in Toronto or Vancouver? I mean you talked a bit about some of your experiences in kind of more activist roles in Toronto.

JG: No, I was a little turned off by the ACT—they were very hardcore activists and sometimes they were just very dogmatic and then they always – I mean, there was HIV and then they went on to other activist things. I was more in the human department. I did a year practicum at St. Mike's Hospital Positive Care Clinic which was very beneficial to a very small group of men who probably are not around—actually they're not around anymore. And very—that was a difficult time period because there was not a lot of services. And we created something. They really looked forward to being there. It was something. And just showing up, setting up a class and just being there, very supportive. That was a very difficult—'94, '95, even still, that was a

difficult period. Yeah, and then studying—when I was studying, I was studying at the Adler school and just being a gay man, being out, and understanding that world was very accepted. They were like, oh, that was very valued. Very interesting to be in a school where people were valuing you and not ostracizing you and then the work you were doing or putting out was actually quite valued. The school was actually at that point in time owned by a lesbian, in Toronto. They were very supportive.

BK: That program that you set up at St. Mike's, what did that look like?

JG: It was an art therapy program – it was run by an art therapist, I was a student. It was just art therapy once a week and it was set up in a hospital setting out of the Positive Care Clinic. I was working with someone who was becoming a Psychologist, he was very clinical. And I wasn't as clinical, I was sort of more outside the box. And it was just providing support, just being there. And then sometimes we took the individuals to an art gallery, talk about art. But it was the emotional connection, the real connection. I didn't really know that at the time, but now looking back, and then it was… And they just wanted to feel accepted. I remember an individual running up to me—usually what happens a lot is people will run up to you, or run up to me and they'll just hug me in the street, "Oh, thank you. I had such a great time with you there." Oh. It always hits you by accident. This one individual, and then he eventually passed away. Yeah. But just to have that recognition but to realize I was helping somebody, and they're very appreciative. Because they're up against family dynamics, life dynamics, living dynamics, health dynamics, and just to have the support there is really quite something.

Yeah, and even like, I did a practicum from 2009 to 2012, but you have to realize those individuals part of it were also part of the eighties. So, long-term survivors coming in and dealing with concurrent disorders. Addiction and mental health and being HIV or Hep C. And that really was—I didn't—because when you're older looking back you kind of know the minefields or the trenches they went through. And so, you have this bigger scope of just being gentle and supportive of what they're up against. Even the doctors and the healthcare, the difficulty, or doctors over-prescribing meds, stuff like that, and they get caught up in combinations of Oxycontin—meanwhile, they're like a thirty-year survivor going how do we help this person out? You know, if they miss a med, they'll get kicked out of a program. It's like, oh my god, what are we doing? You know, that person has gone through the trenches of the eighties. Or they don't have the inner dynamic or the intellect to understand even just basic directives, you just help them through. And then there's young men who are also hustlers, who are either HIV or they're, you know, and then dealing with the concurrent disorders like they were hustlers in the eighties.

Person I knew, there was person—actually this is a good story… I was very young, I was twenty-one, and I met a man at a steam bath. And his name was [name] and he was older than me and he moved in with me. I was very naïve, I didn't understand any—I was so socially naïve because I didn't have many, I didn't have friends in high school, I was so introverted. But he was a street hustler. And—but he was an individual who didn't have—you know, he had his own psychopathology levels of crazy, and very handsome-looking man. Very handsome, but didn't have social skills, didn't have work skills, and he was one of many who are caught up in that world. And then he became HIV, and then he eventually passed away in 1990. I remember

seeing him, I didn't recognize him by 1990, basically. I was seeing him—oh my god, that's [name]. And sure enough, just recently, this year, I accidentally—on Facebook talked to somebody, did you know so-and-so? "Oh yeah, that's my brother. Come for lunch." I had—and so, I got to talk to this man who's brother of [name], realizing [name] had a whole support system of family going for him. I didn't know that as a kid, so here I was trying to help someone out. And he was very difficult, very, very difficult human being during that time period. But also, as you do a practicum, you have other men who, when they were younger, they were street hustlers, and you know, dancers, strippers, whatever. And it's like, oh my god, understanding that context as well, and understanding where they came from, how they didn't have support from their family, they left small towns and came to the big city and got wrapped up into that world as well. And that's a very, it's a small portion, but that world exists as well. I've not really been a part of that but it's like oh, okay, very interesting. How they identified and how they navigated through life. It was not easy, you know. Any other questions, I don't know.

BK: Yeah, so you moved to Vancouver—well, you came back and forth from Toronto and Vancouver a few times, but then you moved to Vancouver in 1990 or…?

JG: '91 to '94.

BK: You've kind of given me an idea of what Toronto's community looked like at various times, but any thoughts on what the…?

JG: Vancouver was much gelled, it was good. Things came together here and because I think of the vicinity of the West End and St. Paul's and what was going on here, many things came together. I remember Friends for Life eventually was formed, but prior to that, it was still community-oriented. There was difficulties… There were services and I always found my friends, they were connected because the West End was really good. Stuff happened here. And so, because it's still a community and people lived in the same vicinity, so there was something, something came. Something was here. Because that's what I remember from that time period. And my friend [name] was quite engaged that way as well, and he had support, doctor support, community support. They knew where to go. Because I was not—I didn't know where everything was, so I would know it through my friends, oh this is so, oh, they would take me—come to lunch over here, you can have a free lunch because they want you to come to show you, or to give you a free lunch because they can't afford to buy you a lunch. Or something like that. So, it was good. It gelled here. And then the meds changed, and then it changed again. And then it grew that way. I was always impressed in Vancouver. I don't know if other people had different experiences, but there were services here, like people were connected. This was a long time ago, used to be some of the bars would have lunches and give-aways and gatherings and there was lot of support, community support in raising money. Bingo, a lot—early—this was like '9-… I couldn't remember which nineties again, sorry, that could be '97. But even before that, so as Friends for Life grew, things grew and money came and there was a lot of awareness that was actually growing that way. Much more than you could think. It was tangible, you know.

BK: So, lots of support, maybe a little bit – it sounds like maybe a bit closer-knit than Toronto in some ways?

JG: I think so, yeah.

BK: Interesting.

JG: I guess it's just the way it's structured here. Yeah, and it's also the people I knew living here, so that's why it has that context. As opposed to not knowing. And Toronto for me, like, a lot of people passed away, so it was like, oh, okay. There was just an onslaught of—there was a gap in Toronto that I didn't know.

BK: You talked a little bit about some of the activism that was going on in Toronto. Did you see much of that going on here?

JG: Yeah, um—oh! There was the AIDS Walk, which is a big thing that brought a lot of awareness—this is like early nineties, this is a long time ago. I remember it started in Stanley Park, and, oh yeah, and my friends, friend who was HIV, I became—here—who I hung around a lot, I would go on walks around, these are the initial walks a long time ago. Like start Stanley Park and go around. And to be very supportive and did that—and what was the other thing? I forgot, there was one other thing I was thinking about and I forgot. And there was other demonstrations I was on, that was here and I don't remember what it was but it was probably an AIDS activist demonstration going on. And then things changed. I mean, people—the world got on board eventually, so things change. So, there was that time period before and then the time period after. I think AIDS Walk really helped a lot. In consciousness raising, you know, raising money but also people got involved. How can I be a part of that?

BK: Yeah, because those walks became very well attended as well as funded. They weren't just a community event, they became almost like a mainstream event in terms of the number of people attending, I think.

JG: Totally. Big. And then, yeah, probably because just I knew so many people were HIV that I just don't know the difference. Sometimes you're like, oh yeah, okay, here, you're doing that, okay, fine, you're doing that, okay, fine. Yeah, and then there's also people who are HIV who do not get involved. They do not—you know they socially isolate, they're not interested in counselling, they're not interested in connecting. That's very difficult as well. There was housing, there's support systems, there was a lot more happening. Because I had some friends who were well-connected, they knew where to go, I was not part of that, so I don't know, they were like, more resilient. Yeah, I don't know.

BK: You spoke a little bit about some of the mainstream responses earlier in the epidemic, but did you want to say anything else about how outside of the community, what those responses looked like and how those changed over time, if they changed at all.

JG: Well, in Canada, the face of AIDS changed. It's not just gay men, white gay men, it changed totally. So… I don't know what to say, the only thing I know is when you go to places, people never understand how many people you've known that have passed away. And so, I just… Which is really quite, in the context of outside—which isn't really answering your questions but no one realizes and I think, there's my own history of my own reaction to all that, and trauma

and whatever, dealing with and processing that, but you go out there and no one really kind of understands. I mean we always are—it's amazing how no one really talks about that as much. We talk about helping other people in other countries, and you know, people who are devastated and whatever, but we've had that here, and how that has impacted individuals. And it's just the volumes and then also how I as an individual have processed that and continued to grow and move on and try to figure that out, because it's similar to someone who has gone through a war. You know, and it's like, oh, and we're still here. It's like, okay, and then finding other people who understand that, because people don't understand. It's like, okay, or they go, "Well, what do you know?" And this is the taboo subject—white privilege. They're all white. 99.9% of them are white, so what privilege do they have?

BK: Like, in terms of long-term survivors?

JG: All the people who died, they were white guys. It's like they were gone—poof. We don't talk about that part. It's like, oh, okay, they were the ones who had it all – you know, did they? So, we use that ideology, going, well, if it was another group, we'd all be concerned, but, oh, it's the white guys, forget it. It's like, yeah, if you open up the pages and pages and pages and pages, and that doesn't negate other, you know people of colour or black people, whatever, but it's like, yeah, this is what was going on. But it's like invisible, you know, it's like, oh, too bad, you know. So, in your personal family, there's not a lot of support or anything in the context of other places. Even when I was working there, when I tried telling people who were managing me, my friends use this place, I understand this connects to this, this connects to this, this connects to this. I understand the connections of it all, and then getting fired. Yeah, pretty weird. You can imagine like, the hurt. Yeah.

Or when I went to ACT [AIDS Committee of Toronto] to do a placement and they said, "You're not a fit with this community." I did an interview to do an art therapy practicum at ACT, and I just lived a block away. I said, I just live a block away, and they said, "What type of philosophy do you…?" I said, "I'm Adlerian and I do art therapy." And I asked a question about security, I said, "Is there security? Are people allowed to bring in knives or guns?" They were shocked. Well, I've had someone bring a knife to my class, so I asked a basic question, I said what do you do for security? And then I also said—I was—I like the philosophy of Richard Pochinko and the spirit of creativity in art therapy. So, they said, "You didn't use the word client-centre. You discriminated against people with HIV/AIDS because you talked about knives and guns. And then, you used the word spirit. We do not use the word spirit or spiritual here. So, you're not a fit with this community." Really? So, you see the craziness—what are they looking for? Then going why do they not—what language did I not use? What politically correct language, what identity politic language? Am I a white male, do you not want white men here? What's going on? I'm going—and then I'm taken, I get a practicum somewhere else immediately, no questions asked, going, and they say, "You look like you've been doing this for twenty years." So, how are we healing and taking care of our friends with HIV? Through politics? Through crazy filtered questions that impose something crazy?

So, you see, you go through not only the craziness of friends who have died, so when you go to help, you go through crazy. So, my—this is why a lot of people are not getting involved in the gay community. It's ideology-based, it's kind of the new communism that has excluded people

from stuff. We don't want you here, you're not a fit here. Look at Pride, it excludes. It's obsessed with an ideology, and I'm going, well, we've built bridges and now we're destroying them and going—but do you know how many people are not participating in Pride anymore? There's a lot, it's a silent majority, we're just, bye. People are moving on, and I call it the gay communism. So, you see every time you know, crisis happens we invent an ideology to come in. So, you can see what happened to me, my perspective, I'm going, oh, I couldn't fit in at ACT? Oh yeah. It's kind of warped there. Do you see my point, what I'm trying to make? It's like, oh, but this is just another perspective. I'm going, there's a perspective of people are not talking about this, they just shut up and move on. And so, there's other people are like, well, it's riddled with politics, it's riddled with some crazy people running it. But how does that affect the agency down the line? Why aren't you connecting this person with these people. I walked in here to do some—it's great here. So, that was an incident that happened a long time ago, it's like, oh, so you can see it made me retract from going out and being a part, or caregiving. Oh, you know.

BK: Yeah, you were speaking just a few moments ago about how we seem to have relegated all of this to the past and said this is like, you know what HIV used to mean. All these experiences that happened to these people that are still around, those happened before, but I mean it's still very much with people that are survivors, right? It's still like the trauma and the PTSD, or whatever you want to call it, it's still here and it's still impacting people in our community and our community as a whole, I think.

JG: Yeah, and then, yeah, you kind of wonder what community, what has happened? It's fragmented, people can't live in the same areas, it's expensive. Then add the stress, and then you know people who are living with their own life issues. And then if they become HIV, it's trauma, you know, where do they turn to? It just compounds it, you know. I just wondered what other communities are hit that way, you know, like fragmented. Or do we have empathy for some and not others? Or do we become immune to the gay community. We keep doing rainbows and unicorns, and I'm going, well, let's talk about the real stuff, you know, or the West Jet balloon at Pride or the Royal Bank or whatever bank, it's all this rainbow stuff. I'm going, you know, I'm going, well, what's really hit home, like what's real. I think it reverts back to the individual and the individual's experience and not to forget that we're individuals. As opposed to some sort of tribe with some sort of narrative that goes on. You know, it's who's this individual and what is this individual going through, you know, the impact. And what support is that is for certain people.

BK: Do you think HIV played a role in this shift in the way the community looks now? How did HIV change the community as a whole?

JG: It gelled it together. I mean, there was [inaudible], it gelled it together and people came together. But it was the HIV community that was supported, so there's housing, there's places to turn to, but what about other people? How do they fit in as well? So, we can see that how impacted the gay community but what happened to the gay community as a whole? Then they're aging. You know, how do we deal with seniors? Housing. Is not just—we talk about the gay community—is the HIV community the gay community? But there is very good things that happened, like agencies, community effort, people came together, people supported each other, they still support each other. Things grow into different levels, different levels of friendships,

whatever. I don't think it's easy. I think even now the context of things have become so expensive, cost of living is so high, so that's a detriment to a lot of people, including stress, financial stress. And then, how do you feel stable, how do you relax? You know, where do you turn to? Although there's been such an increase in agencies, even in small towns. So, it's quite different, those are the positive aspects that have happened. I don't know about the gay community itself, everyone's online, so just looking at their—but do they look at each other? Or do they take care of each other? There's a lot of clubs where people used to come together – they're not here—dance clubs, bars—gone. So where are people coming together to form and socialize? It's online? You know.

BK: So, it's probably other factors like technology and stuff that have shifted the community in certain directions more than say something like—it's kind of hard to put your finger on what the causation is.

JG: Well, it's real estate. You know, it became like the greed, gluttony, and sloth of real estate. And it's like, well, there's the community changed, so where do people go? I don't know. For me, I look—can you imagine being young and not being able to live in your community? It's so like, ugh. You have to travel far away, or how do you connect and how do you socialize and are you mentored by older gay men? Like what is the mentoring? What is the, you know. We look at other communities and we take care of them, but do we ever really talk about the gay community living together and being together? And you know, like—or do we designate a certain area for them? You know. There's like little ghettos but, Vancouver used to be different, the West End used to be quite gay. So, it's changed, it's like, oh, okay, but who's mentoring younger people, who's caring for each other?

BK: Those intergenerational conversations don't seem to happen too often.

JG: No.

BK: Any ideas of how we can foster those conversations? I think that's a big part of this, because certainly one of our goals in the project is to share these stories with younger guys as well in the community and hopefully generate some dialogue.

JG: We don't know. I talk to my friends, we don't know. Like, oh, I don't know how. Because when we were younger, there was a lot of places to go, lot of places to turn to. People would butt up against each other, know each other a bit more. Then it's gone through different stages. Yeah, I think what's happened is the—in the agencies, it's become political correctness. Identity politics have been given such a stronghold that people who are aware, who are like me, who don't want to be a part of that, don't be a part of it. We just see the craziness of it all. And they're always being spoon fed a narrative, or you're this identity, whatever, and I'm going, well, wait a minute here, we're individuals, we're other people. So, I know people who don't want to get involved, because you're like you can't say anything. You walk into the room, you're the white male, you're the piece of garbage in the room, that's what people feel like. The minute you say anything, it's relegated to your white privilege and it's like…

So, for me, years ago when I applied for film funding I was told by an agency, which was a small agency—[inaudible] of Independent Film Makers, I was trying to make a little gay film—that was I not… lesbians and gays do not create a multicultural group, there are lots of lesbian, gay films. And it was signed by an Asian gay man who just received two-thousand-dollars from the lesbian and gay community appeal. I said what's going on here? Oh, we don't mind giving you money, just as long as you're not white. And that was set up by the Ontario Film Development Corporation in Ontario. So, I talked to them, they just said go to their meeting and tell them your concerns. It was all b-s. And so, these people just took over an agency and took it over and did whatever they wanted, and then wiped me out. I'm going, well, you've alienated me. This has been going on, that was 1991. And I was concerned about how gay men were experiencing life, and that's what I was concerned about at the time. I'm going, oh, so this is how I get knocked out of another system. It's like, and the colour of my skin was the problem. I'm going, well, that's 1991. You know and then when I go in art therapy, the teacher would turn to me, "Aren't you aware of your white privilege? You've always had a government job. Aren't you a feminist?" Huh? And she was pissed off because I was talking about when the gay world was forming in the late seventies there was a split—gay men didn't want to be identified through feminism. Lesbians were forming themselves and people were talking about that. So, they see that as a threat. I'm going wait a minute here we didn't—so you see the politics involved.

When I was at a Queer Nation, this was a ten-year anniversary of the 1981 steam bath raids. So, the steam bath raids happened in 1981 which devastated a lot of people. I still know a lot of people who were a part of that. And there's a lot of unspoken stories. I went to the1991 demonstration gathering, and a woman was standing up on a soapbox, she was a black woman, she was talking about linking arms with abortion clinics. I'm thinking, we're not talking about the gay steam bath raids, we're talking about abortion clinics? And then during that one as well, I thought this is kind of strange, why aren't we talking about the individuals who were involved, who were thrown in jail, we don't talk about them. So, the activists talk as opposed to the individual. Then I went to the thirtieth anniversary in Toronto, the 519 Church Street Community Centre Thirtieth Anniversary of the gay steam bath raids. So, there was a lawyer there, there was Brent Hawkes, Margaret Atwood, and they brought in a man, he's a black man who's an activist, and the black man welcomed us as "comrades." We're comrades? So, I said—he was a Marxist. And so, they were talking about the activists, talking about what went on, and at the meeting thirty years ago, and I was at the one at thirty years ago, at the St. Lawrence Market when the steam bath raids happened. And Margaret Atwood spoke. This is in a movie called *Track Two*, I don't know if you've ever seen *Track Two*?

BK: Sounds interesting.

JG: Yeah, it's *Operation Soap: Track Two*. It's on Youtube, and it's like over an hourlong documentary.

BK: On the bathhouse raids?

JG: Correct. And the woman I spoke about earlier, Pat Murphy, who was in my living room when we did the Anita Bryant demonstrations, she actually opens in that movie. So, it's a really, really profound documentary. *Track Two*.

BK: Oh, that sounds interesting.

JG: Operation Soap. And it may—I can actually email you the link. And if you get to watch that, you'll see what was 1981, and I went to the thirtieth. So, what they started talking about at the beginning was, oh, white guys weren't helping out the black community, but we're talking about the gay steam bath raids. So, then a man at the end of this meeting—because they had a microphone—questioned, "Why are you always knocking white guys?" And a woman on a microphone said, "Remove the talking stick." A man ripped the microphone out from his hand. I was shocked, going why are we treating this person who has a very valid question—which is I'm concerned about, like, why are we just knocking white guys all the time? But white guys in 1981, they were just surviving, trying to figure themselves out. But there was such support with other communities like there was—and there was black people in the gay community and they were supportive of each other. Sure, there could be incidences, but it's the activists always saying the narrative, creating this whole thing. I'm going why should I feel bad about myself because of the colour of my skin? And so, an act of violence took place at the thirtieth anniversary of the steam bath raid, with Margaret Atwood, Brent Hawkes there. I'm going, did anybody care? And it was in the 519 Church Street Community Centre, an act of violence took place. If anybody ripped a microphone out of a black woman's hand, there'd be a roar. But you rip it out of a gay man's hand, a white gay man's hand, nobody cares. So, I don't participate, I'm terrified.

This is why everywhere you go, it's like the gay communism, the left eats the left. I'm going wow. So, I'm here, been out on the demonstrations since day one, I'm too afraid to go on them, because the left eats the left. And so how does that relate to the HIV community? Well, I've lived through it all, supporting people, I see how sometimes an ideology comes in and they're talking about something else. Meanwhile these guys are just trying to heal themselves and hold onto themselves, who they are. We're just spinning it into some other narrative, as opposed to you're an individual and you're valid here, the colour of your skin is just as valid as anybody else. Your pain is just as valid. It's like, you can't just measure… It's an individual, not on different levels. Do you see what I mean by that story? I don't know if that story helps you, but it's my perspective of what went on. And I was right there. Meanwhile, no one realizes I was the one—I don't really know who Brent Hawkes is—but when his partner walked in, I sought him out, grabbed him, I said you deserve a seat, sit beside me. Yeah. And no one realizes I did a good deed. But to be in those environments is too toxic. Because it always ends up going to some screaming match.

And every time we're always part of the Queer Nation, the activists, they always revert to "You're the white male, you're the piece of garbage." So, I'm talking and saying that many white men I know have gone through that, and they just don't get involved anymore. And like, that's the putting the words to the politics and you can see how in the world, like we're—how are people not engaging, how are they staying away from services. What scares them from going to services? Are they automatically penned a certain thing? I don't know if that makes sense, I don't know if you ever picked up on that. Because you're also told you can't get jobs, you can't apply for certain stuff. Human Resources Development Canada said the same thing, white men between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five are not allowed to be here. That's happened in the past, I don't know how many years, twenty-something, twenty-eight years. So, you're also

hitting a brick wall there, and then how do we do that in our gay community? That's my little soapbox thing there. Yeah.

BK: And then I look at some of our local gay organizations and they still largely employ white men, so I mean it's certainly not everywhere that that's the case.

JG: No, no, they do that. Yeah, yeah, although in the agencies, yeah. I was just saying the bigger thing, like that.

BK: Sure, yeah.

JG: We've learned to sust—like what are we doing to each other, but who are you alienating? And what money are you not going to get. The people well-to-do are not going to leave money in certain agencies, and whatever. You know. Yep.

BK: Did you want to say anything about governmental responses during the earlier portions of the epidemic? Did you have any insight or thoughts on that?

JG: I just remember it was kind of slow. They were very slow, so the activists were very good that way, doing that. Very, very slow and then the doctors, I guess it was a quagmire of crazy. And until—people were dying, and mothers came out during that time period going on demonstrations. Took a long time, yeah, much longer than you think, longer in responses, longer in protocol, longer in any form of responsibility. Getting on board. It just took from '84, I don't know to how long.

BK: And that was the case within parts of the medical realm as well?

JG: It was very tough at the beginning because people were treated like they had the plague. And then that changed. Well, it took years. It wasn't—it took a few years but then… Yeah, I was young so I just—it was just a little overwhelming, so I was not savvy. I was just, looking back, I can say things took longer but…

BK: Well, and you also weren't HIV positive, so you probably weren't engaging with the services in the same way.

JG: Yeah, it was more like I was being with friends and taking care of them and being supportive, you know, lunch, caring. Just always accepting, accepting, accepting. You know, those are the strengths that helped them. I wasn't frontline. Wow, there's so many different phases that were—wow. When I go wow, it's just, during the activism, sometimes they brought out these white t-shirts with a drawing on, or words. I remember that period of time—time periods—suddenly some people were wearing them in bars and whatever. So, the people who were out front, they're very resilient and amazing people. The ones who are HIV who were really raising awareness, quite so. I was a little bit removed from all that, but they were like the front lines pushing—and that's why I felt like the government took a long time. They needed to be pushed. You could see all the movies that were out, that were coming out during that time period. Yeah.

BK: Any other thoughts on your caregiving roles? We've already spoken about that a lot but if there's anything you want to add around what those roles looked like, or just anything else.

JG: It think it was—because I was like, in the frontline in the gay community, I was around the whole HIV epidemic since it started. So, and I was going out into the world, but when I was caregiving in agencies… I guess I had depth and scope, the humanity of it all, and where people were coming from and going to, and that was a strength, and that showed in the healing process. Some people are clinical, they didn't have that. And so, they don't—they were not the frontline. So, I was just right there with friends and then, it was almost like a living organi—like I was a part of that. And it's the awareness of what people are going through and then what people have come in contact with, and then realizing all the people I knew who passed away. Going wow. So, I'd always bring that to the practice. Just a bit different—they know it. They knew, like people knew right away when I was there. Oh, okay, this is cool. Like, I had one person come, who was not very well and he was just very happy to make it to the class, and he laid down. And I turned and went, oh my god, he died. No, he didn't. He was having a—I couldn't see him breathing, I went okay just chill. Everything's alright, we'll just continue with the class because he wanted to be here. And then he woke up, and I went, oh, he didn't die. I was horrified. But I didn't want to wake him up, because if he's sleeping, he's having a good time. I thought if he died, well, it's a great place to die, it's lovely. And it's like, he may—he was so happy to come to class but he couldn't participate. He was so weak. So, I can just, okay fine, just be here. Just very accepting of—it was always different that way. So, it gave me—I developed skills, and you know, a little insight. Because when you work with people who are very clinical, they can be cut and dry. Very tough that way. I don't know, did I answer your question or…?

BK: Yeah, absolutely yeah. I'm almost out of questions. I think I've gone through most of these now but how have your perspectives on HIV and prevention changed over time? Or around the meaning of HIV, for instance?

JG: First it was like it was taboo, but you also say HIV, Hep C, you know, I mean that's what people also need to be aware of is other stuff going through. And it's changed, so you know, using anal intercourse, have condoms but it may have changed over time. People are taking PrEP, and people are not using condoms. People are having unsafe sex. So, I'm more old school, you know, and I don't know. I just find it like, it's become this other world that I don't know what language I know is the proper thing. So many people who are young who want to have unsafe—unprotected sex, and it's like, I'm just—think that—it's not just that it's also Hep C, it's other stuff you can get. So, if you're actually having anal intercourse without condoms, what about anything else you can get? So that's kind of—so I don't know, I mean people are taking PrEP, they're taking many different things, and I don't—I tried understanding what that's about. But I can understand to a point. I didn't realize you wouldn't want to use a condom for intercourse, you know.

BK: So certainly, conceptions of what's safe or what's risky seems to have shifted to some extent, among younger guys, for instance?

JG: Yeah, and then my friends who are older are just like freaked out. They don't understand why people are so laissez-faire, so easy going. And like, and then include alcohol and drugs, it's like… So, it's the wisdom, it's just common sense, I don't know what people are being taught. But I've even spoken to some of the nurses and they're like—they're having great difficulty as well, because they're trying to teach people to have safe sex, or to worry or to be concerned. And then, there's many—but it's the person who's an individual who have their own psychopathology and their own way of navigating life. Like who would want to take pills the rest of their life? You know, that's really hard. Or the pharmaceuticals, what are they teaching? What do those companies want? Everyone hooked on drugs? That's discussions we have with friends who are a little bit older. We talk about that. I'm also afraid of saying the wrong, politically incorrect thing. You know? Like, I don't know. Did I answer your question?

BK: Yeah, absolutely. I think that's a jumping off point to maybe my final question, which would just be do you have any advice for future generations, perhaps of gay men who haven't experienced the epidemic in the same way that you have based on your experiences? Or like, lessons learned from your experience of the epidemic?

JG: I think it's just self-study and experience. So, talking to people, studying, understanding what's out there. Like, your own self-study. And then common sense. You're an individual. Just basic common sense and, don't you know, you can't throw the baby out with the bathwater, because I don't even know—actually it's working on yourself, as an individual. And doing therapy, and it's self-awareness and going within that way, is very, very important. No matter what. That helped me get through different time periods and help other people. And to be socially connected, with friends or groups. To always be socially connected that way. And follow your intuition, your gut. I don't know what else to say, I don't have words—it's just looking back at the different decades, and then looking forward going, oh, there's just a lot of different pearls of wisdom, or different experiences that happened. And understanding your own inner guidance system, and learning to say no, or let's navigate this. Or finding common sense, and realizing okay, the gay community's really wrapped up in a lot of drugs and alcohol, and so excise yourself from that. To realize oh, what's going on for me, let's do some soul-searching here, let's take it another step further, let's reach out for certain resources. Which is just one minor little step, little helping, little bridging or little stone. To get through, because you need to become more resilient within yourself. I don't have any profound wisdom to say, it's like overwhelming in the question because I don't know.

BK: Well, and it's also challenging, I think, because you kind of have to know – in order to impart wisdom you kind of have to know where the other folks are at too, because I think there is a very different conception of… Well, you were talking about PrEP and stuff, and I think, for instance, not knowing where guys are at, it's hard to know what kind of wisdom to impart, that's all.

JG: Your partners are, or other guys are at? Or?

BK: Yeah. That kind of generational gap, not knowing where younger guys are at.

JG: It's a different frame of reference, totally. And then some aren't. It's different. I don't know.

BK: Yeah, I mean, there are certainly younger gay guys who are still very much committed to using condoms consistently, so…

JG: There are. Yeah, there are. Because it's liquid. It's fluid. Who knows, you never know what's next or what's coming down the pipes or whatever.

BK: Lastly, is there anything else you wanted to discuss that we haven't had a chance to cover or that I didn't ask you about specifically? You're welcome to take a moment to think about anything you want to add.

JG: No, I don't think so. I think I covered a lot of topics there, like over different decades and whatever. This video's used for education or future—

BK: That's going to be part of it. One of our partners on the project is YouthCO, so we're really hoping to work on some kind of intergenerational outputs. Exactly what that will look like, we're still working on that. And then there's the archival piece, where we're wanting to have all of these stories online, in some format.

JG: Yeah. Interesting to see the… The other point was – is there's that movie is a good movie to refer to, and then there's a man named Rick Bébout who wrote for *Body Politic* and he wrote – a lot of his stuff he puts online, and it's under Rick Bébout. And that's early Toronto experiences. Very wealth of information there.

BK: Yeah, I've looked at the *Body Politic*, some of their early coverage of the epidemic. Pretty fascinating.

JG: And then Rick Bébout, he has this—it's his own website—he's no longer alive but the website's still there. Yeah, that was major because that's how you would rush out and grab your paper. And there was out here, there was a paper out here.

BK: *Angles.*

JG: Angles, oh my god, yeah, *Angles.* Yeah. Which had its oh, you know. I'll say one thing in *Angles*, the politics. It's the early nineties, I think it was '92—this has nothing, well, I don't know if it has to do with the topic, but it's my own little spiel—is they had, some lesbian wrote an article about, it was something about rape or something like that. I said, well you know, men are raped as well. I think I wrote it in the comments section. And what they had done is they took a cartoon, they drew a cartoon to refer to my comment section and what I said about gay men are also raped. And they drew a picture of a man with a paper bag over his head and wrote "Whining gay white male." I can't believe they even published it in *Angles*. I'm going, the hatred and the misandry of men is rampant. I'm going, so men cannot talk about their experiences without being silenced and ridiculed in a comment. I'm going, and where do you turn to? And that's in I think 1992 in *Angles*. So, you can see when I keep talking about the white gay men, what's going on here? You know, and you can't just shut that down all the time. Or 1992, how many people I knew died by then. And a friend of mine became HIV through being raped. I'm going where's

the empathy, you know? It's like, woah. So, you can see my own little bone to pick with that. It's like, wow. So, looking within our own communities and how we point daggers to each other, how the left eats the left. You know that's scary, but hello, there it is. And that was 1992, like how do you think I feel? And when—interesting, it's actually in the paper, and the paper printed it.

BK: I mean, those publications definitely have their political perspectives, you know.

JG: Yeah, but would any other community put a paper bag, whining black woman?

BK: Oh, I'm not saying it's acceptable, at all. But I'm, you know—

JG: Oh yeah, they have their own it's all run by—this is why it's like what are the activists doing? What are these people doing? Yeah. Oh, I don't know, that's my little tidbit for you. That's a heavy tidbit. Very interesting perspective. You know, breaking the silence of that, going, oh, this is a real story that happened. But how many people are not talking because they're afraid of ostracism, or being politically incorrect? It's like oh, okay. Yeah, it's resiliency and perseverance and connecting with each other. And hopefully, because technology we're all on the internet and on our phones but connecting, you know. Put the phone down on the bus and look around. Do we need another epidemic to gel each other together? Sometimes you wonder how it would be without the epidemic. You know, it would be like a lot of creative people have passed away, a lot of people, really interesting depth and scope individuals who actually were part of community building had passed away. That's really hard you know. Much more than we think. And the arts, the healers, the creative people, the people outside the box had come and gone during that time period. So, we got caught up in the AIDS community, but we needed to keep building more foundation in the community that way. That was hard. And other fa—think of the teachers who passed away, the theatre people who passed away.

BK: Yeah, there's a big gap left in the community, I think. I mean there's an absence. Like a tremendous degree of loss.

JG: Yeah… It's also and so—I don't want to end on a hard note.

BK: No, me either.

JG: No, it's more like perseverance, working on yourself, keeping it together and trying to keep common sense and just turning to each other for support. You're an individual, you know, work on yourself. And carry on. I just turn to friends like my friend, [name], his resiliency is unbelievable.

BK: Yeah, it's incredible.

JG: Incredible. There's no other person, it's like, wow. And amazing, going through the trenches—oh, you know his family, his history of his family. And finding support and just resilient through the whole thing. It's like, wow. He has his bad times, but wow, I don't know anyone who's actually, who is like that. Yeah. He wal—I was with him this morning, he took

me, we had croissants at the French pastry shop [gasp]. And we have this thing of having these little fun little coffees and croissant or some other—because we just do the poor thing. Oh, we gotta do this, we gotta do this, and so it's the fun, like the moment of—and then he called me and go, "We gotta have some fun this summer." That was the fun we have. It's like, oh, you're right. Like, out of all this stuff, he'd celebrate joy. And he does, over simple things. Cooking a meal. He does laundry, he finds joy in doing laundry. Uhm, going for a—he knows where to go here, it's like, we went to the French past—oh! I'm going oh my god, yes! I keep forgetting, yes! You need your friend to pull you—let's celebrate joy and fun in this moment. And that's [name], that's like, you know not the doom and gloom but just—which is little miracles, at the time. And they build up. I don't know, can you imagine? It's amazing.

BK: Yeah, hearing these stories from folks, I mean I've said this to pretty much everyone I've talked to but it really is such a privilege for me. Yeah, the resiliency of these folks is incredible. It really is. Well, unless you have anything else to add…

JG: I don't know—I also don't want to wander into this never never land of talking. There's just – it's interesting looking back and having a common thread and talking about it and seeing little periods of time, over many periods of time. And the difficulty people have gone through. And it's kind of like, people don't realize how difficult it really was, and is. And the emotional angst and non-support and whatever. Not easy. Yeah, I'm just, sorry, thinking there of a friend of mine. I worked for a film writer in the late seventies, and he was an amazing man and he died in '87, but this was all during that time period. And this is where intergenerational—this is not HIV-related—but we were living through that period of time, he was just coming out of the closet, he was in his forties and there's not been anyone else who was an older person who just valued what you were thinking, and who you were. And he was a university prof, he was writing films and stuff like that. So, I'd sit with him, I worked four hours a day and we'd sit and write movies. This is late seventies. I'd sit on his living room floor and write, like, slasher movies or do stuff. But the rapport, was – I was so valued, like no one has ever valued me like that. And he'd fly in from Los Angeles, I'd sometimes work for him for a day or two. He just wanted to come and talk. But he saw me as being out, for a few years and together, and he was just coming out. He's like looking at me like how did you do that type of thing. So, he'd married, had a family. And about the rapport, and never had anything like that before, that was amazing to have something like that. But he eventually died. I don't know if he died of AIDS or not, but he had a liver issue and I don't know what was going on, but it was during that time period. Yeah, that was not a great time period either. Was also not a great time period for coming out. Was just pre and then the nightmare happened.

BK: Yeah, I think that probably scared a lot of people back into the closet.

JG: Yeah, yeah. Big time.

BK: But thinking about intergenerational dialogue, that's kind of how it has to be done. That kind of mutual respect, right, I think is really important. Like, you felt very valued as a younger guy. I think that's very essential when we start to think about how we're going to translate this project into some kind of intergenerational thing. How do we set this up in a way that's respectful for everyone involved?

JG: Yeah, I ran into a friend who also worked for him a number of years later, who just said, "There's never been anyone like him." I said, "No, you knew you were gold when you were in his presence." It's like, wow. Yeah, if he was around, it would be really, he was quite the—well he was, he's worked on some of the gay movies, like late seventies movies, yeah. It was great. Sorry, I'm just reminiscing, but it was really good too. Different time period. Well, it's interesting, we touched the steam bath raids, and Anita Bryant, before all that. You probably haven't heard any of that yet.

BK: Yeah, I'm trying to think. We've interviewed a couple guys from Toronto now.

JG: I had a t-shirt that said, "Anita Bryant sucks oranges." I donated it to the gay archives.

BK: Was that the demonstration that she got pied in the face?

JG: No, that was like, at a news conference. She came out, there was Reverend Ken Campbell, and it was like some church in North York or Willowdale and they were bringing her up and she was doing her crusade. And we had a demonstration. But back in those days on the demonstration—actually that was when Pat Murphy came—was a cold winter, I was in the Bay and Avenue Co-Op. And we had a little meeting, and it was a demonstration on Yonge Street, and we walked up Yonge Street. Back in those days, the lighting is not as bright, so it's also dark. And it could become violent because people could attack you. And then there was two elderly ladies holding hands, there was not tons of people in the demonstration. And somebody threw a beer bottle into the crowd, they missed people, but you could hit somebody in the head. So, it was very scary to be—this was in 1978—kind of scary to be in demonstrations back then. And Yonge Street was not well lit, so it's also dark. I remember walking up, and we had fun, but that was kind of one of the first I was a part of. I was twenty. And then it ensued, and it all kind of imploded on her eventually and whatever happened.

BK: Yeah, the bathhouse raids are particularly interesting to me because they didn't happen in Vancouver, right? That wasn't happening in Vancouver at the time.

JG: No, it could've.

BK: But it didn't. Which is, I think, it's just an interesting thing to think about in terms of how that might have impacted the way the community looked in the very early years of the epidemic.

JG: Yeah, absolutely.

BK: So, thanks for some of your insights on that in particular.

JG: Well, a lot of individuals have moved out here. I know two who are still alive who were on the one in Toronto. And he was actually hit over the head with a brick, or a stone, had stitches. And another one, he was young, and he didn't take on a lawyer, he just happened to show up at his court date. They got the names mixed up and he got off. So, he's very lucky, he's still here. And those are the individuals, when I spoke previously at the thirtieth anniversary, they should

be interviewing the found-ins, and hearing their story. Not just what the activists are talking about or baking cheesecake, which one of them would talk about. And you needed to actually talk about the individual and their story, unravel that story. That's an interesting…

BK: That'd be a really good project. If it hasn't already been done, that would be really fascinating to look at. Well, I think maybe unless you have anything final to add right now, we'll end our formal conversation at least. Thank you so much for sharing all that you've shared with us. We really appreciate it.