

**AAHP**  
**AIDS Activist History Project**

**Interview Transcript 2014.011**

<b>Interviewee:</b>	Robert Allan
<b>Interviewers:</b>	Alexis Shotwell & Gary Kinsman
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Persons present: Robert Allan – RA  
Alexis Shotwell – AS  
Gary Kinsman – GK

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

**GK: So, we just ask these questions for some context with everyone. The first question is when did you first hear about AIDS? What is your first memory of hearing about AIDS?**

RA: It's somewhere like, '84-ish. It would've been public media. I was in Kingston, Ontario at the time. I would've been finishing up my undergraduate degree. The thing I remember consciously doing was going to the doctor at the university health centre and saying, "I'm a gay fellow. Is this something I need to worry about?" And the doctor did a sexual history with me and said, "Oh, you probably don't need to worry." And that was kind of the end of that. I don't remember exactly when that was, but it was somewhere in there.

**GK: Okay. When did you first hear about AIDS activism?**

RA: Probably somewhere in '86. By the end of '86, I wanted to do something so I took on co-facilitating an eroticizing safer sex workshop for gay men.

**AS: Were you already an activist?**

RA: No. I was interested in community. I got into it because at the time I was working as an employment counsellor and I used to facilitate a group there. And so I think I had been approached because I had some group facilitation skills and I did want to do something. So, I think that was the start of it.

**GK: And was that through the Kingston AIDS Project?**

RA: Yeah.

**GK: Okay.**

RA: Yeah. Judith English. Oh my god. It just came back to me.

**GK: So, you were involved in the Kingston AIDS project and at some point you, I think, got a job with them as well.**

RA: Correct. Yeah. I did. I did a substantial amount of volunteering for about a year, broadened the work from workshop to doing some support work and general public education, and then took on coordinating support services the following year.

**GK: Great. So, you would have met people like, Steven Maynard and Nancy Tatum. Would they have been involved?**

RA: Well, they came along later.

**GK: Oh, they were later. Okay.**

RA: Yeah. They were around. Steven ended up on the board. Nancy ended up on staff a couple of years later. Initially it was myself and Miriam or Muriel Keeping.

**GK: That name sounds familiar.**

RA: Yeah. Miriam? Muriel? Anyway. She was lovely. So, it was the two of us and then Coleen was also an MCC minister. It's so funny how these names are just popping out of my head.

**GK: That's how memory works.**

RA: Yeah. Coleen was half-time with us and half-time with MCC. And she had a lot of stuff outside the office. I remember Muriel more, because we had like, a one-room office that we shared.

**AS: Was that office already there when you started getting involved?**

RA: No, we got it. It was in this old house and... anyway, not the greatest setting, but it had lots of functional aspects to it.

**AS: And people would come and use it as a space, or was it more administrative?**

RA: All of the above. That was one of the advantages of being in this sort of community house was that we then could use the communal space for meetings and stuff.

**AS: So, people lived in the house too?**

RA: There was a caretaker in the house. So, he lived up on the third floor.

**AS: But there were other groups also in that same space?**

RA: I think just about anybody could book the space like, the communal space. And there was certain groups that tended to book it more regularly.

**AS: It's interesting. We're hearing about all these small situations or places where there was like, you know, one organization had an office and then another one would move in next door and these kind of informal webbing of histories of people having connection. Making these kinds of...**

RA: Yeah.

**AS: Can I ask one thing about the eroticizing safer sex? This has also been something that I'm really interested in how that came to be a way that people were talking about safer sex. And that's pretty early. You said it was '86 you were working on that ... do you remember how that happened?**

RA: It was the Gay Men's Health Crisis [GMHC] "Hot, horny and healthy" program. So, there was a manual and a video. It was all laid out. We did little adaptations in terms of our local area sex culture and so on. But that was a huge guide in terms of how we did that work.

**AS: And so were people from Kingston going down to New York City and being connected to GMHC?**

RA: No.

**AS: Lord, no!** [laughter]

RA: No, it seems crazy now. It's funny how we would think about that now as something that you would do that was really straightforward, but we didn't. Like, it was expansive. It is hard to believe, but I probably pay about the same amount today for a flight to London as I did in like, 1988. So, travel was such a bigger deal back then. One of the things we did, myself and the other co-facilitator and a couple of other folks, literally piled into one car and drove to Montreal, and we connected with CSAM [Comité Sida Aide Montréal]. Because I knew Christian Paquin who was a straight man who was doing a lot of gay men's health outreach in the baths and elsewhere, and Judith English knew some folks there. So, we went and did a lot of learning there. And then we piled back in the car and drove back to Kingston. And Toronto, before I forget, was a significant place of connection as well for all kinds of different things.

**AS: People would go there and connect with people and learn what they were doing?**

RA: Yeah. Once they got engaged more directly with support service, that was a stronger connection. So, I would connect with people in Toronto around training volunteers, just a whole pile of different things.

**GK: We've a got a bit of Kingston history here. That's great.**

**AS: Excellent. And do you want to say anything about what the support services were in Kingston that you were coordinating?**

RA: Well, somewhere between counseling, information, referrals. You know, those were the days when you'd walk into a hospital room and the tray of food was at the door and the dust balls were gathering under the bed and the TV didn't work and that. So, there's a lot of advocacy that was going on at the same time as well. It was a combination of a full range of stuff. And a lot of confusion and fear, you know, with families. I remember I had a guy call me from Vancouver,

Francois, whose partner of twelve years he'd lost because he'd come home to visit his parents who lived outside like, twenty minutes south of Kingston in a rural area, and they were from a fundamentalist religious family. So, when he got home and told them what was going on he had to accept God into his life and cut him off. And so I get this call saying, "My partner of twelve years is somewhere, I need your help." And so literally he and a friend came and we figured it out. I mean, he was such a lovely guy. This extraordinary connection happened between he and the mother and they figured it out. But they literally arrived, I put them in my apartment, and it took a couple of weeks, but we figured it out. So, it was like, this real range of stuff, in the sense that there was someone who was dying on the couch in the house that we're in. I mean, you ask and I'm just kind of remembering more and more. So, it was of like, anything; when you say, "What services?"

**AS: Support.**

RA: Yeah. A lot of immediate stuff I think would be the distinction.

**GK: Anything more you want to sort of mention around Kingston before we move to Halifax?**

RA: No. We could probably spend a lot of time because Judith English would have been quite significant at the start. She's a big proponent of it. And it brought a few of us on, so it was probably going for maybe about a year or so, before I became involved. And then was there for two and a half years, I guess? Yeah. So, I could talk a lot about it, but let's focus on Halifax.

**GK: Okay, so a position comes open at the Nova Scotia PWA [People with HIV/AIDS] Coalition and I assume you applied for it.**

RA: Yes, I did.

**GK: Do you want to tell us how that happened?**

RA: I'm originally from New Brunswick, and so when the position happened I was curious about coming back to the Maritimes. I knew I was not returning to northern New Brunswick, so Halifax seemed liked a good option. You know, I thought, "Oh, this is good." Like, it's a small organization, so I still get to do some support stuff. But it was an admin coordinator position, so I thought, "Oh, I can do some sort of leadership on that end," and that would balance a little bit the range of stuff that I was doing. And it was PWA-driven, which really attracted me. I liked the philosophy behind that, and so I applied and was interviewed and got the job.

**AS: And can you talk a little bit about that? How that philosophy manifested or how you would describe what that meant for that to be PWA driven?**

RA: Yeah. So, at that time it meant that you had to be a Person living with HIV or AIDS to be on the Board of Directors. They had an advisory board that were other folks, but they were non-voting advisory. They tried to always have Persons living with HIV or AIDS speaking publically, doing presentations, you know, to having just a full range of leadership roles.

**GK: You described a little bit about how the PWA Coalition was organized, but is there other aspects of how it was put together? So, there is a board, an advisory board, obviously you were a staff person. Did it have an office? What did it do?**

RA: Yeah. They applied for funding from Health Promotions, I think it was back then. So, that gave them funding, for example to hire me, and it also gave them core funding for rent for an office on Gottingen Street. And the other staff person, who I think had been maybe like half-time or something, was then full-time, the office coordinator, and the old photocopier, just pens and pencils and all that stuff. I think they got that office maybe like, a couple of months before I started. And so there's another part to your question that I'm not quite remembering.

**GK: So, what does the PWA Coalition do?**

RA: Well, the education function focused on what it's like living with HIV and AIDS, and the supports – the family members, friends around that. We initially didn't do primary health promotion work. Then we had a range of support roles in terms of... you know, there were support groups and individual counseling, and people could phone and ask questions. And I mean the group had a significant advocacy role in terms of a full range, every aspect of HIV work.

**AS: Were you the first coordinator hired?**

RA: Yes.

**GK: And was it J.J. who was the office...**

RA: Yeah. J.J. was the office coordinator.

**AS: And this was '89, did you say that?**

RA: Twenty-five years ago almost to the day – July '89.

**AS: So, the PWA Coalition had been active for some time before they hired you in order to get all of this. You weren't here, but did you have any knowledge of how that came together?**

RA: Yeah. The story that gets told is there was a support group that the other community group had going at the time – they were called MACAIDS at the time – of PHAs [Persons having HIV/AIDS] and they were talking about, "This is something we should be involved with. We want to advocate." And they couldn't find room to do it in that organization that had a different philosophy and approach in terms of the work. And so they said, "Fine, we'll just form our own organization." And I think they were emboldened somewhat by seeing examples of that elsewhere, so the Toronto PWA Foundation. Certainly they were familiar with some of the work in New York. So, I think they saw those models, had the experience of being shut down from the other setting and said, "Well, let's just do this ourselves."

**AS: Do you know when that was?**

**GK: Yeah. We actually have that information.**

RA: '87-88?

**GK: Yeah. And another thing is, Bruce at the one of the final meetings of the Task Force, actually speaks as a person living with AIDS, and that helps to galvanize some of this too. So, I think it's those two things coming together that tend to produce this thing. So, there's you and J.J. as staff people; there's funding from Health Promotions. That was probably for five years or something. Do you have any memory of that? Anyway, we'll find that out.**

RA: Two years. No, I remember it's two years because I remember only going to Halifax for two years.

**AS: And here you are. [laughter]**

**GK: It lasted a bit longer. So, in terms of your position as administrative coordinator, what were your major areas of responsibility? What work did you do within the context of the PWA Coalition?**

RA: Yeah. So, the other thing is that it's a bit of a misnomer to say there were two staff because there were, and I'm not going to get the numbers right, but let's say there were seven offices. And I had one and J.J. had one. Well, the other five were for the folks on the board who were doing significant volunteer work. And so the chair had his own office, there were a couple other offices that were shared, so most of the people who were there day-in, day-out were volunteers who were PHAs. And so they specifically called it an administrative coordinator position because it had a more, hierarchically sounded less leadership-oriented than executive director. But my job description looked just like an executive director. So, I was responsible for all the proposal writing and reporting and planning and finances and staff and just all those leadership things.

**GK: Right. So, you've already mentioned the advocacy work of the PWA Coalition, and obviously advocacy and activism aren't entirely distinct, but how would the PWA Coalition see itself in relationship to more vocal forms of activism beyond just advocacy around individual situations and cases?**

RA: Yeah. They would see it as essential.

**GK: Can you describe a little bit about how that might have been organized? Like, what types of activist things would the PWA Coalition have undertaken?**

RA: Well, as you mentioned the Task Force, they certainly made representation there. They made representation in any public setting whatever it may have been. Sometimes, at that point there were these travelling federal committees that would come through and we'd get together. You

know, mental health, needle injection drug use. I just remember all these crews coming through who were doing these national road shows, and we'd go and do a presentation. A lot of media, I mean when I first came it just felt like there were cameras in and out all the time. That Peter would've done a lot of...

**GK: And was Peter the chair?**

RA: Chair. Yup. And then, you know, we'd have some clarity around our positions. So, whatever we were participating in, then it was about going to those meetings and saying, "Here's what we see as a priority, or what's important, or how we'd like to move the issue forward."

**GK: So, for that early period of sort of '89-90, when you're there, who were some of the cast of characters beyond people you've already mentioned?**

RA: Peter Wood, Fred Wells, Bruce Davidson, Dale...?

**GK: It was Dale Oxford.**

RA: Oxford, sorry. Hazen, Raymond. Hazen and Raymond were a couple for a while. Eric wasn't around then. So, those were the most active folks on the Board.

**GK: And who would be the type of people who'd be on the advisory board at that point in time?**

RA: There were a couple of social workers, and people in the helping professions who just had a really good perspective and respect for what the philosophy was. And so they were really helpful.

**GK: Is there anything else around the PWA Coalition for that very early period when you first came to work there that you remember, because we're going to segue into ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power] activism and then come back to the PWA Coalition. Almost anything's helpful. Again, we're starting with the PWA Coalition as a group and radiating out from there.**

RA: Okay. So, I think the stuff that's hard to capture. Because it's kind of odd to have been in a position for, what I did was write quarterly written reports for the funders. And really, I would structure something that would fit what I thought would be appropriate and respectful and you would maintain funding and all that, but it didn't really capture everything that PWA did. You know, there's just this tremendous spirit of you know how important it was to be able to push issues forward across everything. I mean, these guys weren't only looking at issues that directly affected them like, access to drugs, appropriate services, funding; they were, from an advocacy perspective, they were also pushing around primary health promotion and saying, "We need programs that are going to be effective." That are way more advanced, I would say, than kind of what people felt safe with at the time. Now, this is a time when people struggled to talk about condoms. And so these guys were saying, "Okay, that's the basic. We want to move way beyond that." And so they were pushing that envelope as well.



**GK: Did the PWA Coalition use talks in schools and stuff like that?**

RA: Yes. A lot.

**AS: Really?**

RA: Oh yeah, always a person living with HIV who would go. So, it was often the lived experience. And so some folks would focus their talk in that way, but some folks actually did talk about a range of stuff, policy or other things. No, we did a lot of talks – health care settings, schools, universities. When Wilson joined, he'd go to talk to the navy once or twice a year. Yeah. All over.

**AS: How did people get to that point in their practice and analysis of saying that condoms are just a starting point and what we want is actually...**

RA: Well, they lived it. I don't know if it was practice or analysis, but it was like, "Oh, I'm infected and sick and I've watched lots of people die around me. And I don't think other people should go through this. And more than anything, I feel that I have something I can say about that." So, I think that's what informed their kind of engagement with that process.

**AS: Right. And in order for this not to happen to other people, these other things need to change.**

RA: Yeah. Absolutely.

**GK: It was quite a dynamic group. I mean I only had a brief encounter with it in '89, the first part of '89, when I was in Wolfville.**

RA: Yeah. They were extraordinary. And Fred, he got sick shortly after I came, but he led a project where they got funding to do a video. What was it called?

**GK: I remember there was a video project.**

RA: There was a video, yeah. It was, again, about the lived experience. And it was like, a couple of hundred thousand dollars. It was a big deal. And so, he wrote it, got the funding, got the project up and running, and then he became sick. So, he wasn't too much involved after that, but Carol Millet really carried that project through.

**AS: And Fred, can you tell us a little bit more about him?**

RA: I didn't know him real well because he got sick shortly after I arrived. He worked with architects before that. So again, he was someone who kind of came to the issue because of his lived experience, and had a real engagement with the other guys. I mean, when he became sick and died that was tough for everybody.

**AS: He had been centre, energetic.**

**GK: And he was the first of the founding group that got sick?**

RA: Yes. Absolutely.

**GK: We'll come back to some of that stuff later, but is there anything more you wanted to say about this period? We'll come back to talk about the PWA Coalition after talking about ACT UP.**

RA: Sure.

**GK: Okay. So, an ACT UP group emerges in Halifax. We actually know very little about this, so anything you can tell us about it is helpful to us.**

RA: So, here's going to be the shocker. As the PWA Coalition was evolving and getting invited to more and more government tables, the voice started to change. And I said, "Strategically, you need a variety of voices, different strategies. It works well when they work together." That's my perspective. People get wound about one strategy, one approach that's going to do everything. That's not my perspective. So, I ran around and talked to people and said, "We need to start an ACT UP." And found a couple of folks, Dan Hart in particular who would take a leadership role. And then I put together the signs and I put together the meetings. And I went to every meeting and let other people take leadership. I didn't *let* anybody do anything, but just other people just did it.

**AS: You held your position.**

RA: And so for every action they took, I would tell them what's coming up and what the options were. There was a commission meeting happening at this date at this time. This is the issue that's going to be discussed. Maybe you want to say something about that.

**GK: So, can you describe the first ACT UP meetings, if you were there?**

RA: There were people who were really interested in action, and some curious onlookers. Like, there were folks who came I think just for gossip and who actually never did anything.

**AS: Or they were dating someone who was going or...**

RA: Yeah. Maybe there was some of that. But there were a few folks who were like, "You know what, we need to do some stuff." And there were a couple of folks who were looking to plug and couldn't figure out how to plug in with MACAIDS or PWA and, I think, that was a fit for them. And so, fortunately World AIDS Day was coming up and so there was an opportunity to kind of galvanize and focus an action, which was the donkey down Spring Garden Road. Well, it didn't start out as, "Let's get a donkey." [laughter] It was like, let's do something and it just kind of evolved into that.

**AS: And what was the motivation for the action?**

RA: Well, inaction was a motivation.

**GK: It's World AIDS Day 1990. I'm pretty sure.**

RA: Yeah. So, it would've focused locally because there was an evolving provincial AIDS strategy. The Task Force submitted a report in '88, which evolved out of Eric Smith, but there's still no provincial strategy. And so, that would've been a local focus, while tying into a global...

**AS: ...situation.**

RA: You know, where folks around the world are also trying to raise some awareness and understanding of how important it is to be able to address this.

**AS: Right. So, it's been years and they haven't made a provincial strategy.**

RA: Right. Yeah.

**GK: Do you remember that event?**

RA: Yeah. Of course, I do.

**GK: Can I elicit a bit more about it?**

RA: So, what we got sorted out were like, signs. We were going to meet at this person's place and then we're going to walk here and we're going to do a die-in at the corner of South Park and Spring Garden and then we're going to walk down Spring Garden, and all that. The donkey thing kind of emerged in there and it was like, "So, someone knows someone who has a donkey he can get for the day." "Yeah, it's a great idea."

**AS: Get the donkey.**

RA: Get the donkey, yeah. We didn't know, but we couldn't have paid for a better acting donkey. It was sort of, perfect. And so, this arrived. We're in someone's backyard.

**AS: And it came up in like, a donkey trailer?**

RA: Yeah. A trailer like, a horse trailer. And so we just unloaded it in someone's backyard, and then strung a sign over the donkey and just kind of went walking down the street.

**AS: What did the sign say?**

RA: It said something like, "World AIDS Day" or "AIDS Action" or, I can't remember, but it was something relevant to the day. So, the donkey was beautiful because it would walk along fine and

then literally when the media were there, it would stop. And we could have one person on one end pulling as hard as they could and then someone on the other end pushing as hard as they could and the donkey wouldn't move. And the signs over the donkey, you know, it was representative. It was like, this is what it's like trying to get some action on HIV/AIDS. And that stuff is what made the media. That was beautiful. It was perfect. I couldn't believe it.

**AS: And were there lots of people out?**

RA: It was a weekend afternoon. So, it was Spring Garden, busy, people walking about. I think it was mostly like, "What's happening?"

**AS: With the donkey.**

RA: A donkey walking and people are yelling something? I think it was mostly confusion by folks who were there.

**AS: But this wasn't a permitted march, where you signed up with the city. We're going to bring out a donkey and have a protest develop?**

RA: No.

**AS: So, what happened? Just took the street? You were walking down the middle?**

RA: Yeah, had a die-in at the corner of Spring Garden. At the time it just seemed like we just did it, and then we were done and put the donkey back on the trailer and we got some wonderful media out of it; wonderful, wonderful media out of it.

**GK: We'll have to try and recover some of that.**

**AS: And you went all the way down Spring Garden to the Legislature?**

RA: No, to the end of the Spring Garden, down to Barrington. It was the weekend, so the Legislature was closed. So, we focused on public, busy area, because it was the weekend. Yeah.

**GK: And the evaluation of this was that it was pretty successful?**

RA: I thought it was incredible in terms of just about every... like, the guy who brought the donkey in. I can't remember who it was, but just how beautiful that was. And I mean, the donkey wasn't injured or anything, that I know of, and I hope it was all fine. I hope whoever owned the donkey wasn't surprised to see the donkey on the TV or anything, but the group was amazing. And that time, again, I know we look at history and we look at movies and it seems like everyone's out demonstrating. In Halifax that was a big deal. That was way, way out there. Those folks, those men and women who were out doing that. We had some people who said, "Wow, we're really proud of you for doing that," who would've had a lot of people in their lives saying, "What's wrong with you

for doing that?” Because it was still just a small town, everybody’s mother lives around the corner. Those folks really, really, really took a risk and they did an amazing job. They did an amazing job.

**GK: So, that was ACT UP’s first major public thing?**

RA: Yeah.

**GK: Obviously, that probably buoyed people’s involvement and enthusiasm for it.**

RA: Yes. I think that really, I don’t know if ‘galvanize’ the group is the word, but I think it gave them a sense that there are possibilities. Yeah.

**GK: Are there other things you remember ACT UP doing after that?**

RA: There were a few different things. During one of the strategy development meetings, it felt like one of those strategies that took forever to develop, the provincial AIDS strategy. It was the one-year anniversary of the strategy development group meetings, still working on developing the strategy, and they showed up with a cake.

**GK: It was a birthday cake, yeah.**

RA: Yeah. A one year birthday cake, with a really... so, “Happy Birthday. It’s been a year.”

**AS: “You still don’t have a strategy.” Is that the...?**

RA: Yeah. Well, they didn’t actually say... like, it was just that they didn’t have to say that part in the message. It was like, you know, “And we’re waiting.” And there’s the whole shirtless stuff with Rumours.

**AS: Can I go back to the cake for one second?**

RA: Yeah.

**AS: Do you remember anything about how that happened? Where they took the cake and who received the cake?**

RA: It happened because of a meeting happening inside in this place on that floor.

**AS: It’s a one-year... and then people went in with the cake?**

RA: Yeah. Just arrived and... remember, they don’t have security in every building. You can get through the front door. They just walked in and arrived at the meeting and there was media there, which we all helped sort out. So, the media got that. And they delivered the cake.

**AS: Were there signs?**

RA: It's Halifax. [laughter]

**AS: I know. I was living here then.**

RA: No. Like, you couldn't do that now because you'd have to sign in. There's security at the front desk, and all that stuff. But back then...

**AS: You just walked in.**

RA: You just walked in. Yeah.

**AS: Someone probably thought, "That's nice. They're bringing a cake to someone."**

RA: Yeah. How lovely! A cake! One year?

**GK: Do you remember if anyone ate the cake?**

RA: I did. Actually, you know what, people avoided it because I remember making a big deal about going over and going, "Mmmm! Cake! I'm going to have a slice." And either not much was eaten or I think it was actually maybe one or two other more activist-oriented folks who had some, but the rest were...

**GK: We need to get photos of this.**

RA: I mean this is a crew who, literally, the representative from an organization that would have a significant stake in the development strategy would openly talk about gay men as "fruits." And because she was an older woman, no one would call her on it. And when you did call her on it, they would say, "Oh, you know. That's an old so-and-so and... you know, from rural Nova Scotia. That's just, you know, buh-buh-buh-buh-buh."

**AS: So, she would just be in conversation like, "those fruits"? Wow. And these people who are forming the provincial strategy, because this cake came from people living with HIV and AIDS, wouldn't have a piece.**

RA: I don't if it was more complex than it came from someone with HIV. I think it was more like, that activist pushing our boundaries. Some version of other, but it would've been kind of a complex mix.

**AS: Right. So, not just fear, but also some too pushy...**

**GK: Like, "We like cake but not activist cake."**

RA: Yes. Right. And it was really good cake.

**GK: And what type of cake was it?**

RA: Chocolate! I remember it.

**GK: We need to find photos of that. We'll see if Anita has some. So, you started to talk about Rumours and the stuff around that. And obviously, that ties into the shirtless wars. I don't know if you want to tell us a little bit about that.**

RA: Well, it seems improbable that that's an issue, but there was supposedly, and I'm pointing to my nipple because there's supposedly a health code about nipples can't be out in public in bars or something?

**GK: Maybe at that time in Nova Scotia there was.**

RA: I can't remember. Anyway, there was something around that.

**GK: It was part of the liquor code.**

RA: Liquor code. That's it. Anyway, so there's a bit of a mix. So, it was summertime and I think there was sort of a joyous kind of celebratory thing they were having sometimes on the weekends where folks would take their shirt off and dance. And that included both men and women. So, those folks would get into trouble with the management of the place and eventually it was like, "Well, we need to do something about that."

**AS: Can you just say a little bit about what Rumours was and what it was like?**

**GK: GALA.**

RA: Yeah. So, it was owned by the Gay and Lesbian Association; though, try and have some separate management but a real tie-in there. And it was the only one, or one of two gay bars. Certainly, it was the most popular one.

**GK: It was an old movie theatre. I remember it.**

RA: An old movie theatre, correct. On Gottingen, right across the street from the PWA offices. It was there before the PWA offices. And so yeah, it would've been a busy place on the weekends.

**AS: Yeah. Hub.**

RA: Yeah. And could also hold community meetings as well. So, I think during the week, there'd be some of those going on.

**AS: And would there have been any political education that would happen in the bar context? Was there condom distribution?**

RA: Yeah. We did some of that. We certainly did. PWA Coalition did some of that. And I think whatever. It was one of those places where there was some targeting going on. There was some chit-chat about people don't want to mix you know the fun party with education stuff, but it seemed always if we as PWA Coalition wanted to do something, they seemed to be pretty open to it.

**GK: So, there was a particular event that happens that ACT UP is involved in at Rumours in the context of the shirtless, but it's actually...**

RA: Yeah. It comes to this plan where it's like, on this night at this time a few of us are going to go and block the laneways, so security guards can't get up to the dance floor because it was a movie theatre. So, you'd walk in, up the stairs, there was a bar right there, and then there were these two runways down to the front, and in the front stage was the main dance area. So, we devised a plan where at a certain time there's a crew who wanted to go shirtless. And so the women all had "Silence = Death" pasties on their nipples and the guys... it was a mix. I think some of them had the pasties and some of them didn't. I actually don't quite remember that as well. And then, they, at that designated time, would all take their shirts off while a couple of us were at the end of those runways onto the dance floor and would block any security guards who would try and go out and do anything about it. And what happened was, of course, when they did it actually a bunch of other people did it too. While initially it was this smaller crew, it ended up being a bunch of... And they couldn't do anything anyway. And so, again, it was celebratory; it was effective. Nobody got charged with anything. You know, the world didn't come to an end and, no, they didn't lose their liquor license, and whatever it was that people were going on and on and on about what was problematic about that – none of that happened. I'm sure other people had other experiences of it, but mostly what I remember was everyone talking about just how wonderful it was. And so, that was that. I mean I think afterwards, there was kind of this endless discussion about shirtlessness stuff.

**GK: Do you remember the response of Rumours management to some of the people who were involved?**

RA: Oh, they weren't happy. Yeah.

**GK: Some people got barred if I remember right.**

RA: Yeah. It was pretty random.

**AS: Just whoever they thought maybe was involved?**

RA: Yeah.

**GK: Eric was barred for instance.**

RA: Right.



**GK: I don't know who else.**

RA: Yeah.

**GK: And there was an accusation of some rip in the... they had a huge video screen.**

RA: Right, which didn't make any sense because I don't know if people were up on the stage.

**AS: But people's experience of that night was that it was really fantastic.**

RA: Yeah! It was fun and joyful and other people joined in. Like, I think the people who didn't know it was part of the act were just like, "Woo hoo! We're going to play without shirts tonight." And that was that. Yeah.

**GK: So, ACT UP involved a fair number of women in it?**

RA: Yeah. Well, I don't know what qualifies as a fair number, but probably what I remember is about half and half. Yeah.

**GK: And ACT UP also had parties.**

RA: Yes.

**GK: I heard a little about it through... were you ever at any of these parties that Dan would have put together?**

RA: Yeah. Because Dan lived in this incredible loft in the youth hostel and so, it was a big open space. We had some parties there, and then one of the individuals who was connected, Andrew who was at NSCAD [Nova Scotia College of Art and Design] at the time doing a fashion degree wanted the... it's become more formal and more involved and that. They actually had really smaller, more funky graduating fashion shows, or whatever it was towards the end. He organized that show when he graduated or whatever, end-of-year show, he organized one of them in support of ACT UP as well. He had knitted these sweaters that were in black and white with, "queer." It was in reverse, so if you looked in the mirror you would read "queer," but when it was...

**AS: ...on your body.**

RA: ...it was whatever it was; however that works. Like, they were incredible pieces that he'd hand-knit himself.

**AS: And did that show happen at NSCAD or at the loft?**

RA: I 'm trying to remember if it was NSCAD or the loft, one of them.

**AS: Was the loft part of the youth hostel or it was just connected?**

RA: Yeah. It was the top level.

**AS: He just got to live there?**

RA: Dan did. Yeah.

**AS: Dan who?**

RA: Dan Hart. It was this incredible space. I think a little tricky in the winter with the heat and that kind of stuff, but it was incredible. So, the parties would partly be kindred spirits and nice to get together, and partly would be just great parties – music, dancing, fun. Some of them we raised some money? Maybe.

**GK: So, what happens with this ACT UP group after the Rumours situation? Do you have any memory of that?**

RA: Bits of memory. I mean I think there was a bit of a struggle in terms of understanding, is this going to be the focus or... what was going to happen and how important an issue is it? Some people felt it was really important and other people didn't. There's just a real mix in terms of how much energy people wanted to put into that issue. How difficult it was to come to a place of understanding where energy should be directed. You know, there's a lot to take on, and so it's tough, I think, for any group to figure out, where are we going to put our energy and what's the priority for us?

**GK: Okay. So, if there's anything more that you can remember about ACT UP, we're going to move back to the PWA Coalition. But if there is anything... I mean I think also a couple of people move away around that time as well.**

RA: Yeah. That's right. Brenden moved. Brenden moved actually right in there. So, that was significant. I don't think Dan... did Dan move?

**GK: That was later.**

RA: Yeah. Dan left later.

**AS: Did ACT UP in Halifax and Nova Scotia... was there any connection with groups outside of Halifax or was it mostly Halifax-based?**

RA: Yeah. It was mostly Halifax-based, which I think it would've been good to have connected to elsewhere.

**AS: Was there a Pride Parade happening then? Would ACT UP have had any presence in relation to queer or queer, gay and lesbian organizing?**

RA: Yeah. There are folks connected to GALA, the PWA Coalition... Pride was pretty small back then, so just getting a parade together would've been really, really big deal back then.

**GK: Was there a Queer Nation group at the same time? TK, when I talked to him said that ACT UP/Queer Nation – were basically the same thing. TK did leave around this time.**

**AS: I think they've changed their name.**

RA: Okay. When you say that I'm like, yeah. But I think that was part of the broader... Queer Nation was elsewhere and so what are we? I don't remember. You know, and I think maybe there's some... that might've been more the ending. Like, maybe do some people want to be a Queer Nation group? I don't remember that.

**GK: Okay. That's been really helpful. Thanks.**

**AS: I think people in general have no idea that ACT UP really existed in Canada.**

RA: Right.

**AS: They think it's just something in Philadelphia and New York and Chicago. Like, I didn't know. I mean I now have discovered that I had all these friends, because I was fourteen then, who were involved in ACT UP here like, Sangye who's in Toronto. So, it's just really good to just remember.**

**GK: The ACT UP group in Vancouver was more long lasting, and there was an ACT UP group eventually in Montreal and a short-lived one in Ottawa as well I think. So, then moving back to the PWA Coalition, shifting organizational focus. We're into the PWA Coalition in the early 1990s. One thing that obviously had an impact on the PWA Coalition, and you've already mentioned this starting to happen, was that original core of people living with AIDS and HIV, people started to die, to get sick. I wonder if you could tell us a little about what that must have been like? I mean you've got a particular type of position there as well in relation to all of this.**

RA: Yeah. What that was like? Wow, in two sentences...

**GK: And again remember, if there's things you don't want to talk about or think about right now, that's fine.**

RA: Yeah. I mean because it doesn't happen all at once. It's not an event happened one day and then the next day everything was different. It's people's illness, and they're in and out because of that. People die and so, those folks who carried significant pieces of the work... like, when Fred got sick and could no longer take a leadership role in terms of the video stuff that kind of falls on other folks. I mean, through the early/mid-90s, there were enough folks around who kind of stepped up and took leadership roles. You know, Wilson and Terry; Janet got involved. There were other folks

who, I think, stepped up and took leadership roles. It had a big impact in terms of the sense of continuity, understanding the broader context, just that accumulation of stuff that happens because you're involved year-in, year-out gets affected. I think that's kind of where staff played a bigger role in terms of trying to carry that continuity forward. But it also did begin to shift in terms of what the new leadership brought on as well. We can't only have a board of people living with HIV and AIDS. So, they shifted that policy a little bit to have... I think eventually it was majority board members had to be PHAs, but then other folks could join as well.

**AS: Would people have been doing direct support work for people as they are dying? I mean people were friends with each other too, right?**

RA: Yes. Absolutely. The hostel was next door, Morton House, which was run by CARAS, which is Church members Assembled to Respond to AIDS. And so, we had two or three, three or four board members living there. For example, with Michel DeCoursier, he wanted to die there, so we were involved in round o'clock shifts in terms of care for him. I think it was like, four-hour shifts or something. We would all sign up and take on one of the shifts. And everybody was different. Sometimes, some people liked having the visits and supports, wanted to structure their supports in that way; other folks would actually kind of back away and wanted to limit their contact and their engagement. So, everyone was different that way.

**AS: And both things have an effect on what it is like to also be doing political and advocacy work, right? Whether you have a close friend or someone who you've worked with who says, "I'm stepping back. I don't want to engage," or whether you're doing a lot of direct work that changes and affects how people feel in their other work that they're doing.**

RA: Yeah. Absolutely. What was your question again?

**GK: That really addressed a lot of it. I mean we can come back to specific individuals maybe later on in terms of memories of them. But I guess, until maybe 1991 Peter is still the chair? And, I think, Eric becomes the Chair when Peter gets the job in Saint John's. Is that right?**

RA: Yeah.

**GK: Okay. So, one of the issues obviously is also what's happening, you already mentioned this, the long delays in developing a provincial AIDS strategy which finally comes down in 1992. I had a little bit of connection with that because I was in the Valley AIDS Concern Group then, and I know that there was at least a little bit of a flurry of province-wide organizing around that, but if you want to tell us a little bit about what happened with that provincial AIDS strategy and what was the community-based group's evaluation of it? It comes down in 1992.**

RA: [sigh, laughter] I just remember, you know, it was paper. I'd been involved with the National AIDS Strategy, so I remember that as kind of like, "Here's the paper and here's the pocket of money going with it." The provincial AIDS strategy was, "Here's the paper."

**GK: And nothing else?**

**AS: And no money?**

RA: No.

**AS: What? For real?**

RA: For real.

**AS: Wait. Like, here's the plan, but then no, "This is how it's going to happen." What was the plan?**

**GK: That interdepartmental coordination committee.**

RA: Yes. That's it. It's, "Here's what we're going to do with bureaucracy."

**AS: We're going to have bureaucrats talk to each other more?**

RA: Yeah. Not that it ever works. It was so painfully watered down and so useless, and not tied to anything.

**AS: That must've been kind of brutal.**

RA: Yeah, because we did a lot of organizing around getting the community, which you [Gary] would have been involved with, to agree to priorities, so that when we would go to the meeting we would say, "We had five." Oh my god, it's coming back to me. We had needle exchange...

**GK: Something around anonymous testing.**

RA: Anonymous testing.

**GK: Especially outside Halifax.**

RA: Yes, because we didn't have that then. Anonymous testing, needle exchange, I'm sure funding would've been around there somewhere. So, our messaging was clear and consistent.

**GK: It was maybe coverage of drugs too through social assistance plans.**

RA: Yes. Good. Thank you. So, we would organize these meetings just, "We want to make sure and we think this might be beneficial."

**AS: And people from the community would come to the meetings.**

RA: We engaged as many people as we could from all over the province.

**AS: A huge amount of work.**

RA: Yeah.

**GK: There's actually a list of the groups here. Just a couple of props I brought. That's one thing I could find. It's not really signed by you, but it says...**

RA: Barb signed it, who I still know to this day. I had breakfast with her on Sunday. And that's me. And that's probably all my spelling mistakes in there because we didn't have spellcheck [laughter] and I'm a terrible typer; although if Barb typed it, it would've been okay.

**GK: Yeah, I think Barb typed it.**

RA: Oh my god. And we brought in Michael what's-his-name, from...

**GK: Michael Callen.**

RA: Yeah. For a treatment talk and he said, "Okay, but lets bring in the group for some performance," so that helped to pay for it as well. Oh, flashbacks.

**GK: There's a long list of people who are connected.**

RA: Right. Yes. That's it. So, that's what we did. We took the lead to organize and then we got it down to, "Let's get some consistent messaging going," and all that stuff, and high priorities and we pushed for those. I think in some way they were in the paper, but instead of, "And now we have anonymous testing," it would've been like, "And there'll be further discussion about anonymous testing," or, you know, "Treatment access – yes, we'll engage another government department to discuss treatment access." Like, everything was all that kind of thing.

**GK: It was an AIDS strategy for the provincial state. It wasn't about what they were actually going to do with people in the province.**

RA: Well, an AIDS strategy for a provincial state who didn't want to do anything about it. And so they could tick the box saying, "Well, we have a strategy." And that time there was actually pressure from the federal government too, because they were getting funding from the federal government saying, "You need to pull together a provincial strategy." Transfer payments would've been a bigger deal. The federal government had a bigger voice then. I know that they were putting pressure on provinces to develop them, and so they could turn around to the federal government and say, "Yup. We have a provincial strategy."

**GK: Some other things that PWA Coalition was involved in – I think in 1990, there's a needle exchange that's set up in the office. You could tell us a bit about that.**

RA: Peter – and that’s part of the brilliance of Peter, right. There are so few people in the world who can do this. We talked about a needle exchange and how we’re going to do it. And he was just like, “Go out and buy fucking needles. Just do it.” Because where we were there was a stroll behind us and he knew the lay of the land a little bit in terms of injection drug use and said, “We’ll get the word out.” And we had one of those advisors, was a public health nurse. And she was very practical. So again, one of those advisors who got it, and she was very practical, and she said, “That’s a good idea. I’ll provide you with puncture proof containers and I’ll come by every week or two and slip them in with my other stuff that I’m returning and I’ll get these incinerated” or whatever they do. Like, they would go to the safe needle dumping place. And so she would do that. And so we did. We just went out and bought needles. And so, “Okay, we’re doing this.” We’ve got the puncture proof containers. We put it in the closet in the hallway and then just starting telling people, “We’re doing needle exchange.”

**AS: Amazing.**

RA: I was told that with Stepping Stone around the corner and we started getting the word out.

**AS: Can you say a little bit about what Stepping Stone was?**

RA: Stepping Stone was, and is, a group who works with women who are involved in the sex trade.

**GK: So, do people come in off the street?**

RA: Literally, yeah. The stroll that was behind the offices was more active and anyway. I mean, the needle exchange that eventually got a fixed location. And it’s still there, was a block away from where the PWA offices were. Injection drug users are everywhere, in every neighbourhood all over the world, but generally thought of as kind of an area that had some convenience for some folks who were using.

**GK: Were there any tensions? Oftentimes when groups that come out of the gay scene in some ways connect with the injection drug use communities, which are obviously not entirely separate; there’s sometimes tensions. Were there any problems at all?**

RA: Not with the core crew. Again, there’s some brilliance about, “This is just what we need to do. This is what it is. This is what the work looks like. We know what this is.” Like, I don’t know. I can’t quite remember if they had an experience of seeing it in action elsewhere or what it was. I mean there are probably some folks on the periphery who were like, “I’m not sure about this. What’s this about? Or does this take away from our mandate somewhat?”

**GK: You already mentioned Stepping Stone. Did the PWA Coalition work with Stepping Stone at all around sex workers?**

RA: Yeah. So, sharing information. They ended up getting Tuma. That’s how Darryl got involved. He got hired along with Jane Allen and they were doing the outreach. So, we did some training

with them, especially when they decided that they wanted to do some outreach on the hill. And so, the guys kind of went over and talked about that because some of them were familiar with that.

**GK: Some other questions are about some of the specific outreach projects that the PWA Coalition was involved in in the early 1990s. There's a Women and AIDS Project that emerges, if you could tell us a little bit about that? We're obviously going to try and talk to some of the people who were directly involved in that.**

RA: Yeah. Jane was the first person who was hired for that. We were targeting... so, injection drug use evolved into the Friendship Centre. There was a pocket of money that was available to friendship centres across the country. However, it came about, there was a small group of us who were like, "You have funding to develop needle exchange," and so we pulled together a proposal and they got the funding and the rest is history. And by that point a couple of things that happened. One of those federal advisory groups came through town and I remember Wayne; I remember Wayne's name, he was just this awful, awful bureaucrat, just hateful, horrible. I think he would've shot us if he could. He was the main advisor to the Health Minister. Wayne Sullivan.

**GK: We'll put him on the hate list.**

RA: Oh my god. So literally, I go to the federal conference. Cate Hankins was there, I remember her from Montreal, and all the mucky-mucks who were talking about injection drug use trying to figure out what's the best way, "You know, Canada needs to deal with this." And so, travel to Halifax and do it. So, a bunch of us are doing back-to-back presentations. Wayne gets up and like, "No. It's not an issue here" in, you know, eloquent bureaucratic speak. And then we're just all sitting waiting our turn. I get up and, "I'm from the PWA Coalition and we've been doing needle exchange now for eight months and this is how..." And everyone on the committee kind of did one of these, "So, how many exchanges are you doing a month?" and just really went in. By the time we got to the proposal for the needle exchange, we actually had some data that we could report through some experience. And once that got going, like I said, the rest is history. It's still going.

The whole targeting thing, again philosophically, about the PWA Coalition and understanding how to approach the work, targeting was important and not everyone shared that perspective. And women were one of those areas that needed some focus. You know, lots of different parts to it. So again, we applied for funding initially to do a needs assessment to develop the lay of the land, and then that evolved into a project that went on for a good ten-fifteen years after; fifteen years after that maybe, a little less than fifteen, maybe twelve years after that. And that was just the guys saying, "We know what we know; we know what this is; we need to do some other work targeting that."

And the other thing that's big for Nova Scotia is the African Nova Scotian communities. For each of those, we went out and got a separate advisory committee who could to expertise in that area and would become the new advisory committee for that project. So, it wasn't run by the board; I mean it was all run by the board, but the board understood that there was an advisory group for that project and would always make the connection between the advisory group and the board. So, if you want someone from that advisory group on the board, but the monthly meeting or whatever. I can't remember what it was, but there would be an advisory group just for that project.



**AS: You were still coordinating at that point?**

RA: Yeah.

**AS: Would you have been doing support work for the different initiatives for each of those, so they could also come to you and say, “We need to set up a community meeting? Can you help us figure out how to do that?”**

RA: Yeah. I would sit on all those advisory groups. I would go out and start the development... like, I would know a couple of folks and they would say, “Who else can we get involved?”

**AS: And who’s important to talk to.**

RA: Yeah, and develop it that way.

**AS: So, when you started working on the Black Nova Scotians issues around AIDS and HIV, what happened? What was the response? How did you proceed?**

RA: I had been involved in the Human Rights Network that was run out Dal Legal Aid. Racism, I mean, it’s always big, but there are a couple of things that had happened that that group was formed out of. People weren’t being allowed into clubs because they were wearing like, those beanie type hats. I just remember these really crazy racist things. And so, Dal Legal Aid formed this group. I was a part of that. I met Joan Jones there who was with Metro Legal Aid and got to know her. So, I’d start having conversations with her and either had known or then quickly met Lorne Izzard, who got involved and then there were some other folks that we engaged. I don’t think there was ever any question amongst those folks that HIV was an issue. I mean, there’s always a question about, where should this be? Or what should be doing? Which we didn’t have any ownership. We were like, “If another group wants to take this on that’s situated in the black community, the black church wants to, whoever. That would be wonderful. How can we help? But if nobody else is going to do anything, we kind of want to think that this needs a bit of focus.” And so, that’s how that evolved. And the crew who were involved all got it. There was real mix in the community in terms of, “Is this really a black issue? Of all the issues that we have to deal with, is this one that we...” Yeah. So, the staff person, initially Kim and then Deena, who...

**GK: Kim. Was it Kim Bernard?**

RA: Kim Bernard.

**GK: Who was also in Four the Moment, right?**

RA: Yes. They certainly would’ve dealt with a lot of that.

**AS: And so the women’s initiative, you said it went on for fifteen years of work?**

RA: Twelve? I can't remember.

**GK: It continued after the groups were merged?**

RA: Yes. It did.

**GK: The outreach project didn't, as far as I know.**

RA: It did because Deena... then we had to get more and more specific in our project funds. It's not ongoing addressing the community, but you had to pick some little piece of work that we were going to do that was defined and close ended. But it started to dwindle. Yeah.

**AS: Did the work in the black community get taken up by other actors in the city?**

RA: I think sexual promotion in general has been taken up by more and more people in all kinds of ways. There's like, specific...

**AS: Like, in Toronto there's Black CAP [Coalition for AIDS Prevention].**

RA: No, nothing like that.

**AS: It got more merged into general activity around sexual health?**

RA: Yeah.

**GK: I wanted to come back into this. We're going to talk to people who were involved in the Black Outreach Project and the Women's Project, so we might want to get some names from you. But I think we should move on to talking about the merger of AIDS Nova Scotia and the PWA Coalition, and how that comes about.**

RA: It's bureaucratic-driven. Funders come to us and say – I can't remember, 18 months or two years or whatever it was. Let us say, 18 months. It was max two years. They did give us a bit of a lead in. So, let's say, somewhere between 18 and 24 months. And say, "In 18 months, we're going to give funding to one group."

**GK: Only one group.**

RA: Yeah. That was what they said, "And so, if you're interested, we have some funding available to help you plan for that." So, one of us, or both of us, got about fifty–sixty thousand dollars to plan this merger and so, engaged some planning person, some business consulting, planning person and thus began a process of trying to find our way to one organization, which wasn't hard to do. Like, people didn't struggle so much with services and education, but philosophically there was never any overlap. It was just all these stupid structural discussions. You know, "This person will have that job and we'll have this position and that position in this service," but then there's complete divergence in terms of marketing – uh, "marketing" – *targeting*. [laughter] I'm sure

there's divergence in that too. We weren't sophisticated enough to marketing. No, I mean targeting. So, the PWA Coalition were really clear about the importance of targeting as one of the ways that's part of health promotion work. The other crew was like, "No. You don't want to divide people up. Everybody's the same." And let alone the philosophy about PHA involvement in leadership in the organization.

**AS: So, AIDS Nova Scotia didn't have a lot of PHA involvement in leadership.**

RA: There was some, but just philosophically very different, completely different. The leadership was not PHA, you know, the chair who's standing up saying this, that or the other thing, weren't PHAs. And by this point Wilson was our chair. And so there are many, many, many, many different versions of this story, which is why it's great that you're interviewing all kinds of people. But there are two very strong alpha-males who are both chairs of the organization, and for them, what they saw was, "Bring it on. Lets have a fight. I'll win." And that's what they did, despite the fact that we spent tens of thousands of dollars, had nice meetings, and did all that stuff at the end of the day that's all it worked out to.

**AS: That must have been incredibly hard.**

RA: It was painful. It was horrible.

**AS: I can also imagine that would have just had a huge effect on... there's still a lot of work to be done. Like, what year was this that the merger happened?**

RA: 1995?

**GK: Five, yeah.**

RA: By the time, it finally happened. And towards the end, because it was kind of swinging in a PWA direction... like, we're going call it the AIDS Coalition Nova Scotia. And this is how minute and horrible a time it was, so they would come to meetings saying, "Well, I talked to someone in the business community and they said that if you have the word 'coalition' in the title that that's not good for fund-raising. People don't want to give money to something that has 'coalition' in the title," because where did the word 'coalition' come from? PWA. So, they started having secret meetings. There'd be this, "No. We're going to come together." But they were having secret meetings to kind of strategize, "How do we make this go our way?"

**AS: And AIDS is not over. People are still really sick, so how did this affect...? It must've been really challenging for this eighteen months or two years, and also doing work.**

RA: Yeah. I think during that, because there was a little bit of... you know, we moved in together. Like, I think that people on the ground just did their thing.

**AS: They kept doing their work.**

RA: Yeah. I mean sure, there's discussion and what about this and what about that and all that stuff, but I think for the most part people did their work.

**AS: Interesting.**

RA: I mean the boards really had to engage in that process. It was at that level of discussion, so while staff were engaged or consulted or whatever, it really wasn't their role to figure that all out. The boards had to do that. And there were a couple of folks who really wanted to do that. Like, really saw this as, "This is a fight I want to win," despite the fact that it got framed as consultative and collaborative and all that stuff.

**GK: So, you ended up also being an employee of the new merged organization.**

RA: Yeah.

**GK: We're really not going that much further than 1996 in terms of our central focus, so how was it for you working as an employee in those first couple of years of the new AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia? "Coalition" did get into the title.**

RA: Yes. It did. And once it got settled, there was part of the secret group from AIDS Nova Scotia who were strategizing. One of their strategies was to try to figure out how to get rid of me. And so, they came up with a trumped up charge. I'm literally sitting at home one day and I get a letter from a lawyer saying, "You're done. Bye."

**GK: I didn't know about this. That's really messy.**

RA: Yes. It was *really* messy. And then I got a lawyer, and laid it all out. It probably took a month or so, maybe two months. The guy from AIDS Nova Scotia tried to do as much he can to damage our reputation as much as humanly possible. Did some stuff in the media, did this like, "Oh yes, we're very concerned and buh-buh," you know, that sort of bullshitting. "Lets paint him as horribly as possible, but we're very concerned." And then I got a lawyer, we laid it out; went to a board meeting, laid it all out. And at the end of that board meeting, a whole pile of people plopped down their letters of resignation on the table and walked out, because they were wrong. And they had gotten found out and they never came back.

**AS: Wow. So, the people that were the plotters resigned at that moment. That's an amazing story.**

RA: Yes.

**GK: So, any final reflection on the new AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia?**

RA: Yeah. It took a little while to settle down. Initially the two... I was coordinator, the director of the other organization, we were both there, kind of in parallel positions. So, it just took a little while because it all came out. She's in the office next door. And so, a couple of weeks later I'm like,

"So, here's some minutes from the secret meeting. Do you want to tell me about that because your name's on it? Funny that you never told me about this."

**AS: She'd been next door to you this whole time?**

RA: Yeah. Just all, "So happy to see me and so lovely and, you know, buh-buh-buh." It was like, "Do you want to talk about this at all?" Anyway, she quit within a few weeks. It just took a little while to settle down and for the folks who were mean and nasty and lied and tried to do anything they can to really shit on PHAs, to wind their way out. It took a few months to settle down. And then really, what happened after that was more about, because our main source of funding was federal, was about all the shifts that were happening federally and about how that changed the work. I think the crew of people who were left behind were committed and dedicated and all those things.

**GK: I think we can continue to contact you about other people we want to contact who you might have their information about in terms of Black Outreach Project, the Women's Project, and other things. And I think, for us to now get into memories of people who died is probably not going to work out.**

RA: One word. Tell me what you think about... [laughter]

**GK: I mean what we want to do is actually remember the people who died.**

RA: When I say Raymond Wells, what do you think? Go. Go. [laughter]

**GK: Maybe you could tell us a bit more about the context for this needs assessment.**

RA: So, that literally was a, "Oh shit. We better write some of this stuff down." And it was also about the amalgamation and what was happening with the federal bureaucracy and how it was impacting the work, and we better get some of this documented. And so, we applied and we got a small piece of funding like, maybe \$10,000 or something. And just by the grace of whatever, Robert Lorway was between a Masters and PhD, and he's an anthropologist?

**GK: Medical anthropologist.**

RA: Medical anthropologist. So, we knew he had the writing skills and stuff, and so we were able to engage him. Robert wrote that. Robert wrote most of that and I wrote some of it, and pulled that together.

**AS: And you talked to people and...?**

**GK: It's based on interviews and stuff.**

RA: Yeah. Robert did that.

**GK: And there's some focus on Cape Breton as well. So, it's Halifax, Cape Breton, and other stuff is not as clear. But it's a fantastic document, so thanks so much for it.**

RA: Yeah, and it has a really clever title.

**GK: But it's not on it.**

RA: That was from Matt. Do you know Matt Nummer?

**GK: No.**

RA: He does Gay Men's Health Promotion stuff. He's here at the School of Health Promotion, still finishing up his PhD. His PhD research, I'd sent it to him, so I thought that's where it had gone. But he didn't have the cover page.

**AS: Do you know if any of the tapes or documents landed anywhere?**

RA: At some point, there's actually a fairly decent archive at the AIDS Coalition, wonderful person who kind of got it all organized. But they moved and so when I send you to them and they say they can't find it, I think something's happened there.

**GK: Yeah. My sense is there's complete disarray from when I met with the executive director last summer.**

RA: Right.

**GK: We'll continue to pursue that, but it would be nice to have a title for this. Obviously, we're going to use it only for research purposes. We don't want to publish this or anything.**

RA: And I don't know if Robert would list this on his CV.

**GK: I did email him by the way.**

RA: I'm pretty sure it would start with, "Getting Through Today." Like, we had a bit of a clever title for it. So, I'm pretty sure it would start with something like, "Getting Through Today," and something – something like that.

**GK: Yeah. It's very useful.**

RA: Yeah.

**GK: So, that's the context in which it was produced then.**

RA: Yeah.

**GK: It looks to me from reading it that part of it was to try to argue for certain types of funding and priorities and, obviously, really strenuously pushing forward that, “We’re on the front lines. We’re community-based people.” It really interesting that the formulation used...**

RA: Is that what the conclusions were? Really? [laughter]

**GK: Anyway, but one interesting thing is everyone was using by this point in time an AIDS service organization. And it is studiously community-based AIDS organizations that you’re holding on to here, which was the original formulation.**

RA: Oh, we were never an AIDS service organization, ever. That may have changed, but not on my watch.

**AS: And why? Can you just say why?**

RA: Because, I’m sure the meanings of the words have changed completely since then – and you can attribute whatever name you want, whatever words – but AIDS Service Organizations or ASOs were bureaucratic and were there to provide a service that the government either wasn’t willing to provide or could be provided for less money. So, that’s an ASO. Community-based AIDS organization might do that, but on top that philosophically it meant it was driven by community concerns. It had a role in terms of engagement and involvement in developing policies and programs. And that was something that was very much part of how we saw our work.

**AS: Yeah. Different.**

RA: Yeah.

**AS: And this is one of the reasons, this is one of the places that we’re starting here because of that orientation.**

RA: Right. [laughter] It’s fun. It’s amazing what I recalled out of my brain. It’s like, holy crap.

**GK: It’s great.**

**AS: Are you going to say anything more interesting?**

RA: No. The people, in terms of with the Black Outreach Project... I know Rocky died. I don’t know if Joan is still alive.

**GK: And was one of the workers, Brian Walker? Do you remember that name?**

RA: He was. He was a summer student. I don’t know if Kim or Deena was the lead then.

**GK: But Kim, we will try and track her down.**

RA: So, Kim Bernard was the initial one. And then actually, I think Deena was a summer student of hers. And then Deena Noseworthy, who last I heard was in Atlanta, then became the coordinator for a couple years.

**AS: And Joan?**

RA: Joan Jones was on the initial advisory committee and Lorne Izzard. Do you know Lorne?

**GK: I certainly remember the name.**

RA: He was working with CBC. He was there a long time. I mean, he might be retired or something, but I'd think he'd still be around. And there were other folks. But if you talk to Joan or Lorne, in terms of the advisory committee people, that would be good; and then Jane, if you get in touch with Jane, which was the women's project.

**GK: We need to get in touch with her.**

**AS: What's Jane's last name?**

RA: Allen. She'd be key, because she was the first person hired there. Do you know Mary Petty?

**GK: She's in Vancouver now. She's Cindy Patton's partner. They met at a party at our house.**

RA: No, they did not. They met at the Atlanta Sexuality Conference, because I brought Cindy into that conference!

**GK: Yes, but we had a party at our house.**

RA: I know you did.

**GK: So, you're right, but it was in a particular context during that weekend. [laughter]**

**AS: You're both right!**

RA: They literally met here in Halifax.

**GK: That's true.**

RA: The rest was history.

**GK: Yeah, I know how to get a hold of Mary Petty. She's another person who we may want to interview when we're in Vancouver.**



RA: She was on the advisory committee. Like, she would've been around before I was. She was one of those helpful people who understood what they were doing, didn't get in the way, but was really helpful, and then was really involved with the Women and AIDS project. So, she'd be really great for both of those. And she did a lot of care. Mary actually was a big, really... yeah.

**GK: We should definitely talk to her when we're on the west coast.**

RA: And you have the Mainline folks.

**GK: Sorry?**

RA: Mainline folks?

**GK: No.**

RA: Gordon King was the director of the Friendship Centre at the time. I have no idea if he's still around. So, he would be good to talk to in terms of what it meant from their perspective, because the Stepping Stone person would've been involved.

**GK: Jane had some relationship to Stepping Stone too, right?**

RA: Well, she and Tuma were hired at the same time for the outreach. But whoever the coordinating director of Stepping Stone was...

**GK: Nancy Rodgerson and Trish Connors are listed here under Stepping Stone. So, we've got lots of names.**

RA: Yeah. So, they'd be good to talk to about that as well. I mean Diane, whatever her position is, has been around a long time. She wasn't around during that first phase.

**GK: Yeah, we'll definitely talk to people connected to Stepping Stone too. As you can see, these things also expand.**

RA: No kidding. It's a big project.

**GK: It's great. And thanks so much for the interview. This was wonderful.**

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]