

AAHP  
**AIDS Activist History Project**

**Interview Transcript 2014.023**

<b>Interviewee:</b>	Mary Petty
<b>Interviewers:</b>	Alexis Shotwell & Gary Kinsman
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Persons present: Mary Petty – MP  
Alexis Shotwell – AS  
Gary Kinsman – GK

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

**AS: We're talking to Mary Petty on October 30th, 2014.**

**GK: When did you first hear about AIDS and what did you hear? Do you actually have any memories of that or recollections?**

MP: I do. Absolutely. I was in Atlanta, Georgia between times that I had lived in Nova Scotia. So, I was there for a couple of years working at Emory. I had some gay men friends who started talking about their friends in the hospital. It was around '81, '82 and I was starting to go to social work school down there and soon moved to Washington, DC to do a placement. I was starting to read in the gay press about what was going on so I went to whatever meetings were announced in the community and started going to little group working meetings. I went to an AIDS vigil there...one of the first. It must've been 1982. I was just starting to get up to speed and talking to people about this, but I remember being in these little working meetings in people's houses with gay men, and I would be the only woman and I would be thinking, "Oh my god. My experience from the women's health movement is what's relevant here, what I could contribute." So, that was the beginning for me, and then when I came back to Halifax, which would've been in the mid-'80s, it was on my radar. There wasn't much being said at the time, but I took it everywhere I went – into my workplace and anything else I was doing. I talked to people and asked questions. So, by the time I got to Halifax, I had a fair amount of experience in talking with people about AIDS or knowing people who were living with AIDS. Not that many people in Halifax were aware – it had not hit the media yet – so we found each other. And it was very much part of being in the gay community. They were just tied together.

**GK: So, maybe just coming back to two of the things you started to mention: One is you talked about what you've learned in the feminist health movement was really what you brought into your involvement with AIDS. Maybe you could tell us a little bit more about that. Like, what were the insights from the feminist health movement that you felt were really important?**

MP: People were just in shock and although I had been friends with gay men some in the community, I wasn't terribly experienced or knowledgeable about gay community issues at that point. I'd been mostly doing feminist work, and I remember being in these living rooms and thinking, "You guys need to get organized!" Like, "You need some women to help with this, because we have all this experience from organizing around health issues and being skeptical about the medical system and all these things. You really need our help." That was what struck me and I thought, you know, all the things that we did around abortion rights and getting individual

women engaged in empowerment around their health was so relevant to what was going on here. I felt like people were so overwhelmed and not knowing where to go, and here was something to grab onto. So, I felt like I wasn't even a very good facilitator type in those kinds of meetings, but I still had something to offer at that point.

**GK: Right. Do you remember reading particular things that were important to you about AIDS during that period?**

MP: Oh yeah. I probably read everything that I could in the gay press and whatever I could get hold of then. I was going through my stuff and I found something that I wrote in a feminist health publication that we had in Nova Scotia in the '80s on AIDS. I haven't read it again. I don't think I want to. [laughter] I was definitely tuned into whatever was being written at that time. And I'm sure I read Cindy's book early on – *Sex and Germs*.

**GK: So, you find yourself in Halifax again and you're starting to meet people. This is in '85?**

MP: I think it was '85, yeah. Yes.

**GK: What was going on in Halifax?**

MP: Well, I was working in the Clubhouse. I think I was there by then. I can only remember chunks of decades... I was working in psychiatry and I was really interested in things like, being critical around medical issues and health issues. I was really into anti-psychiatry. I worked in psychiatry but, you know, I was in a little group that could fight back on some of those issues. So, I was talking about AIDS there. I would bring it into a context where it wasn't being discussed too much and trying to get everybody on board. I've got a photograph that I'll give you of a walk that we did and I recognize in the photograph now some of the Clubhouse clients who were walking along with us. I can't remember exactly the meetings, but I went to meetings similar to the ones I had been to in Washington early on. I don't know how that got started or what I was doing. I mean the gay community in Halifax was just so small and everybody went to Rumours. It was all informal until I remember very specifically the start of the PWA (People with HIV/AIDS) Coalition, because I was quite involved in helping write grant proposals and that sort of thing. But the other thing is I actually applied for a job... what's the other organization that would've been starting up then?

**GK: It was really called MACAIDS – Metro Area...**

MP: The one that was more professionals starting it, same as here and other cities.

**GK: Yes.**

MP: I applied for a job – their very first job there but I didn't get it. I had a terrible interview. I can't remember who got it, but anyway it was a good thing I didn't get that job. It would've been a terrible job for me. Sometime after that, when the PWA Coalition got started, I was gravitating toward that. That was more my thing and I got to know those guys at that point. I didn't get that job – this must've been by the early '90s or closer to 1990, when there was the conference out

here in Vancouver. It was my first time to Vancouver and this was some kind of Canadian AIDS conference. I don't know how I got to come out here, but anyway, I came here for that. When the PWA Coalition was starting – you guys probably know the year by now. I don't know, but that's where I was, helping out. I was just really good at doing grunt work from my experiences in the women's movement. It was like "Okay, I can do that." There were a few of us just trying to help.

**AS: And can you talk a little bit about what the space was like or what the energy was like in those early days of the PWA Coalition? There was a space on Barrington.**

MP: Yeah. I sort of remember that. Can't even picture the...

**GK: The one up all the stairs.**

MP: Yeah. I don't know. I just have such scattered memories of that. And I remember the posters and all the safe sex stuff that started coming; and then the fights about those posters when women started coming into the space, and that goes on and on throughout the years. And we had a support group there that I facilitated with somebody, but I can't remember who. And there were the guys who were dying. There was this guy from the Shambhala community who identified as straight who came to that group and I remember him very well – I can't remember his name – but I remember he said, "Well, I heard there was a group for gay guys and I thought it would be far more interesting than the hemophiliacs." So, he came until he died. They all died very, very soon. And I don't remember doing that for a long time because everybody died. But, you know, when I came here in 2001, there was a support group sort of like that that had survived. I mean not the people, but the group itself because it was based here at the hospital, and I remember it really brought back a lot of memories about it like, "Ah jeez, I never thought I'd see this again."

**GK: Do you remember any of the particular people that you've engaged with besides the ones who died at that point in time?**

MP: Yes, Brenda and I had a chat about it to see if we could remember more. Because she stayed in Halifax, she has a little bit better memory of the names.

**GK: This is Brenda Richard who we'll talk to later.**

MP: So I remember Frank Morton of course. He was one of the first guys I remember being involved with at the level of sitting in the hospital by his bed. Then there was a guy named Raymond Macdougall and he had a partner whose name I can't remember. And then one of the things I remember about Raymond that was interesting, because it sort of crossed paths with my professional life, was there was a psychiatrist and she was at his bedside. She had been a resident when I was doing my social work training in a psych hospital, which was horrible, a very medicalized experience, and she was a resident then. She got involved with a lot of positive guys, and she was really involved with Raymond. I remember her being at the bedside with him. So, yeah, that was really important. I was close to Bruce MacDonald and Dale Oxford – I guess Dale died first and then I remember spending a lot of time with Bruce. When he died he was staying with somebody who must've taken care of a lot of the guys back then because I remember going to

his house and that's where Bruce was when he died. He left me his leather jacket and hat, and I was the executor for his will. I went through all the photographs and his stuff and met his father. And then I was friends with Peter Wood for quite a long time. I think I was probably still there when he moved away.

**GK: ...to Newfoundland.**

MP: Yeah. He survived a long time. I heard about his death when it happened, which was much, much later I guess. I also remember the ministers and priest. There were two – Bob and...

**GK: Bob Petite?**

MP: Bob Petite and Bob Macdonald.

**GK: Yes. I'm trying to think of him.**

MP: Yeah, another Minister. They were both quite involved in all of this and then died subsequently. Yeah. Those are the names I remember, and then a series of people I just can't remember. I remember going to see that play; it was by a local or a Nova Scotia playwright, I think. What was it called? And it was one of the typical AIDS' stories – a guy coming to out to family, dying, that kind of play.

**GK: Was it someone from Cape Breton who did that?**

MP: It might've been, but it was performed at the Rebecca Cohn auditorium.

**AS: Oh. I hadn't heard of it.**

MP: Well, you know what, I do know where I have that recorded because when I did my dissertation I worked on art from the epidemic, and mentioned that play. So, I'll have that somewhere. We all went to that event – those things were just so hard, then. I went to a lot of memorial services that I can't remember. I just remember that song that was sung at every single one of them – a song from a musical. And it was about our children and the generations... but oh my god, everybody played it. It was "We Rise Again." The play was Kent Stetson's "Warm Wind in China."

**GK: So, you already talked a little bit about how this was mostly a bunch of men – mostly gay men – and obviously women. Coming into that situation, there were sometimes some tensions and some difficulties. So, I was wondering if you might talk a little bit more about that.**

MP: Yeah. The other person I remember really well when I was thinking about this was Janet Connors. I remember when Janet – I think of it now as kind of being discovered. You know, it was like, "Oh! This is a woman living with AIDS," and I remember going to a meeting and – I don't think it was PWA, it might've been MACAIDS [Metro Area Committee on AIDS] – but I just remember

being there with her and being worried about what was going to happen. And it was a justified worry in that I've seen over the years, and it continues, women just being burned out by being held up as "the woman with AIDS." I'm glad, whenever I see Janet now, to see that she's survived all of this. I have run into her, protesting at conferences, so that was good. But in the overall work, there were tensions between some of the women and the gay men about safer sex posters and explicit images.

**GK: So, one of the things the PWA Coalition does a little bit later, and I'm not sure if you were involved in this. There is both the Women's Outreach Project and the Black Outreach Project. Do you have any memories...?**

MP: The Black Outreach Project I can't remember at all. So, it might've been a little bit after my time but the Women's Outreach I do remember. I can remember writing a grant for that too.

**AS: They got money for it.**

MP: That's what I remember about that, and that it was going back to my feminist health movement experiences. When I moved to Nova Scotia and lived in New Glasgow during the late '70s and early '80s, and I worked in the Women's Centre, we just wrote grants all the time. So, I brought that into this work. I was always happy to write grant proposals.

**AS: Another thing, it seems like, early on in the PWA Coalition there was a kind of informal needle exchange that happened. Do you remember anything about that?**

MP: Not too much. Just kind of hearing about it.

**AS: I've been interested in the things that are very overt like, "We're doing this and they think that we're just..." something about the Nova Scotia context that's, "Yeah, we had a needle exchange. We didn't try to make a big deal of it with the government. We just let people know that they could come." You know?**

MP: That sounds like Nova Scotia, where you're more likely to know the Health Minister personally. It's such a small population, very connected, so there was a low key way in which you could actually get things done, sort of under the radar. Not like in the larger provinces.

**AS: Yes. It shapes things.**

**GK: Well, one of the things that happens – I think I might've first met you around this but maybe not, I'm not sure – was there was an attempt to do some province-wide organizing around the government talking about developing a provincial AIDS strategy and there was actually a network of community-based groups across the province and we had meetings. Do you have any memories of that?**

MP: I do. I would've been involved with my old buddies from the Pictou County Women's Centre and that group, because I know they got involved in those efforts. So, that's what I mainly

remember from that time. I would've still been involved in abortion rights and women's health issues. I remember a kind of overlap between AIDS issues and other events. There was some kind of provincial women's health organization. Those of us who were activists were involved in a lot of connected issues.

**GK: Right. So, then at some point ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power] emerges.**

MP: Yeah.

**GK: Do you have any memories of how that happened?**

MP: I suspect that we all knew about ACT UP from whatever we were reading and paying attention to and that we were like, "Oh. We should do that." So, yeah, I led the donkey.<sup>1</sup>

**GK: Oh really?**

MP: And there's a picture.

**GK: We haven't been able to find a picture.**

MP: Okay. Brenda says she can find it.

**GK: Okay.**

MP: Because I had it for years and I just couldn't find it anywhere. I think it was in the newspaper though. But she says she can find it. And so, yeah, there was that event.

**AS: That's the MacDonald Bridge.**

**GK: If you were leading the donkey, tell us more about how that came about. From what we can figure out, it was the first action ACT UP did in some cooperation with the PWA Coalition, but it's not entirely clear.**

MP: Yeah. I don't know. I mean we must've been having meetings or something and it was like, "Let's do this." Was Peter Wood involved then? I don't know. So, somebody thought it was a good idea and we just did it. I was so game – "Okay, I'll do this." We did die-ins and everything. So, we were really trying to do what we had seen in ACT UP actions.

**GK: And how was the donkey?**

MP: It was really hard to move. And then a few people were concerned about the donkey's welfare and had a talk with us about that later.

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<sup>1</sup> See link for image: <http://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/675>

**AS: So, what we understand is there was an acting Premier whose last name was “Bacon” and so initially there was a desire to have a pig because of some comment on his name. But then, pigs were not as easy to get. So, do you remember who had a donkey?**

MP: Somebody in the group.

**AS: Somebody had a...**

MP: Yeah, some guy in the group had a donkey or had an uncle with a donkey or something.

**AS: Do you remember what the donkey meant?**

MP: It was the stubbornness, the inaction, the inability to move because it was all about the government inaction; so, yeah, the difficulty leading it through the streets.

**GK: So, we heard the donkey played its part very well.**

MP: Yes. Absolutely. [laughter]

**AS: Have you had any donkey leading experience before?**

MP: No.

**AS: So, it was just part of what you gained in AIDS activism. [laughter]**

**GK: Did Robin call it Pedro? The donkey?**

MP: Yes. Yes.

**GK: Yeah. I think that’s what Robin called it, Pedro the donkey.**

**AS: It’s so interesting to think about that intersection of Spring Garden, right near the Lord Elgin. Apparently, that was where it started and went down. You know, just fascinating to think of that moment there.**

MP: Yeah. It really was. I mean we just hadn’t done anything like that up to that point.

**AS: I wonder if there’d ever been a die-in in Halifax at that point. Do you remember if it felt shocking or challenging to do that?**

MP: Yes, it did. I think taking to the streets felt shocking. I mean I’m sure that other people had done that but for me it was my first time. I’ve been involved in you know feminist activist events but that was the first time I remember doing something like that. I just wasn’t familiar with this kind of theatre until we saw ACT UP. That was very important.

**AS: Do you remember anything about how the police related to the march and to people being in the streets, or the ordinary drivers, Nova Scotian drivers?**

MP: I think people were amused, yeah. I don't remember any sort of yelling at us or anything and the police I don't even remember, so they must've been either ignoring us or...

**AS: ...really slow.**

MP: Nobody was mean. Because my subsequent ACT UP experiences in New York and Washington, the police were quite mean. In Halifax maybe they were nice. I don't know. I can't remember anything about them, so it must've been okay.

**AS: Yeah.**

**GK: Sometimes if the police don't know about things happening it takes them a long time to find out and to respond. Do you have any idea about how many people would've been involved in the event you were leading the donkey at?**

MP: Yeah. You know, I think for a small city, it was probably, we could take up space in an intersection, so it had to be a hundred. I would think so.

**GK: Okay. That's more we've learned about that, so that's good. And to actually find the donkey leader.**

MP: And you will get a picture. Brenda says she knows how to do it.

**GK: So, are there other things about ACT UP Halifax that you can remember?**

MP: Well, I remember these demonstrations and, you know, those two in particular. And it must've been a relatively short period of time, just like a flash. I don't remember any discussions about, you know, sustaining these kinds of actions. It was just like maybe it wasn't a great fit for what we were doing.

**GK: Do you have any sense of how the ACT UP group would've been organized or made decisions or anything like that?**

MP: It would've been very casual. I mean it's partly a little bit coloured by my experience later with ACT UP where things were so intense – it was nothing like that. Later I thought, "That hardly even seemed like ACT UP."

**GK: So, ACT UP did an action at Rumours, which I think was largely based on just trying to get the music stopped for a little while and just sort of talk to people about "There's an AIDS crisis going on, and you need to take this seriously." And at least one side of the story is as a result of the official people at Rumours trying to get rid of the ACT UP people the screen got ripped, so there was a hole.**

MP: Oh. I don't remember that. I must've missed that. Maybe I was away or something.

**GK: That also intersects a bit with the Shirtless Wars.**

MP: Oh, the Shirtless Wars. Oh my god. I forgot until you said that.

**AS: Can say anything about the Shirtless Wars?**

MP: Oh yeah. I was in the Shirtless Wars. Oh my god.

**AS: What were the Shirtless Wars?**

MP: Like, where we took off our shirts at Rumours. Why were we doing that? [laughter]

**GK: Because women weren't allowed to do it.**

MP: Oh, because women weren't allowed to do it. Okay. [laughter] God, I remember that. Yeah.

**GK: And then eventually men weren't allowed to do it either because women weren't.**

MP: Yeah. Oh my god.

**GK: Robin's told us about that. So, it's like a pivotal moment in Halifax history.**

MP: Absolutely.

**AS: But one of the things we don't have is, apparently – so, this is like I'm implanting memory – there was a swimming party at Long Lake. No?**

MP: No, I don't remember that.

**AS: This is the story we heard – a bunch of women said, "We should be able to take our shirts off at Rumours if the men can, but in order to not make a bylaw problem we'll put 'Silence = Death' stickers on our nipples."**

MP: Oh yeah.

**AS: Can you...**

MP: Well, I remember the 'Silence = Death' stickers at some point and maybe I remember it from Rumours. I don't remember the lake, but I might've... because definitely Rumours is where I remember the shirtless thing and participating in that, and so the stickers, yeah.

**GK: And so what was it like to participate in that?**

MP: It was fun. Yeah. It was fun. I can't remember being like... it was hard sometimes, with regard to AIDS, to link those things that were sort of fun. Like, I have a picture of me and I'm just smiling and I think later on I wasn't smiling so much, but you know people were dying and we were really seeing a lot of horrible stuff. So, it was almost like as part of moving away from the death and dying – when we took to the streets was kind of fun. So, it's always a little blurred for me around that. The shirtless thing just sounds like that. I mean god I was in my 30s then; it was just fun. Rumours was fun. The community was really fun. And so that was the other side of this very painful thing. And so I remember, Rumours being such an important place and I'm thinking... I mean I went to several different locations, but the one on Gottingen Street, I guess, with the theatre, I remember most.

**GK: Yes.**

MP: I mean my last bit of time in Halifax... I think I probably had my going away party there. It was a really important place for fun, and yet I also remember in those last few years before I left just seeing – you know, being able to have a sense of all the people who had died and so it was always juggling those two things.

**GK: So, in terms of that picture – that's outside the Gottingen Street Library, right?**

MP: Yes, I think that's the same one with the bridge?

**AS: Yeah.**

**GK: Okay. Yeah, it's the same banner anyway, for sure.**

MP: Yeah, that's the same one as the bridge.

**GK: Can you tell us anything more about that particular action?**

MP: These are my Clubhouse clients who came along, so I remembered that when I saw it. No, I can't. Like, who made those great signs?

**GK: We're also trying to recover banners.**

MP: And these are great signs. And I didn't make those signs, and I can't even remember being part of those, you know, the preparation for this. But somebody was doing that who was really good at it.

**AS: Do you remember any of the other people in this photo?**

MP: I don't think so.

**GK: So, do you remember any of the other people who were involved in ACT UP?**

MP: No. I don't. I mean I assume that my PWA buddies were, but I can't even remember like, who was alive at that point and whether... I mean Peter was so grumpy at that point.

**GK: I knew Peter in Saint John's and then later on in Halifax.**

MP: Yeah. I don't know. It's kind of hard...

**GK: Eric was involved in ACT UP.**

MP: Eric would've been involved for sure.

**GK: And then someone named Dan Hart?**

MP: Oh, Dan Hart. Yeah. That rings a bell.

**GK: He was quite central to ACT UP.**

MP: Okay. Yeah, that rings a bell.

**GK: We haven't yet tracked him down, but we will.**

MP: Yeah, that really sounds familiar and Eric. Peter was he Chair of the PWA at that time?

**GK: I think that Peter might've been in Saint John's during that period.**

MP: Okay, because at one point he was, whatever they call it, the Chair or the head of the coalition. But I can't see him doing this.

**GK: I can't really either.**

MP: I can't see him doing it, but anyway. Yeah. So, Eric I remember being a part of this kind of action. He would've been involved in all the organizing like, when the sign was made and those kinds of meetings I think more so than what I remember. I would be there doing whatever I could do, but I was never any good at sign-making.

**GK: So, you probably wouldn't remember what happened to the ACT UP group in Halifax then?**

MP: You mean like, when it stopped?

**GK: Yeah.**

MP: It seemed like it just faded to me, but that's also conflated with my own experience. So, I don't know. I mean maybe I moved away. It just seemed like, when I thought about it later, it seemed very short-lived.

**AS: Yeah. When did you move away?**

MP: '94.

**AS: Yeah.**

MP: I don't know. Like, the donkey thing – do you know what year that was?

**GK: I think it was on World AIDS Day, 1990. So, I think we're talking about '90-91 in terms of when ACT UP Halifax was around.**

MP: Yeah. Yeah. It was pretty short. It all blurs with me because I can't remember who was alive when. It's only people who are still living like Eric, who I can remember.

**GK: So, we're going to ask you next about your continuing involvement in AIDS stuff. But before we do that, are there any other memories that have cropped up around the time in Halifax for you that you want to tell us about?**

MP: You know, the hospital vigils. It's like these different scenarios that I remember so well in the hospital vigils, which were really, really important. I learned a lot from those, but when I think about it now I think, oh my god. I was so young, really.

**GK: Can you tell us more about the hospital vigils?**

MP: Well, I sort of got known in my small group of friends for being able to be there in that way. And I would feel like I was in another zone being at someone's bedside. I was getting so much personally from just being able to sit with people in that way, and just being there. I mean of course I had never been through anything like that, sitting with people who were dying. I was only like 30. So, that was really important and I was able to do it. I must've been able to do it because my workplace – the Clubhouse – was so progressive. They were like, "Oh yeah, go to the hospital. Do whatever you need to do." So, I would spend a lot of time there, and then some people started joking later that it was a bad sign when I showed up because I could really stick it out until the end.

**AS: Do you remember how that was organized? Like, how you would find out? Just talking to people or...?**

MP: Yeah. Like, with Frank, which was early on. I mean because his sister was such a part of his care, and then she was connected to the lesbian community. So, a lot of stuff just happened because that community was what it was and these friendship networks so connected. It just kind of happened. Later I remember – and this is connected to that support group that was out of PWA

– I remember people organizing a bit more to actually go and sit with people and maybe people who were actually dying at home got a little bit more structure. People were paying attention to making sure that that happened in a meaningful and supportive way.

**AS: There was someone there consistently.**

MP: Yeah.

**AS: And Morton House gets set up at some point, right?**

MP: That's right. Oh, I totally forgot about Morton House.

**AS: Do you remember anything about that?**

MP: I mean I just remember it now that you say that it got set up.

**AS: After Fred's death.**

MP: After, yeah.

**AS: I think it's important to trace some of the... do you want to share anything about how it felt to be doing that work? Like, for a lot of people it wasn't possible to sit with people over and over again.**

MP: Yeah. I mean it sounds cliché but it was a privilege and I was aware of that then. You know, and now when I look back I keep thinking about how young I was. So, I was still capable of moving back and forth and to, you know, be excited about other things in the community – being a lesbian and the community being young, and all that stuff. So, I was able to juggle those things, whereas there were points later on, you know, when I was older and it was a lot harder to have any sense of fun or joy. But then it was really intense on both sides so, yeah. It was important, I think. I wouldn't give up any of that experience.

**AS: Yeah.**

MP: And I think about that support group a lot even though, you know, I can't remember their names. But that was just kind of amazing when I think about it now. The group that I have here are... I think because it was based here and it was run by social workers, it continued as people left and died. The group just kept going and it's now a long-term survivors group. And when I sit with them today I think about that group, and just about what everyone who survived went through. So, being my age and being the same age as the guys who are long-term survivors is really poignant—in thinking about those times and that shared experience because there are not that many people still around. In this clinic where I work today, I'm the oldest person. I'm the only person who has had any experience that goes back that far. So, it's me and the patients here who share these memories.

**AS: ...who have that.**

MP: Yeah.

**AS: And so, one part of the thing that's amazing about that support group... I mean I'm always amazed by people meeting this incredible adversity and then creating a collective space, when they might not necessarily have had experience in making collective spaces together.**

MP: I did have a lot of experience and from the women's movement and from landing in the Women's Centre (Pictou County) as soon as to Nova Scotia. I was still in my 20s and new to Canada. I just thought collective work was normal at that point.

**AS: And so you were able to bring that into the context of the guys who were positive and help shape that.**

MP: Yeah.

**GK: I am moving into your involvement with AIDS, which obviously didn't stop when you left Halifax. You got involved some forms of ACT UP activism in the States, so maybe you could just tell us a little bit about that.**

MP: Yeah, so I went to Philadelphia. I moved there with Cindy but then I went to school to do my PhD in social work. I've been really fortunate to get to do stuff that I want to do. And, again, because I was a little older – I was in my forties by that time – I was definitely not an ambitious academic type. So, I was thinking, "I'm going to have fun doing this." And it was an alternative to going out and being a social worker in the States, which I didn't think would be very much fun for me at that point. This was a really great opportunity, so I said, "Okay, well, this is what I want to study. I want to do..." because I had a professor who did something like the social impact of the arts, it was like, "Okay. I'll do this project where I look at activist art in HIV and AIDS." And so I joined ACT UP in Philadelphia. This is about mid-90s. And so it was a really interesting time to move from Halifax to Philadelphia. So, the period that I'm talking about in Halifax had already passed in Philadelphia. The people who were AIDS activists at that time were gone. So, there were just some lingering survivors, and then there was this group of anarchist young people. I thought of them as kids, they were probably just about ten years younger than me. And they were the AIDS activists – they were the ACT UP people in Philadelphia at that time. I mean they were leading the organization and they were quite involved with African American drug users in recovery. So, that was the constituency there and it was so different from New York but they had meetings the same as New York, every Monday night in a church basement. And so I went to those and went on all the actions for the next two or three years with them as part of my research – but, you know, participating in everything and getting arrested and all that was happening. When we would go to New York, it seemed like much more of the old leadership was still there; I realized they were two very different groups. I was happy to be in Philadelphia. It was good. It was a really interesting time.

**AS: There is someone who has been doing some work on the African American ACT UP, Dan Royles.**

MP: Yeah. I heard about that. Yeah, and they're still around. I try to keep up with them. We had a member – Greg Smith who is dead now – who was in prison in New Jersey for spitting on a police officer on an attempted murder charge from the early 90s I think. He was very connected to ACT UP Philly who ended up supporting him and being involved in a lot of prison HIV work. We would visit Greg in prison and he did HIV work inside the prison. Every time I go to visit a prison here, I think about going to visit him; what a brutal system it is. When I got involved with ACT UP Philly, they had just been out to Vancouver for the 1996 conference. The idea of Vancouver was very much associated with a shift in the epidemic and the “cocktail.” When I decided to move out here, I didn't really come looking for a job in HIV—I just thought I was going to quiet down my life a little bit. And I just accidentally... everything has happened to me like this, no planning, just landed in this job in the HIV clinic. The social workers here had been quite pro-active back in the early days, starting the group that I mentioned earlier and other support programs. They were quite connected to the HIV and LGBT communities. So it turned out to be a familiar place for me and a good job to end up with.

**AS: Yeah. It didn't quiet down.**

MP: Well, when I came here after Philadelphia, because of the HIV treatment and everything – medicalization of HIV and HIV care had really stepped up. By the time I got here in 2001, it was a different world full of lots of people who were new to all of this. HIV was a medical issue and treatment was the focus. And so it was hard to sort of figure out how to fit into that. I have some material I was looking at the other day from my first couple of years here and I realized that a lot of people were still dying. I don't anymore but I worked in the HIV inpatient unit part of the time, so this is where people were still in hospitals, still dying. Some of that experience that was reminiscent of the old days, and not in a good way. On my first day on this job, the social worker who hired me took me into that group and said, “You're going to run this group.” There were maybe, three guys there – three old guys, my age. And that became a really important part of my work here; I mean it is to this day. I probably wouldn't have stayed if it weren't for that group and the connections to people that it afforded me. As well, since I was just returning to more clinical work after a number of years, the guys in group got me up to speed on the treatments and medical aspects of HIV that I needed to know. Cindy and I and some SFU (Simon Fraser University) students did some work on the group related to its history and place in this community. The group was connected to the community, geographically and culturally. It changed over the years of the epidemic of course. A lot of the activist impulse diminished and it became more of a support group. At one time I think it was much more connected to activism and things that were going on in the community.

**GK: I think the PWA Coalition here may in part have grown out of that support group too.**

MP: Yeah, it may have because there was a social worker... the social worker here named Judy Krueckl, who died before I got here, who started that group and people still talk about her. And she was very connected to the community.

**GK: As we've been talking are there things that have cropped up for you that you haven't had an opportunity to talk about yet? This is your time to talk about them.**

MP: Well, you know, I could really go on and talk about – which I won't – but I think what's cropped up is just this span of time and thinking about where we are now. And it's a little hard not to feel despondent about that. So, the fighting that I do now is very different.

**AS: How would you characterize that difference?**

MP: I came here 12 or 13 years ago and the epidemic, the experience of living with HIV was thoroughly medicalized and that required an adjustment for me. I think the support group has really been an anchor for me that connected me to earlier times in the epidemic. And it still is to a certain degree, but it's such a small part of everything else that happens in the world of HIV now. Things developed in a particular way here and the program of "treatment as prevention" took hold – that was possible partly because we have universal coverage for HIV medications in BC. So, as a testing ground for that idea it made sense to government. Many of us long term activists had concerns about the impact of this program on privacy and rights but, on the other hand, we were given resources that might actually help people. But it's pretty disheartening to see this all characterized in the way that it has been – ideas like population viral load trumping social justice. And I mean, those of us working on the front lines had been saying for a long time, "We need to be able to get to people who aren't coming here and who can't reach the clinic," and then to have it all framed as treatment for prevention was pretty fucking disheartening. So, that's been hard to deal with. I'm glad that lots of guys got to survive. I find ways to be okay with that while still being critical and being able to talk to people. And there are always people who will share that perspective, although it's getting harder to find.

**AS: We paired up with AIDS ACTION NOW! in Toronto last winter to talk about some of the things that are in common, and some of the things that are really different, about quarantine legislation – quarantine impulses back then – the ways that activist groups like ACT UP and AIDS ACTION NOW! resisted quarantine legislation; current efforts around criminalization and some of the enforcing treatment; or treatment as prevention language and discourse that's happening now. Hearing some of the current things that are happening has made me feel like it's really too bad that there were these more short-lived ACT-UP experiences on both coasts and that it's not an alive way of understanding what's happening now, you know?**

MP: Yeah. I mean there are just not a lot of people critical of what's happening. And maybe there're not a lot of people who are working in the area now who feel like they have the freedom to speak out and to do anything to resist this.

**AS: Yeah. I think it's totally appropriate if you want to say something about like, how did that lack of freedom get shaped in your experience or perspective?**

MP: It's around everybody feeling vulnerable, like organizations focusing on survival and funding. I guess that's the most simplistic way to look at it, but people are very reluctant to take a stand in the face of some of this stuff.

**AS: And jeopardize the funding.**

MP: Yes. I mean because you've get this money and that's what you do with it.

**GK: And the last question is suggestions on other people we should talk to. And I guess in this case both with Halifax and here – Brenda Richard, obviously.**

MP: When you talk to Paul, he'll have some things that came up the other night when we were talking about this, and Brenda Richard. I mean, you know, those videos that they did for AIDS Vancouver – the 30 30 campaign. You've seen those. So, the people who appeared there, you might just look at those and see. Micheal Vonn, who I mentioned earlier–has a long activist history in the epidemic. She's the policy lawyer BC Civil Liberties and has done a lot of work on criminalization and the rights of HIV positive people. She appears in the 30 30 video in a piece about her life with Billy, a well-known drag performer here who died years ago. She worked at AIDS Vancouver as a case manager before she went to law school. She is very vocal with her criticisms of some of the prevention campaigns and public health approaches.

**GK: That's great. So, this has been really, really helpful. Thank you so much.**

MP: Oh good. It's good to talk about it. I'm sure everybody you talk to feels that way.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]