

AAHP
AIDS Activist History Project

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Interviewee:	Robin Metcalfe
Interviewers:	Alexis Shotwell & Gary Kinsman
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Persons present: Robin Metcalfe – RM
Alexis Shotwell – AS
Gary Kinsman – GK

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

GK: Do you remember when you first heard about AIDS?

RM: I was living in Halifax and I would've probably first read about it in *The Body Politic*, which was covering - it hadn't yet been named - the Gay Cancer. The first informed or thoughtful writing I was reading on it was Bill Lewis and Michael Lynch, what they were writing in *The Body Politic*. The first person I remember that I knew of who died was James Fraser, who was the archivist. I actually wrote a short obituary for him for *The Body Politic*. But I think there was a little bit of false security in Halifax. I remember thinking, "Oh, that's happening in New York and San Francisco."

And then Randy Shilts came up with his notion of Patient Zero, which I've written about a bit because "Patient Zero," quote-unquote, the person identified as "Patient Zero," was Gaëtan Dugas, who ended up in Halifax. There was that international media phenomenon of the creation of "Patient Zero": the photograph that was used was by Rand Gaynor, who lived in Halifax. The photograph was taken on Toronto Island, but the people knew each other from Halifax and the photographer lived in Halifax. I've written a little bit about it in *Queer Looking, Queer Acting*, but there's a much more full analysis of it that I wrote in a book called *Image and Inscription*, published by YYZ in Toronto. I do a sort of "art historical" analysis of the photography, in comparison with a painting called "The Swing" by Fragonard in the eighteenth century. I talk about the construction of the image of sexuality through the lighter than air, and how that's related to constructions of queerness and femininity. I had a lot of fun writing that. Of course, the picture of Gaëtan Dugas is him in a swing, his feet not touching the ground. I called it "Light in the Loafers." [laughter]

That kind of brought it home, because I didn't know Gaëtan particularly, but I knew quite well people like Rand Gaynor and his partner, Mert Mattice, at the time, who'd had a relationship with Gaëtan. And I knew who he was to see him. I remember seeing him on the dance floor at Rumours - the first Rumours on Granville Street. I just realized, "Oh, that's much closer to home than I had imagined." So, the first layer of denial was pulled aside rather abruptly by that information.

I haven't been affected by AIDS in the same way as many of my friends. I haven't lost someone of the first order, like a partner for example, a sibling, someone that I was very, very close to. I've lost people that certainly were good friends. I think that the AIDS crisis came at a time that I also was beginning to temper my involvement with the organized movement in Halifax. The movement was becoming a bit more institutional, as we owned turf. The local activist organization owned the social club, which was a great advantage in a lot of ways, but it also meant that that organization became very concerned with keeping what it had and protecting its investment. That led to the Shirtless Wars, which we've talked about, in 1990-91. So, I was feeling less strongly connected to the organized movement in Halifax, which led to a rupture a few years later. And that

happened in the course of the AIDS crisis. The closing of *The Body Politic*, which had a lot of impact on me because it was the movement that I'd really come out into and strongly identified with, both in Halifax and Toronto.

There were two different movements. They were both activist and pretty political, but the one in Halifax was much more, mixed men and women and a lot of working class participation. In Toronto, it was a movement of really brilliant and pretty young men ... I mean, they were all a bit older than I was; they were older men. They were maybe eight years older than I was, which is a lot when you're 21. And that also applied to the pan-Canadian movement, which was another thing again. But those were the movements that I really felt, for the first time, that I'm not somebody else – I'm not other. I'm of this group of people. This is my community. And then that community effectively ended in a lot of ways. It's interesting because in terms of *The Body Politic*, I was just at this opening of the *Camp Fires* show in Toronto, which was an important occasion for me because I found myself in the same room at the same time with Ken Popert, Gerald Hannon, and Eddy [Ed] Jackson, and I don't think that had happened since *The Body Politic* folded.

GK: Yes.

RM: So, I made a choice not to plunge into AIDS activism, at that point, in a way that a lot of my friends had. It didn't come into my life in the same way. And I was also focusing on other things, like my writing and getting started as a freelance writer. In fact, in '85-86 was when I quit my job in the railroad and started freelancing full-time. So, I was somewhat distracted with earning a living. The way I got involved was that I was living in a building in downtown Halifax, everyone calls it the Smitty's Building, because it's where the Smitty's restaurant is... The Garden Park Apartments at Spring Garden and the corner of what was then Tower. It's been renamed Martello Street. Actually, it was during a fire drill. The fire alarm went off and we had to vacate the building and I ended up chatting with one of my neighbours who was Bruce Davidson. And I became friends with him and his partner, Dale Oxford. I got chatting with Bruce and he was involved with the PWA (People with HIV/AIDS) Coalition. And so, I became friendly with a number of people in the PWA Coalition. But it's interesting that many of the people living with AIDS that I became close to, I became close to *as* people living with AIDS, rather than friends who contracted AIDS. It entered my life in a different way than having people that I was close to contracting AIDS or HIV. And I'd been in a relationship from '82 to '87 and remained very, very close with my ex-partner for many years. He went on, shortly after we broke up, to have a relationship with another person whose name I'm blanking on. He was one of two gay brothers from either outside Antigonish or New Glasgow. But he was a prominent activist in the Coalition, and I remember meeting with them with Bruce and Dale, and the man whose name I'm not remembering at the moment. They were putting together a brief for the AIDS Taskforce. They asked for my editing help as a writer for developing their brief for the AIDS Taskforce. So, I did that, which was probably the most significant kind of direct contribution I made. That was late '80s that these things were going on, and then in around 1990 there was an upsurge of activism, including a lot of younger activists. Sort of a new generation who were involved with ACT UP and Queer Nation, which were more or less the same thing in Halifax. If it was a demo about AIDS policy or medication it was ACT UP, and if it was generally queer it was Queer Nation.

AS: But it would be the same people.

RM: Yeah. And people like Michael Weir, and Dan Hart, and Brenda Barnes; people like that were very involved. And Colin Colette, I remember, who was a friend of mine locally. I remember, I think it was Pedro the Donkey – the demo where they led the donkey through the streets to symbolize the stubbornness of government.¹ The donkey really played the role very well and refused to budge. I do remember participating in a die-in, which... Now, this is memory and memory isn't obviously always reliable, but my memory is participating in a die-in at the corner of Spring Garden and South Park, the corner by Victoria Park and the Lord Nelson. And I don't think we died-in for a long time, we just did it long enough to make a point and stop traffic.

GK: And was that part of the same event?

RM: That's where I'm not sure. It may or may not have been part of the same demo – they tend to sort of mush together in one's head. But actually, I suppose the interesting thing there is that younger generation. So, that was a bit different. At that point then there were two ways in which there were organized groups of people that I was involved with. One was the PWA Coalition, and actually I had gone early on to the meetings of the Gay Men's Health Association, what became that and then later on very unfortunately MACAIDS – the Metro Area Committee on AIDS. Would you like a side of fries with that? [laughter] And Scott MacNeill, he was part of that early on.

I'm backtracking a little bit to the very beginning of the organized response. My sense was that the people who responded there were worried well and people who had friends who were becoming ill. They did not really have a history of activist organizing, and so they didn't bring a big set of critical skills to bear. I think that movement got somewhat hijacked by health professionals – some of whom were gay, some of whom weren't – but they were health professionals before they were gay is sort of the feeling you got. I don't mean to badmouth. There were a couple of doctors who did a lot of really good work in Halifax and certainly Bob Fredrickson was a very important activist in the community, but the sense was that “the white coats knew what they were doing and we should trust them.” And I don't think that people, like myself, who had a history with activism would've bought into that, but people who didn't have a history of activism were more likely to trust the professionals, that they knew what they were doing.

That meant that organization got off to a difficult start and there were tensions about representing just the queer community generally, much less people with AIDS. So, there were almost two layers between the organization and people with AIDS. First of all, there were the professionals and then there were the worried well, and the people who were actually directly affected were the farthest away from the actual organizing and decision-making. That started to change with the PWA Coalition, where I came in. I'd been to some early meetings but I hadn't really been active in those other organizations. I got involved in the PWA Coalition at their request in the support role to provide support services. Then the third thing was the young, queer, radical political/cultural movement, which grew out of the AIDS crisis, people who came out into the time of the AIDS crisis, and so were affected in another way again, by the crisis. And they I think joined forces with people from the PWA Coalition. Many of the people that were active in ACT UP for example, in Halifax, weren't necessarily directly affected or infected, but they were dissatisfied

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

with the responses of the authorities and it also was a way of articulating a queer critique in general. And the earlier wave – the '70s wave of queer activism in Halifax, which I'd been part of – had kind of dissipated at that point. The Gay Alliance for Equality was less political and radical than it had been.

AS: It's just so interesting this point about having the social centre set up ... Is your sense that it was generally that people who had been very involved in gay activism in Nova Scotia did not necessarily immediately transition into working with HIV and AIDS?

RM: I don't think it was so much the individuals, because the actual radical contingent in Gay Alliance for Equality wasn't that big. At one point it was the Civil Rights Committee, that was it. That was the euphemism for the lefty radicals and, of course, I was the chair of the Civil Rights Committee, at least at one point. But there was a handful of people who were quite ready to zoom off to national conferences and to organize demos and leaflet and stuff like that. But the Gay Alliance for Equality, which later became GALA – actually the change of name kind of corresponded with the change of the tone of the organization – the Gay Alliance for Equality (GAE) came together at a time when *any* activism was radical to some degree because we didn't even have human rights protection.

To be out at all was a radical stance. Some were more radical than others, but generally the organization wasn't divided severely. I should say, we were definitely aware of a kind of tension in the organization. I was aware of a group of gay men who would not march in the marches and would stand at the sidelines and make smart comments. That tension came to the fore most clearly in 1977, in the Tits'n'Lipstick controversy, during which all the radicals went to the conference in Saskatoon. All but six of us, which is a pretty large number of the radicals went to Saskatoon for the conference. I'm gesturing to you Gary because I saw pictures of you in Saskatoon recently on the website.

GK: So, this is the cross-country conference you're talking about.

RM: Yes, in 1977.

GK: That's right.

RM: Because the Gay Alliance actually had a fair amount of money, because we were running this social centre, six of us took the train to Saskatoon. Our travel expenses were paid by the Gay Alliance, and we went to attend the conference and while the radical cats were away, the mice did play. Rand Gaynor comes into this story again. Rand Gaynor, I don't see as having a political agenda, a conservative one particularly. He kind of got pulled into this. I don't remember to what degree a decision had been made before we left. There may have been some general talk about having a couple of murals made for the community centre – a men's mural and a women's mural. When we came back, one of the murals had been done and it was a "women's" mural, quote-unquote, which of course had been done by a man. It was Rand Gaynor who'd done it. And it was Rand Gaynor of 1977's concept of lesbianism, which was two sets of bullet-headed, bullet-nosed breasts pointing at each other with a kind of electrical charge going between them and a big tube of lipstick coming out of it. [laughter]

AS: Phallic-substitute.

RM: Yes. A super-sized dildo. Well, that might actually fly better today, but in 1977 it did not fly with the lesbian feminist community in Halifax. Actually, the mural was recreated by the young queer community in Halifax last fall.

AS: Really?

RM: Fall of 2013. It's in there in *OUT; Queer Looking, Queer Acting Revisited*, and I think it was Genevieve Flavelle, Beck Gilmer-Osborne, and Emily Davidson. The lead person Genevieve Flavelle is credited in there for it, and they did it from a photograph that I had taken, because I did have the presence of mind to document it. What happened was while the radical contingent were away, this thing went up. And we came back and it was a *fait accompli* and there was a crisis in the organization. First of all, there was a lot of, "Well, we should take it down or paint it over." and "No, we shouldn't." and, "You just have no sense of humour," and, "You don't get camp sensibility, blah blah blah..." And nothing was happening on it. We were in a deadlock and then a group of women took it into their own hands and they graffitied... They wrote over it, "This is a crime against women" and "Keep your hands *of my sexuality*," actually. [laughter]

AS: It's hard to spell when doing graffiti.

RM: And that's what I documented; I documented the graffitied one. And then there was a crisis because the conservative men in the organization wanted the women expelled for having vandalized the community property. Of course, the left wing in the organization said, "No, they shouldn't be expelled. Maybe you should be expelled. But let's just call it a draw. The mural is done," which is what happened. But that was sort of the extent of political parting in GAE, and it didn't really come to the fore. What I'm calling the conservatives weren't really aggressively putting forward an alternative position on things; they were more abstaining from the more political – "Oh, those political people do that thing." This is my perception of course and it's biased, but it was, "We'll have a little fun while they're away. We'll do something that we want to do." And then, the thing is, the people who I'm calling the conservatives, during the '77 regional conference in Halifax, I have the picture; it shows this group of five men behind a banquet table Keith Dobson, known as Miss Kitty, Clive Richardson, John Marr, John Hurlburt, and Tommy Miller, who was a leading drag mother in Halifax. Of those ones I remember John Hurlburt and John Marr being, what I'm calling, conservative. They weren't even particularly conservative but they were into this sort of gay male cultural aesthetic, which didn't go with the earnestness of the left in the 1970s. I mean, Keith Dobson wasn't involved in GAE particularly. I remember him from the dance floor. He was a killer dancer. You had to watch out for those elbows. And Tommy was mainly active in the drag community, and very important in the drag community. Clive was actually fairly left wing, but he had more fun with the other guys. He and I went together for a while, and he ended up moving to Vancouver. I reconnected with Clive years later in Vancouver. Unfortunately, he died a number of years ago. And I run into John Hurlburt once in a while, and I'm always very happy to see him, and the same with John Marr. At the time, it seemed like a political difference. I don't feel like I

have political differences with them now. It was a cultural and social dynamic that had political overtones, but it wasn't a clear kind of political disagreement in that period.

I know this is a long story leading up to what happened in the eighties, and what happened in the eighties is I think basically another group of people came to the fore. People who would not have been out in the streets, or might even have been smirking on the sidelines in the 1970s; they were emboldened to be more involved because of the gains we'd made in terms of cultural space, and were also probably drawn in by the fact we were running a social club, which meant their interests were represented. They were involved in the running of that club. Of course, there were also some people who got drawn in because the club was a source of employment. Both in legitimate and not-legitimate ways, it was a source of resources. I'm sure a lot of money got funneled off in ways it shouldn't have from the organization, but it managed to keep going.

So, the focus of the organization became much more on that, and we did fund some social enterprises through that, like housing the Gay Line – for a while, we actually owned another building, which was on Macara Street, which Lynn Murphy rather cleverly named Radclyffe Hall. At one point, we hired Chris Aucoin as a community organizer. That kind of programming was kind of ham-handed: the community centre didn't function very well as a community centre. It wasn't in the middle of the community. Macara Street wasn't particularly well located. And while Chris was very motivated and very capable, it felt like, "Well, we've hired someone to do that now." As opposed to like, "We're all doing this together." It felt like the activism was getting bogged down within the organization and more institutional. That led up to the period of the Shirtless Wars – I call it the Shirtless Wars because that was the part that I was most directly involved in. But it really merged with the Queer Nation and ACT UP moments in Halifax.

So, there was this new wave of activism, which frightened the horses a little bit in GAE, and GAE at the time still represented a very broad coalition of people. It was much more gender mixed generally. It varied from year to year, but consistently when I would go to national conferences or I'd go visit groups in Toronto, et cetera, you would see, *The Body Politic* was overwhelmingly men and a couple of women – Chris Bearchell, notably – who were bravely asserting another presence. In GAE, women were often a third and sometimes a majority. I would still say it was male-dominated, but not in the same way as most gay organizations in Canada. So, that was an aside.

At the time, we actually had a woman manager. Last time I held an executive position in the Gay Alliance, I was Vice-President of GALA. By that point, the Vice-President chaired the organization, so I chaired it but I wasn't President. I won't remember the exact order of succession of offices, but I remember Pam Leeming being the last president of GALA that I dealt with. Pam was a very good person. I like Pam a lot, and I don't think she was conservative in a political sense. She was conservative in wanting to conserve energies and conserve what we had, and so could be persuaded to go along with some decisions that I thought were conservative in the other sense. But the manager was Marilyn Lamb. She was Mary Daly-type feminist. So, she was another kind of conservative. She was a sexual conservative in the feminist sense, with some very strong opinions about gender and sexuality. I remember we had a very earnest public meeting once about drag and there was this tiny Acadian drag queen – very effeminate – who came to the meeting. Not someone who had blossomed into full ballsy drag queen mode, which you have to if you're going to survive as a drag queen. An early stage drag queen and rather a sweet person. And I remember Marilyn saying to him, "Well, you know, you walk up the street and you have all the male privilege in the world," except, "No, he doesn't! You have more male privilege than he has." It was that kind

of cookie cutter thinking, “This is how things are.” Marilyn Lamb was a very intelligent woman, and we had some really interesting conversations about things like etymologies and linguistics. But that also made her a force to be dealt with. At the time her partner was Kath Cure, who later, when they broke up, totally flipped in terms of her position. But at the time Kath was writing for the newsletter. And I’m sorry. I don’t remember what stage between the evolution of *Have You Heard?* and the emergence of *Wayves* this was, but it was a periodical associated with the Alliance for Equality, and Kath was writing in it regularly. She seemed to be Marilyn’s mouthpiece. When the Shirtless Wars came, she articulated the party line from Marilyn’s perspective. Then, when they broke up, she totally dropped that and she started organizing drag shows. [laughter]

AS: People are complicated.

RM: So, I don’t think that her heart was really in it. But the manager, she had very strong political opinions on issues of gender and sexuality from a lesbian feminist Mary Daly kind of position, and the first conflict that came up was actually with ACT UP. Now these things were happening in parallel – the Shirtless Wars and ACT UP/Queer Nation, and I think that the shirtless dancing may have started – but they were close in time. But this happened before the full war broke out around shirtless dancing.

ACT UP did a zap of Rumours, which had the largest video-screen east of Montreal. It was actually a fabulous place to dance. There was a period there in about 1990, when it was possibly the best dance club in Canada. I remember the NDP had their national convention in Halifax, and a whole bunch of people went to Rumours after their meetings, and were like, “Wow!”

AS: This is really great.

RM: It was an incredible space.

AS: And what made it so great? I mean, was it the DJs? What was it?

RM: It was a bunch of things. It was first of all the building, which was the old Vogue Theatre. Now, this is when we really missed an opportunity, because The Vogue had been renamed The Cove at one point. It was built in 1948. It was actually a lovely theatre. It was a late-deco building and had been a movie theatre with tiered levels, a big sloping balcony and orchestra leading down to the main screen. Then it had devolved into a seedy porn theatre, and then it closed. When we took it over, we took the name Rumours.

When The Turret on Barrington Street had moved to Granville it became Rumours, and the Turret had been beloved. Rumours on Granville was not beloved, and so the name did not have a strong association, but we took it with us to Gottingen and named the club on Gottingen Rumours. But we could’ve named it The Vogue because we moved there just before Madonna had her huge hit. Like we could’ve had The Vogue. [laughter]

AS: It could’ve been international.

RM: Yeah! We would’ve had every right to it, because the building had been called the Vogue since 1948. But we didn’t. It was called Rumours. We did a reno of the building, and Bill Mitchell who

was studying architecture at TUNS, Technical University of Nova Scotia as it was then, actually designed the interior. We had this cascading series of levels coming down. There was the projection booth, way up in the back; you would climb the stairs to go up and it was like a private place with a view down. The place was enormous, and there were layers and layers and layers. And of course, it was all about view planes. It was fabulous for cruising. If you know the Roy Thompson Hall in Toronto, the one really good thing about that building – the acoustics have been like a headache from the beginning – but the area around it, where you go during intermission, you just go up and down stairs and look at people from different levels and it's wonderful for seeing and being seen. Well, Rumours was like that but in one giant open space. Then it went down to this dance floor with a big bar in the middle and above the dance floor was the largest video screen east of Montreal. And music videos were really just blossoming at the time. There were some community-produced videos that appeared on the screen as well. In terms of DJs, we had a local dance culture that emerged, and what I experienced there is that the dance floor trains the DJ. Like, when there was a bad mix we all would stop and make hand signals about what we think should be happening next.

There were some really good dance nights there. But the social club was still operating. I think Wednesday nights were pool night, which was mainly women. I think that was up in the projection booth. So, it was serving a very mixed audience. Not everybody understood was that, economically, Saturday nights kept the place going. The Wednesday night pool nights were not paying the rent. They were a really good thing to have and kept the place open and a fun place to be, but it was between 11:00 and 1:00am on Saturday night was when most of the money got made to keep the place going through the week. And that was the dance time. And it was still fairly mixed there, but it definitely was a largely gay male energy on the dance floor.

Anyway, ACT UP did this zap, which was probably on a Saturday night. They would've chosen a time that was dramatic. They stopped the music and did a little demo on stage. They basically said, "We challenge people not to be complacent in the face of AIDS, and to be active." In the process of that, I think when they were leaving, somebody, I don't know if it was a placard or something, rubbed against the screen and it made a rip. And I don't think it was a big rip, but it damaged a little corner of the screen. And the manager, Marilyn Lamb, wanted ACT UP to pay for a new screen.

AS: Which would've been...

RM: A fabulous amount of money. She wanted to ban them from the club for having interrupted activities and everything. So there was a big crisis about that. I was later banned from the club because of the Shirtless Wars. I remember some of the activists in ACT UP were later involved in the shirtless dancing. They did not pay for the screen. It was ridiculous to expect them to. And while the ACT UP people should've been more careful, it was a screen; it was an honest mistake in the process of doing what we're supposed to be doing which is, you know, activism.

That was an example of how those tensions came to the fore, and the tensions that were already there. It was the fall of 1990, winter of 1991. There was a one year period when this phenomenon developed of people dancing with their shirts off – first men, and then men and women. The background of that is peculiar to Halifax. We had not had shirtless dancing. It was standard in gay clubs in North America: with the gay male dance culture, that was what you did when you got all hot and sweaty and into it, you took your shirt off. And that hadn't been a culture

in Halifax. It was a combination of factors: One was Halifax was just culturally conservative. People thought, well, you can do that in Toronto or Fire Island, but you don't do that in Halifax. But also, it was an odd example of the conservative impact of progressive politics. It's like what I was saying about Marilyn Lamb's feminism, which had conservative effects, although it was a radical critique.

The situation in Halifax wasn't based, originally, upon that kind of politics – Marilyn's politics – so much as just the general sense that the space is mixed. We're holding onto, or hoping the liquor license board doesn't take away, our club license. The men in Halifax were not particularly bold. Once in a while, a guy would take his shirt off and there wasn't actually a strict rule against it, but it was frowned on. It's like you're rocking the boat. I'm projecting backwards, so I'm not sure if it's accurate for what the situation would've been in, let's say, 1978 or 1981, but there was never a big, shirtless dancing culture and the general understanding seemed to be that there was an unwritten, unspoken agreement or truce that men would not assert a really gay male sexual space because it was a shared space. Most men weren't inclined to anyway, because they were caught in a bubble of a certain cultural conservatism in Halifax. The men who did, were constrained somewhat. It's like, "You might be going too far."

What happened in 1990 is that a group of men started to take our shirts off. It was three of us. I think Chris Aucoin probably started it, and Ken Belanger, who was my ex- but an ex- I was very close to, and myself went along. Because it hadn't been a strict rule, maybe Chris went and danced with his shirt off and nobody stopped him. But people were saying, "Oh, you're not supposed to. People don't do that here." That was it, "People don't do that here." That was the tone. We would confer beforehand and say, "Are you going to the club this Saturday? Are you going to take your shirt off?" So, we had support for each other. The three of us started doing it. It was frowned upon but not banned, because it wasn't technically illegal in the Gay Alliance. And other people started joining in. So, over the course of the fall and through the winter, the group started growing, of other men who would take their shirts off. That gave rise to the tension that was articulated in the community newsletter, and with Marilyn and Kath – Marilyn *through* Kath would be my perception – articulating a critique of this. And there were people complaining. We had all kinds of meetings about it. "Should we allow this? Should we ban it?" One of the phrases that Kath used in one of her articles was, "I don't want men rubbing their hot, sweaty bodies up against me," and I worked with Andrew Horwood who was graduating from NSCAD (Nova Scotia College of Art and Design) at the time as an artist. We collaboratively made a t-shirt that said, "Hot Sweaty Body." People wore them to the club. It may have been during that period – a lot of discourse – that we had that community meeting about drag that I talked about. So, there was a lot of effort to have a conversation about it. We were a very broad-based organization and that's very much to the good. I really value that part of our history, but this is a process through which that broke down.

AS: But what did it mean for you to be taking your shirt off?

RM: Well, it was interesting, the framing of it was that a lot could say, "Well, you can do that because you're gay men who have been to the gym and blah blah blah, and it's all about body fascism, blah blah." It certainly helped to have been to the gym, when you take your shirt off. But I've always been embarrassed about my body. Even after I went to the gym, I did not have a particularly gym-built body or I didn't perceive it that way. I have large breasts, which if I hold

them the right way, look pretty good as peccs. But my perception – self-perception – was always, not a positive body image.

I was embarrassed in gym class and I hated when we had to take our shirts off – shirts and skins. I was mortified when I was a boy in school. I hated gym class anyways, but one of the worst things was when I would have to take my shirt off. Going to the gym helped to build up my confidence, but it was also a sense that it's okay if my body isn't perfect. I remember other men who definitely didn't have perfect bodies, who were taking their shirts off and my sense was we'd actually created a zone of permission. I remember some guy who was very heavy, for example, and we'd all go around and say, "Yay! You've taken your shirt off!" And this was before Bear Culture had emerged, had ripened, and you'd say, "Hey, you're kind of heavy." [laughter] Definitely, in the group that I was in – the people who instigated it – there wasn't a sense, "Oh well, he shouldn't take his shirt off." It was never that. We were really happy that you've got to that place that we've got ourselves to, of feeling free enough with our bodies. And for me, it was transformative. I danced, from 1975 when I first came out in Halifax, but it was always like, [muted] 'doo doo doo doo.' And something happened to me; I was possessed by the god of the dance. My body has never forgotten it. I discovered dance in totally different ways.

We often don't value the body nearly enough in politics and realize how vital it is. Walking in your first demo is such an important experience because it's a physical experience. You can think about it, you can articulate ideas about it, but actually going in the street and presenting yourself and declaring yourself to the buildings and the people around and claiming the space is a physical activity that your body never forgets. It never forgets that feeling of freedom. "I can do that." "Why would I want to do the other?" It was like that with the dancing. I found myself in a place I'd never experienced or even imagined, and for me it was actually ecstatic, and the closest thing to a religious experience I'd had. It was community, because it was done communally – it was very much a collective space, and I danced best in a group where the group is dancing. Where you're creating the dance floor. And we created the dance floor, which was free for people to do whatever. You could form a line; you could dance by yourself. You could start flirting with somebody you don't know and then break off after a point and go somewhere else. It was a collective space and it was physically and emotionally and spiritually transformative. And taking our shirts off was like – if you used a religious metaphor – a sacrament. I don't want to get religious about it because it's not about a theology; it's about an actual experience.

And so this went on from the fall/winter into the summer, and it came to a head on Pride Day, when there was a demo. My understanding is that a group of women who were all involved, or many involved, with ACT UP. They were younger women activists. People like Brenda Barnes and there was another young woman who I'm picturing, I don't remember her name but I remember her being involved, a very attractive young woman. They went out to swim in a lake in the afternoon. This was between the march and the dance. It was a hot day and I remember women running into sprinklers and getting all wet, so it was wet t-shirt dyke kind of party as part of the parade. So, many of these women went out and swam naked, I believe in a warm lake outside of the City, and then came back, and they had the idea that they were going to take their shirts off. But they had this idea that legally you could protect yourself if you covered your nipples, covered your areola. We all learned the word "areola" in this thing; that became a political term in Halifax. They had "Silence = Death" stickers and they put "Silence = Death" stickers on their nipples. They came to the club and they were going to do it on a certain song, and they were

waiting for that song and that song wasn't coming. They actually ended up doing it to, I think it was, "I am what I am." There were two songs – "I Am What I Am" and "We Are Family" – and I think they might've played back to back, but I think it was "I Am What I Am." You know, the drag triumph song from La Cage aux Folles, which is wonderful kind of symbolism [laughter].

AS: More accurate.

RM: Yeah. It was around one o'clock in the morning. This group of women took their shirts off with these stickers on their nipples, and I remember that was the best two minutes of my entire life. It was such a surge of joy. The men who were dancing, and there might've been eleven or so – we had become a bigger group – we just immediately whooped with joy. And this thing spontaneously happened where the women formed a circle and were dancing in one direction, and the men formed a circle going the other way. Then men were lifting women up. You know, Brenda Barnes, who's woman, someone lifted her up. I have an audiotape interview – I actually did a thing on CBC about the Shirtless Wars in 1993 and I have a tape of her talking about – "There I am – tits to the wind!" [laughter] I remember talking with CBC about keeping that part on air, right – "tits to the wind," which we did, but the CBC thought that that was pushing the envelope.

So, Brenda Barnes was there "tits to the wind." And then all of a sudden, all sorts of people started taking their shirts off – men and women all over the place. It's like, "Oh, okay. We're all doing this," right. It was this wonderful moment of liberation, which of course didn't last because then we went into the reaction period and there was a series of meetings. There was an initiative to ban shirtless dancing – to actually make a law, make a rule. As I recall Kath Cure was bringing that forward. We had a big public meeting and because I'm good at what I call "Robin's Rules of Order" [laughter] – I do know meeting procedure, and I realized it was to our advantage to get our motion on the floor first, so I managed to get our motion on the floor first. Everyone knew there was a motion coming, to be proposed, to ban shirtless dancing, but before that came to the floor, this is how I recall it, I brought forward a motion to allow shirtless dancing for everyone.

There had been this rationalization that, "Well, women don't have freedom to dance with their shirts off, so it's not fair to let men have that freedom," and I thought there were several things wrong with that. One is, who says women don't have that freedom? We actually hired Maureen Shebib, I don't know if she got paid for it or not, she may have done it pro bono, but she was a lawyer and did a study on it. And she said, "You know, actually the law is really weak on this and if we challenged it, it probably wouldn't hold up." In fact that was true, because Gwen Jacob challenged and won the right, asserted the right for women to appear shirtless in public. That was very shortly after this happened. Maureen said, "First of all, the law is not definitive, and probably, to the extent it exists, would fall." She also told us what the steps were. The police were not going to run in and shut the club down. There'd be a series of things that would happen, of things being brought up and the liquor license board asking a question and blah blah blah... And there'd be a series of stages where we could decide how to fight or to strategically retreat. You know, it would be like any other campaign.

It's a very poor liberation argument that because one group can't do something you shouldn't let the other group do it either. It seems to me that you should be saying, how do we get the same freedom for everybody. , At that point [early in the Shirtless Wars] there wasn't a group of women who were mobilized fighting for it. And I said, "If the women want to mobilize around it, then I think the men should support them. If the women aren't mobilizing around it – that's their

choice. But that doesn't mean that we aren't allowed to do it. We're going to do it. And if and when the women decide they want to do it, then we're on board with them." This is the argument we made in the months leading up to it. And when the meeting happened, the argument that I and the pro-shirtless people put forward was, "Let's take this on. This is another stage in our liberation. And if we have to – we don't know, maybe there'll be no opposition, but if there is opposition – from the liquor license board or police or whomever – we can handle that as a group. We do it together." So, the decision was not just to allow it, but we were making a commitment, a collective commitment to work together to gain freedom; and for women in particular in that case, because it was women who were likely to be challenged by the authorities.

That was a great moment. I felt that was a wonderful decision that was made and was one very affirming that the organization had made that decision. But there was an immediate reaction, and another meeting was held which, as I recall, was technically not properly constituted. It was a special resolution meeting and they didn't give two-weeks notice for it. So, under the bylaws of Gay Alliance, it wasn't even a proper meeting. But that meeting was called and they banned shirtless dancing. The fear factor had set in. People were afraid that the club was going to get shut down; we were going to lose everything we gained. Although, as I say, the meeting was not properly constituted, there was no point in challenging that, because at the end of that meeting, the organization was dead. The coalition that had sustained the organization at that point for more than 15 years had died. That was one of the worst moments of my life, the end of that meeting. I remember talking with Pam Leeming who was the president. She wasn't committed to a conservative or repressive agenda at all, but she was just trying to hold everything together. I remember talking about Dale and Bruce, who were friends of mine, and saying, "I will never dance with them again. I just know it." And it's true; I didn't. They died, not too long after that. And we had never had a dance space together again. I remember telling her that and she had trouble believing it, but it was the truth. You know, that was a loss.

There was some activism. There was some resistance. Some of us went in and took our shirts off in the club while dancing. The first resistance that I remember was from a woman. That was the next week, a woman took her shirt off and Marilyn called the police.

AS: What!?

RM: Yes, Marilyn called the police. And I was there. I went right over to be near, to hear what was happening and the police told her, "This is your problem, we don't want to be involved," and left. So, it wasn't the police and it wasn't the liquor license board who were...

AS: Who were instigating this.

RM: No. But this woman was hustled by security out of the club. And then it may have been the next week, a group of us went and took our shirts off and they stopped the music. And of course, the crowd was really hostile because it was Saturday night and they were there to drink and dance, and we were the troublemakers who were stopping the music. Well, I think we walked out. I don't think we were escorted out. Anyway, we left but then I and some of the others were banned, actually banned from the club.

GK: For a period of time, or forever and ever?

RM: I think it was for a period of time. I remember being in the club again later, but there was a period when we were banned. Mike Sangster and I did a little zap, a little demo in front of the club. It was the only occasion in which I joined the order of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. We both got our t-shirts up in wimples, and I made a leaflet. The cover of it was the image of the Hierophant from the Tarot deck and it said, "Marilyn for Pope." [laughter]

GK: Oh yes. Okay.

RM: And it said why Marilyn would make a great pope. At some point, I was allowed back in the club, but it was basically done. And that period in our history ended. To me, it was an interesting irony that the victory, as it was, went to the people who wanted to protect the club; the club died.

AS: How long after?

RM: It struggled on until 1995. It immediately lost its mojo and never regained it, and started losing money and went under, as did the organization, in 1995. So, it killed the Gay Alliance, basically. Not immediately. Chris would be a good person to talk to about that period because he was involved after I was. I'm trying to remember if he was actually president at one point. He may have been. I remember he put energy into trying to save it, but I think it was beyond saving at that point.

GK: So, to just continue a bit of the chronology. The Shirtless Wars is what happens with Rumours and the GALA. What happens with ACT UP in that context, in terms of any memories you have? I also remember, we've heard from other people, that ACT UP had really amazing parties where people did take their shirts off.

RM: Yeah, I think a lot of those were at Dan Hart's place too. I remember him hosting stuff. Also, this period was the birth of the Wearable Art Shows at NSCAD. I remember Michael Weir did probably the first poster for it, and it's reproduced in the book. These things come in clusters.

AS: It seems like, in some ways, either just because of the people involved or because of the "Silence = Death" nipple-covering, were the Shirtless Wars framed or understood or experienced as being people involved in ACT UP and radical AIDS organizing? Does that make sense as a question?

RM: It's interesting. Different people might have different interpretations. It was definitely the same people. As I say, these things come in clusters. It's the same group of people who were engaged on these different fronts. I would say, what happened with the Shirtless Wars is that two things merged. Some of us were already straddling that, but they kind of came together. The younger ACT UP people weren't initially part of the shirtless thing; they came on board for it, and I have to say, particularly for the women; the women took the activist step of taking their shirts off. That led to a merger of those; they had been parallel and overlapping before that. People didn't per se see it as an AIDS issue. I think it was interesting that it was an issue about the body and about embodiment in politics. And at that point, when that happened, the division lines were

pretty clear ... I mean, you expected ACT UP people and Queer Nation people and PWA people to be on the Shirtless side of the battle.

AS: Yes. It seems like it coincides with, it goes along with, a particular view of holding on to a particular kind of positive feeling about sexuality and sex and a refusal to have shame.

RM: Yeah. For me – this is going back to another beginning – my personal experience of the AIDS crisis, on one of the most profound levels, was the loss of a world, and that was an activist world. It wasn't the loss of a gay male club dance space, because that was the period that led to all the White Parties and Black Parties and the Circuit Parties. I was actually in Montreal during one of the Circuit Parties. I was staying on the street where all the guys were staying, and I didn't go... I just felt like this is so not me. A part of me really wanted to but I didn't feel plugged into it. So, it wasn't so much the loss of that, but it was the loss of the space that had that intensity of political engagement, as well as a space to dance and to connect. And, the loss of *The Body Politic*, the fact that the people I knew either faded away from activism or shifted so they were involved in AIDS activism or AIDS support. A lot of people were just involved in AIDS support because people were sick and were dying left, right, and centre and needed a lot of just very practical, immediate care and support.

I remember I attended a conference in Toronto about trying to reclaim radical sex politics – that would've been later in the '90s at some point. I don't remember the date. It floats out there because it's not connected to anything. It was an attempt to reconnect. Bill Dobbs from New York. I don't know if you know him, he was part of Sex Panic New York.

GK: Yes.

RM: It was an attempt, not very successful, to try and reanimate the sex radical movement of the '70s. My memory of that moment around 1990 – yeah, early '90s – was that it was an abortive kind of second wave. There was a huge amount of energy, a lot of interesting young activists... It came to grief in Halifax and a lot of the younger activists left. And it left us in Halifax without much to hold on to.

We're now in another wave – the second edition of *Queer Looking Queer Acting* – the young community I've engaged with there ... It's the most hopeful wave I've seen since the wave in 1990 and it feels like it might stick around more. Particularly around issues of gender and trans issues, it's already changed the terrain generally. There's an incredible generation of young queer activists who also seem to be sticking around. I feel, in some ways, the current generation is the most solid reemergence of that energy since the '70s. That may be unfair to the reemergence around 1990, but the one around 1990 didn't sustain itself locally because of the kind of conflicts I was talking about.

GK: So, if there's nothing else immediate that comes up, maybe I could go back to some earlier questions that are not quite part of the narrative that you talked about. They might bring things into the conversation. Just to go back, you mentioned Eric Smith at one point, but do you have any memories of that in terms of how much support Eric got from within the gay scene? Or what sort ramifications there were on people?

RM: Some of those questions I can't answer very well because, in a couple of ways, there's a blank period for me. There's a blank period in the second half of the '80s – or let's say the mid-'80s, between about 83-4 and '87 – the period when the Gay Alliance, the GAE became GALA and then that changeover. A new group of people were serving on the board. I was less involved with the Gay Alliance. I also wasn't as directly involved in that period with the early AIDS activism. I got drawn back in to some extent, but not in as high profile a role as I'd been in the gay movement in the late '70s, early '80s... So, I don't feel like I'm well informed for some of those questions. I was aware of them going on, and was peripherally connected. You know, I went to some of the demos and some of the hearings. I did speak at, I think it was the Krever Inquiry, and I helped write the brief for the AIDS Taskforce, from the PWA Coalition. I should say I edited; I massaged the text. They produced the text and I helped massage it into a more effective form. I can't generalize. I didn't feel like there was a general community to be able to say 'the community' responded this way or that way.

GK: Maybe more individually, what was the impact of the Eric Smith situation for you?

RM: I don't know if I can say. At that point it had several layers to it. It had all the questions around AIDS, about response or lack of response to AIDS; the slowness of the provincial government to produce safe sex materials and programs, etc.; the lack of Human Rights protection for PWAs, for gay people, because they were both at play with Eric –the fact that he could have been fired for either of those. So, it was part of the longer campaign to get human rights protection.

It's hard to separate it out also from the global situation, which was that in the late '80s there was a polarization. The political possibility formed in two different directions. One was incredible repression. People talking about tattooing people with AIDS or gay people, and putting us in concentration camps, but the long term effect was actually that it moved forward the agenda of human rights, and acceptance on that kind of a level. But that was sorting itself out. So, the lines were being drawn and forces were shifting one way or the other – either towards repression or towards acceptance and integrating a more accepting attitude.

There were individual steps, individual battles. At the same time, I think, spousal benefits and such things were starting to emerge. Partly because of the AIDS crisis, because of surviving partners or partners who may not get into hospital rooms. I would say I was more directly connected with the first wave, of just putting it on the agenda: saying there was a political issue here about getting sexual orientation protection, as part of the larger questions. It was a period of nitty-gritty battles on many fronts.

GK: I'm going to ask another question that goes even further back, but I think it's a continuous point in terms of the narrative you've been talking about, which is the connection with *The Body Politic* and the early articles by Bill Lewis and Michael Lynch. Clearly that provided a gay liberation context for dealing with AIDS. I just wanted to know if you wanted tell us more about how that was significant for you?

RM: I felt fortunate that I was in Canada because the questions were being framed differently than in the United States. I didn't have direct experience with the United States. I was reading American periodicals and I knew American activists. I wasn't really going to the US, except to Maine, oddly enough. I had friends in the state of Maine that I had contact with. It seemed that in the United

States a lot of the reaction was a panic reaction and an overreaction and an anti-sex reaction, like closing down bathhouses. Also, safe sex literature was, across the board, not distinguishing between oral sex and anal sex in terms of risk.

In Canada, I think because of the leadership of *The Body Politic*, – in particular, and Bill Lewis and Michael Lynch – from a relatively early stage the safe sex literature *did* distinguish between high and low risk activities. And the bathhouses – partly because of the particular order of battles in Toronto, and the bathhouse raids of '81, which had happened just before the AIDS crisis, but they were very fresh and they were really important – actually defending the bathhouses was an important principle. So, we defended the bathhouses and defended sex and had sex positive safe sex literature that distinguished between high and low risk activities. That affected us here too. The literature we had, when the government got around to publishing it, was modeled on the Ontario literature. It wasn't modeled on the New York literature because we're Canadian, right? So, it definitely had an impact. It had an impact in the community in terms of framing it. It had an impact in the queer community, but it also had an impact globally because the agenda was set differently in Canada.

AS: Right. Different policy.

RM: It's also important, of course, to note that the gay community in the United States already had an established business aspect – people like David Goodstein and *The Advocate*, for example. There were large businesses, which tended towards conservatism. So, there were competing agendas in the U.S., between that kind of conservative business agenda and the "touching your lifestyle" agenda of *The Advocate*. You know, marketing and they'll love us for our money, versus *Gay Community News* in Boston, which represented more like *The Body Politic* position. But GCN was more loyal opposition. As tends to be with American politics generally, the left was somewhat marginalized.

In Canada, the left was central, I would say, because there wasn't really a gay business elite in Canada. There was very little. There was George Hislop and the baths, but they weren't even particularly conservative in the American model. So, the voice of gay liberation in Canada was already to the left of the voice of gay liberation in the United States – what was heard publicly, what registered. So, we started from a different place. And of course in Canadian politics the left was more integral to the conversation than in the United States, just globally speaking.

GK: One of the things we want to talk to people about is just memories of people who were living with AIDS during that period of time who died. We want them to be able to be remembered in the context of the project. You've already mentioned Bruce and Dale, and the regret of not being able to dance with them in that particular type of space. Is there anything that you want to share? And we realize that this opens up things that are not necessarily always easy to talk about, but any of the people who would've been AIDS activists who might've died during those years.

RM: Well, I want to mention Greg Wight, who was an artist. Jim McSwain and I organized an initiative called "Art by Gay Men," which started in 1982. It was a more or less annual exhibition that went on from '82 to maybe '89. It wasn't every year, but it was most years, in that period. Generally, Jim and I co-curated it. It was actually the first curatorial project I had. I had no idea I

was going to turn into a curator at the time. I remember meeting someone at the conference in Halifax who described himself as a freelance curator. I remember at the time thinking, “That’s the most marginal occupation I’ve ever heard of.” [laughter] Eleven years later I was a freelance curator. But my curating started actually as an activist project, without any idea that I was entering into the professional career mode of visual arts.

So, we organized this exhibition and it was controversial because it was art by gay men, and not by lesbians and gay men; so it was seen as an implicitly male-separatist kind of thing, which it wasn’t. It’s just that we don’t necessarily have the same culture. We also know that if it’s to do with men and women, the women will object to all kinds of things in it and we actually wanted to claim some gay male visual cultural space. If lesbians want to organize an exhibition – great, I’d be thrilled to go to the opening. But we claimed that space and did that show.

One year, it may have been the third year or the fourth year, Greg Wight came in as a partner in the project. As I recall, that year we were at Red Herring (a co-operative bookstore). He was from Newfoundland originally and he went to NSCAD; and then he moved on to Toronto, and Jim lived in Toronto for a number of years. Jim was living in Toronto in the last years of Greg’s life. Jim was very involved with Greg there. So, Jim was much closer to him in that sense. But I knew Greg and I kept up on what he was doing at least partly through Jim and they did projects together, like *The Medicine Show* video, which is specifically about AIDS. It’s about AIDS medications and Greg is on camera through it, and they collaborated on this critique of the medical politics at the time.

AS: Do you know where it was produced or held?

RM: Ask Jim.

GK: But I would think V-tape would actually have it.

RM: I’m sure they would. Yeah. And Jim can tell you about getting a hold of it. I’m sure it’s viewable and screenable.

AS: Yeah.

RM: So, he was an example. I feel like several historical epochs have happened since that period. First of all, in the late ‘80s, I found myself with a community of friends and people I was working with. I got to know them as people with AIDS. After the cocktail, I found that some of my closest friends are living with AIDS and have been living with AIDS for a very long time, but it’s a totally different reality after the cocktail. It’s something you know about them. And it’s an immediate reality in some ways that you have to think about. You have to think about immune systems, but it’s not like it was in the ‘80s; it’s radically different. It’s integrated into one’s life in a totally different way. But actually, what I’d like to do is read you a poem.

GK: Sure. That’d be great.

RM: Yeah, here it is. This is from 1989 – the first of December actually. I don’t know if I consciously wrote it on World AIDS Day. I don’t think so. It’s interesting. My 1989 section, the first poem here

is a poem written in memory of a friend who was murdered - queer-bashed and murdered in Halifax. I seem to write a lot of things about people who have died, but I think actually I might have to refer to my other...

AS: It's the most organized poetry situation. [laughter]

RM: And obsessives write poetry. There we go. This is in memory of a friend of mine named Peter and again, because I don't remember a lot of things in my head. I can't always remember Peter's last name. But we saw each other for a while, and he was a *really* handsome man. He taught me how to make this salad dressing that I still make. But the poem is called "The Nephrology Christmas Dance":

on the occasion of World AIDS Day
I give Peter a condom
and hope that he wears it in good health

you take that stuff seriously, don't you? he asks

he doesn't think much of sex anymore
is grateful for release from the burden
he says

his face is as handsome as ever
except for the spot like a brown mole
nestled at the corner of his mouth
that could mean
nothing

a large-framed man
built like a generous house
good proportions
square angles
carpentered in muscle and bone

this is the bed Frank died in, he says
this is what he was looking at
I follow his gaze to the arctic ceiling
the lone trolley track for the curtain
and the idiot blankness where ceiling meets wall

we talk about art
and going next summer to visit museums
but he's tired and conversation strains his voice
he gets up to see me off

in the hallway we walk past boxes of surgical gloves
pale latex lilies
invite hygienic perversions
Peter grabs me a handful to stuff in my pocket

a sign by the elevator
with hollies and ivy
announces the Nephrology Christmas Dance

I imagine drunken lab assistants
waltzing dialysis machines
around a kidney-shaped pool

outside
the wind
sheering off the Victoria General
burns my ear

a cute small man
passing on the icy path
catches my eye
we turn to look at one another

GK: Wonderful.

RM: And Peter didn't live a lot longer after that time. But it reminds me of Frank Morton. I did a road trip with Frank and, I think it was Bruce. I can't even remember what the occasion was, but I remember we drove down through the Valley (the Annapolis Valley) and came back across the province. A drive I've rarely done, from Bridgetown across to Bridgewater, I think; one of those roads that goes across the middle of the province. I remember because that was the first time I'd ever driven on that road and it was a really nice trip. I remember really enjoying it and Frank being a hoot to travel with. But he was ill; he was visibly ill. You're aware of travelling with someone who was medically frail. I don't know if I can say a lot more about that trip, except just what I remember is kind of a glow of what it felt like.

AS: Were Frank and Peter together?

RM: I don't think so. No, the reason that he was in the bed where Frank died is because he was in the same room in the same wing of the hospital. It was 4A, 4D, it was 4-something. For a while, there was the AIDS...

AS: The AIDS-wing.

RM: Yeah.

AS: But they were close?

RM: Yeah. I don't know how close they were. They obviously knew each other. I mean, it's not that big a community and he probably would've visited Frank in that room. That's why he knew where it was.

GK: Thanks very much for the poem. That was really wonderful. There's sort of two standard questions we ask at the end, which is: Is there anything else that's cropped up during this conversation that you haven't had an opportunity to say?

RM: Well, I'll probably think about the answer to that question in a couple of hours. [laughter]

GK: And then suggestions of people to talk to; you've already given us today a whole bunch of names, but anyone who you think might not fall within the pool of people that we've thought of already?

RM: Do you have James Shedden?

GK: Yes.

RM: I should say that was actually one of the more important ways I was connected. James and I went together for a couple of years, probably '91 to '93. It was right after the Shirtless Wars, so I was in my recovery period. I was furious and deeply hurt and James was a young, angry, very activist, very out person working with the PWA Coalition, I guess at that point, then later the AIDS Coalition. So, I had a vicarious experience on a lot of those politics through James. James was right in the thick of it, and I would hear about it from him. But I also got to act out my rebellion and my resistance.

That was also a period when I got strongly into leather and dressing in leather. I didn't even tell you about when I went to Rumours with a bare ass. It's a leather outfit called a slingshot. It had a thong and it covered my genitalia, but it didn't cover my ass cheeks. That was in the period of the heating up of the shirtless war, but things hadn't broken down entirely and I wore this out to the club. There were, of course, people who wanted to kick me out, but there were people who rallied to support me. And it wasn't like, the shirtless dancing guys and the leather guys alone. It was also lesbian feminists who were friends of mine, some of whom didn't agree with what I was doing but they thought that I shouldn't be kicked out for doing it. There was still a safe space based on that kind of coalition politics. That was the sort of thing that was going on in that period for me. I started getting into the leather community in the lead-up to that period – around 1990 – and then with James. We would both dress in leather for a Pride march or something. We were acting out our sexual politics publically.

GK: Just from our previous conversation last year, I think, through James you got connected with Michael Callen coming and the Flirtations. I think that was in 1991. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that?

RM: Oh yeah, that's a whole story because the Dal queer group... I'm not sure what they were called at the time. I don't think it was Dal-Out. I think they had another name then, but they had arranged for the Flirtations to come perform in the Grawood Lounge in the Dalhousie SUB, the Student Union Building. They [the Flirtations] corresponded with James, to have Michael Callen come and talk as an AIDS activist. I remember James being disappointed that he'd been sort of pre-empted in terms of the Flirtations, but he said, "Well, someone else is doing that so they'll organize that," and he would organize Michael's talk.

But as it turned out, nobody from the Dal group, after they'd arranged for the Flirtations to come, they didn't meet them at the airport. They didn't even meet them at all until the break – the intermission of their performance. I believe it was the weekend of December 1st and there was a blizzard, which is unseasonal in Halifax, but there was a blizzard and we met them at the airport. We took them out to Peggy's Cove in the worst possible weather, and took them up Citadel Hill, where you couldn't see anything because it was a blizzard. We basically got to spend the entire weekend with the Flirtations because they were orphaned. Nobody was taking them in hand. It was like, "Okay! We'll take them in hand" and we had a great time with them. The other memorable moment of it was we all went for breakfast in the Ardmore Tea Room on Quinpool Road, which has these little booths and it's a homemade pie kind of place. We were sitting in a couple of booths, because with the Flirtations – me and James, and I don't remember if there was anyone else there, but that would've made 7 or 8 people. So, we were taking a couple of booths, and Michael at the top of his voice was asking us all about our experience of anal sex. Bless the Ardmore. They sort of cringed, but didn't try to kick us out. He was also asking each of us who we would have sex with among the Flirtations, which I thought was kind of indiscrete. [laughter]

AS: Just trying to plan.

GK: Right. Well, I think if there's nothing else you want to say, we're done.

RM: Oh, thank you.

AS: Thank you.

GK: It's been very helpful.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]