

AAHP
AIDS Activist History Project

Interview Transcript 49

2016.012

Interviewee:	Heidi McDonell
Interviewers:	Alexis Shotwell & Gary Kinsman
Collection:	Ottawa, ON
Date:	September 15, 2016

15 September 2016

Persons present: Heidi McDonell – HM
Alexis Shotwell – AS
Gary Kinsman – GK

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

AS: So I start every tape by saying that it's September 15th 2016. We're talking with Heidi McDonell about Ottawa in Vancouver.

HM: Just to summarize: I was at the first AIDS Committee meeting and had a little bit of involvement. I lived in Abiwin Co-op. Actually, I was very active in Queer Nation in Ottawa. And, I was actually the first staff person that Pink Triangle Services ever had. So that's what I was doing that whole period. And, I was also on the Board of Directors of Abiwin. And the Membership Committee. ... So that's what I was doing during that period.

GK: Okay.

AS: I am having, like, a cozy greedy feeling about getting to talk to you. [laughter]

HM: How greedy! [laughter]

GK: So we start off all the interviews we have done with a few questions—just so there's a commonality to where we start — do you remember when you first heard about AIDS? And what did you hear?

HM: You know. I don't remember the exact moment. But, because I was at Gays of Ottawa we got all the publications. And I had a subscription to *The Body Politic* from 1978 until it stopped publishing. And, actually, I gave my copies to Carleton—or some professor's office in a box. But, anyway, it was definitely in *The Body Politic*, the little stories. And at first, I just thought it was bullshit. You know, these little stories coming out about some disease. And then, I don't remember the moment or the day that I began to know it was real. But I also had access because of GO [Gays of Ottawa]. Of course, no internet. We got a lot of magazines and newspapers from the States, so there was more and more. So I read all of those, too, because I was working on *GO Info*, which was the little publication at Gays of Ottawa. And, so, I read all of that. So, that's how I first got to know.

And, then, the first person I knew of that was HIV+ – AIDS – was Peter Evans. And he was from Canada, but he had been living in England. But, when he discovered that he had AIDS, he came back to Canada. And, I think, was one of the – might have been the first patient, even – that was treated. I don't know which hospital he was treated at, but one of the first patients. He actually went on a little mini tour across Canada. I think this was '83. And, because I was at Gays of Ottawa, I got to meet him. And, because Gays of Ottawa sort of acted as the liaison with the Federal Government and the Federal bureaucracy, he was in town to meet with various people, and his

family lived there. And he was in the hospital... So we sort of hosted him and took care of him when he was in Ottawa. So that's the sort of first inkling of it...

And, then, I guess the first personal friend would have been Bob Moore. And he was hanging around GO. He was just sort of in our gang that hung out. And he volunteered at GO... And he was really sick for a while. I remember going by on the bus and seeing him drag himself down the street. And, he couldn't figure out what was wrong with him. When they finally figured out—I don't know where he got his test, or whatever—the first thing he said was that he was relieved. Because he didn't know what was wrong with him. But, at that time, all we thought when you got AIDS was: it was death. Like, there was no comprehension—we just knew people were going to die.

And, then, we were building Abiwin Co-op, which came out of a housing subcommittee of Gays of Ottawa. And they took advantage of the CMHC's [Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation] housing program, 97.1. Not the very first one, but, the very early one, where you had a lot of control. And, many, the first of us who moved in – round one – were almost all gay. And gay families. And that's how Abiwin was founded, because, at the time, there was no human rights protection in the Ontario code. So this was a way we could protect ourselves.

AS: To have a co-op that was existing.

HM: That's right. It all sort of happened at the same time that we were figuring out about AIDS and trying to get this housing built. So I think it was always in the back of people's minds. And, then, Bob was really sick. He had this one little apartment. It was the only bachelor. And I was on the board of Abiwin. I wasn't on the original board, but the second board by the time we moved in. So we got the perfect apartment for Bob! [laughter] No one really wants it, but Bob! "Bob really needs it... So just give it to Bob!" And so, actually, he moved in right next door to me. And that really made me realize—I never believed ever that you could get AIDS from people without it being sexually transmitted. Because hanging out with all these guys and Bob next door, I thought I would have it by now. So I never bought any of that kind of bullshit. I think we got most of our information at GO from Toronto. Because I can remember we were always slightly behind. I can remember these pamphlets, "Don't get tested," very vividly saying, "don't get tested." And we were trying to decide whether that was the best strategy, whether we should distribute them. Because "don't get tested," there's no point, there's no treatment—you know, don't have your name on a list.

GK: Right.

AS: Yes.

HM: So, one thing I must say—and maybe you've heard this before—is, I want to reiterate it: Jake Epp. People died because of Jake Epp and his refusal to admit he had anything to do, and it was his portfolio. He would do nothing. Nothing happened. Even though we were in Ottawa, and people were trying to meet with him. We would often host people from Toronto, like Kevin Orr was really good friends with Bob Read. Bob Read was on the board of GO and Abiwin. And, so, a lot of

information, I think, was through Kevin and Kevin's links from Toronto. And we always got mailings at *GO Info* from Toronto information.

GK: Yeah. Kevin Orr was this sort of second wave of employees at the AIDS Committee of Toronto. That would have been, probably, '84, because I worked there as one of the first people involved.

HM: [laughter] I actually started university with Kevin Orr. And, so, yes. That was interesting, how we got our information. It was more word of mouth and people coming back to visit. And we also had connections with the former Christine Donald, who was at CLGRO (the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Ontario). And they would come and visit for meetings, too. So this is sort of how Ottawa would be involved with the Toronto stuff.

AS: Yes. People would come because it was the capital, and then because it was in Ontario.

HM: Yeah. And we would host them, maybe talking to government. Or they were friends... Or a lot of people move from Ottawa to Toronto because it was more exciting. And, you know. But they would come back and visit, because they lived in Ottawa, and stuff like that. At one time I think we had five ex presidents' of Gays of Ottawa who lived at Abiwin. When I used to deliver the newspaper, I would just take 20 of the subscriber newspapers over to Abiwin [laughter] and put them in under the door to save money. So that was really tight. And everyone knew each other in that way. We looked out for Bob, too. I can remember he had this teeny tiny apartment and he was being interviewed by the media and they wanted him to be eating his cereal. They wanted him to take this shot. So there was four of us crowded like this into the corners of the room. [laughter] And there's Bob eating his cereal, right. [laughter] He did the AZT [zidovudine] thing. The crap thing. I can remember him walking around with it in his vein, you know, That whole thing. And he really lived a really long time without any treatment. He always said, I think there's some truth they found now, he was a vegetarian and, well, he liked to smoke pot a lot, but he also was a vegetarian! [laughter] There were no pain killers then—and, basically, you know—besides the crappy AZT. Then he got Cytomegalo—or whatever—virus in his eyes.

GK: Cytomegalovirus (CMV).

HM: He actually went blind in the end. [pause]

And then we were one of the first co-ops to have an HIV/AIDS subsidy. So, what we would do is we had two spots—well there were lots of other people who lived there with AIDS—but we had two spots that they could be referred to. You had to have a doctor saying that you really did have AIDS, because there was one person once who lied. So we had that spot, and that was actually written up by Bob Read and passed at an AGM [annual general meeting] unanimously. That was never an issue at Abiwin. We took that idea, and I was the delegate at the co-op housing federation meeting, so we talked about other co-ops having that.

But the other thing we sort of found on the front line at Abiwin was about AIDS—I was on the membership committee for years and I had this question... Well, first, about diversity (we didn't

call it diversity then, I don't know what we called it) but about gay people and stuff, but then I would say, "do you know that there are probably people here who have AIDS, who live here?" And, I would say, "of course there are people who have AIDS everywhere, but we have a policy here, a subsidized housing policy." And if I saw them hesitate, I just went for it. There were actually people—I remember one in particular, a woman, with two teenage kids, who she was about to get one of the best three bedroom subsidized apartments, and she did not take it. I was glad. Because that was my job [laughter] on the membership committee, to keep people like that out. Then the AIDS Committee started doing condom blitzes, and then the baths, but, you know I don't remember any women ever going on those. I remember hearing about them later, you know. And the silly things they did while they were there.

GK: Like what?

HM: Well... Philip Hannan could do that trick where he could put a condom on a zucchini, orally. Well a dick, I guess! But he would always demonstrate at Christmas [laughter] with one of the squash vegetables left in the fridge. [laughter] Then they had this wooden thing, they called it Mr. Woody, or something, and it came with the condoms. You ever see that wooden thing? It's, like, it's wood and it's a fake dick. But it's not even a dildo. It's like a...

AS: A dowel?

HM: Yeah. A dowel, right. And then they would demonstrate putting it on and all. And they would try and put that in their mouth with a condom thing. Anyway, they would get up. They were very—I think the condom blitzes were quite fun. [laughter] And there's a famous picture, that would be in Bob Read's stuff, and, actually Philip Hannan, if you want photography on that stuff, he'd have it. He's back in Ottawa or Toronto, he lived out here for a while. Anyway, he's a photographer and it's all good stuff. But Bob used to have one framed in his house. And that picture had all the people in their little Ottawa AIDS Committee t-shirts standing on a staircase. There was this bar and you went up the side, it was this ancient, stupid bar. And they were all standing there in their shirts coming out.

AS: With Mr. Woody?

HM: Well, no. They were just hanging out there. [laughter] So he would be a good source for the photographs. And then they went to the baths, of course. So they did all that stuff. Then, I don't know how it started, but, you know about the Living Room? At some point the Living Room started and that was when they first started talking about women and children, actually. Because the Living Room. And one of the guys, George, I can't remember his last name, but he and this other guy actually got the subsidy for the AIDS housing in Abiwin. And they actually ran the Living Room at first.

AS: Can you just say how you remember what the Living Room was? And how it came about?

HM: Well, I don't know how it came about. They just needed a place to hang out, I guess. And go. So I remember them talking about how it was for everyone. And that's when they started to talk

about women and kids. Because one day we were talking to them and they said that there was a little baby there. A little toddler. And she was three, or something. But how she was welcome there, because she had AIDS, too. And that was the first time they started about women and kids.

But, you know, lesbians were putting a lot of money into GO then. Because one of the only places they could gather was at pub nights, Saturday night at GO. So, actually GO was running off lesbian alcoholism. And then they started to sober up, and the money resources went down. [laughter] But, I don't remember a lot of them, you know. You watch some of the documentaries about women taking care of guys with AIDS, and that kind of thing. There might have been people, but there certainly wasn't a feeling, I ever had, and I was kind of at the epicenter, that lesbians should be doing that. Even though in Ottawa gay men and lesbians, because of space considerations, always worked closely together. Not out of any progressive politics. Just because they had to. And, you know, the guys had a place to go. But if the lesbians could only drink at GO... [laughter] So that's interesting. Obviously, the women at Abiwin, and one person you should talk to is, Barb MacIntosh, she's a past president of GO. She lived in Abiwin. She was part of our gang. And Catherine Browning, who's a professor somewhere...

AS: She was also a GO person?

HM: Yes. She was also a president at GO, too. She was actually Bob Read's last care giver. So she might even know where his stuff went. And Bob's lawyer was Philip MacAdam.

AS: Do you want to say a little about GO? I mean, it seems like that was some of the context you got into a lot of the other AIDS stuff.

HM: Yes. GO is an interesting organization, because Ottawa was so small. And they weren't—they were activists, but they weren't socialists. It was interesting. Because I was one of the only people who was a socialist, *per se*. And there was Denis Leblanc who was active in the NDP and worked for a Member of Provincial Parliament in Ontario. But they were activist-based. And that was kind of interesting. You don't quite see that anymore. This sort of didn't always go together, which people forget. That you know, activism and socialism on certain issues, you know, to me they always go together. But [laughter] on one issue or two that people could be very activist, but then on other issues they weren't. So you had a mix of it.

And everyone was young, too. Like, I really hate this thing about gay youth or queer youth being relegated to somewhere, as if they are stupid and don't know how to do anything. Because they started these organizations, and ran them. You know, nobody was that old. It was ridiculous. That somehow young people are too stupid. And they set up all these organizations. So they started out young and they just wanted a space. And GO ran dances, and that's how I got into it. They ran these fun dances. And, actually, Bob Read, I didn't know then, but he was the DJ. And my lefty friends and I were a mixed group of queers about 20. We never had any money. Nothing's changed. Maybe some of them have money now. I don't. So, we would go to these dances because they cost, like, two dollars at the community centre. And we could go, men and women, whatever. And we'd bring sort of straight people with us, who, I didn't know what they were, but anyway. And we could go to these little dances and they were actually quite fun. And then they got this pub space and that's

when the lesbians became involved.

AS: And the pub space was actually in the GO building?

HM: Oh, yeah! And one of the funniest times about sharing space with gay men—I think I’ve told you this one, it’s really hilarious [laughter] You know the thing about dicks in photos? If they’re above... I don’t even know if this is true, but...

GK: It was true.

HM: They couldn’t be over 45 degrees. So Philip took pictures of I don’t know how many guys’ dicks. And it was lesbian pub night, so lesbians walk in and there’s 20 framed photos of 45 degree angle dicks from around town. [laughter] And, so, some of the, you know, slightly separatists, were just like, “I’m going to throw up, I’m going to throw them down the stairs...” And I’m, like, me and a couple of other women were like, “No, no, it’s okay. We won’t do that. You know, I know the artists.” So we put paper towels, very carefully, over them. Covering them. [laughter] And, even then Philip had a real fucking fit. He said, “That’s censorship!” And, I’m like, “Is it better if they threw them down the stairs, or out the window?” [laughter] And, then, afterwards—he wouldn’t have even known, except I told him, maybe that was my mistake! I said, “I went around and made sure we were very careful.” Because some of these photos were at eye level, when you were sitting having a beer, you’d look over and there’s Philip’s dick. [laughter] You know, our one night! Four hours in this little space. You know, boys, couldn’t we make a concession? [laughter]

So, also around that time, GO was doing everything. I mean the people who were on that board—there was probably, a hard core of 25 people—they did incredible things, and they’re all 25 to 35. And, I don’t think any of them would call themselves socialists. They’d usually vote for the—if there was a gay guy around to vote for. You know, Denis would get them to vote. Not a gay guy, but whatever that Michael—head of the NDP guy—was Michael Cassady, to vote for him and stuff. But they were very active. I don’t know where they all came from in terms of where they got that, but they just somewhere got that message early coming out. Coming out as a political act. And so we just got to keep going. So Abiwin came out of that. AIDS Committee came out of that. Pink Triangle Services came out of that. There’s probably another one... Oh, *GO Info* came out of that. So all these things. And then they had a phone line. And that’s why even though I wasn’t in the AIDS group *per se*, I was an employee of Pink Triangle Services. I was very nervy. I can’t believe how nervy I was. When I was about 21, I went over to GO and I said, “I’m young and the government has a work program for young people and I need some money. So will you sponsor me so the provincial government give you some money so I can have a job for 16 weeks?” John Duggan was there and he goes, “Sure.” [laughter] So I go bang on the governments door, “I’m a youth and I need a job and I want to work at Gays of Ottawa!” And there was a woman, didn’t blink an eye. Went off and she found the right person and she said, “Sure.” So I actually got involved there because, not going to the bar, but because I needed this job. So that’s how I got more involved.

GK: So this job was with GO? Or with Pink Triangle Services?

HM: With GO.

AS: With GO. That was probably some iteration of New Canada Works or...

HM: Something. Something like this. I've been retrained as a youth so often it's amazing. [laughter]

AS: And that program, you could just be anywhere and they would...

HM: Yes. Exactly. And so GO didn't have to do anything. And I guess there had been some students one year before who actually wrote a pamphlet—if you can believe it—about (it wasn't a very used word then) homophobia. And I heard that they were very lazy and they didn't really do anything. And they were quite impressed with me. I actually did things. [laughter] So then I just... They had the newspaper, so I wanted to write for the newspaper. So I started writing for the newspaper. I was going to Carleton then and we had a campaign going on at Carleton. Because the engineers built a closet at Carleton. And they put it in front of the Student's Union building.

AS: Like, a closet?

HM: Yeah. They built a closet, the engineers. This is what they did with their time in engineering. They went in the engineering shop and used university materials and hammers and they made a closet. And then they put a big fucking chain around it with a padlock.

AS: Why? Like, what was the...

HM: Get in the closet! Stay in the closet.

AS: Really?

HM: Yes.

AS: Wow.

[laughter]

HM: So we organized around that. Like, move it or we're gonna kick it down. And so, of course, it had to be taken down. And then we handed out leaflets in the tunnels about it. I can remember some of the reactions. Guys would throw their books down and put their fists up.

AS: When you offered them a leaflet?

HM: Yes.

AS: When was that?

HM: It was all that same time. '84.

AS: Wow.

HM: ish. And then we had Gay People at Carleton, it was called GPAC at the time. And we had our own little icon in the tunnels. It got defaced. So we had a little troupe that would look both ways and then we would touch it up. [laughter] We made a stencil for quick action. [laughter] Our own little stencil in the tunnels. So all these people were kind of connected. Because there weren't very many people who were out then. Like, I was one of the few women who was available during the day, but who would be out, and who would actually go and talk to schools, if they needed someone. Because we would go in pairs. But there wasn't that many people. Like, there really wasn't. It was very, very, small numbers... Of people who were willing to be out.

AS: And how did you come to that? How did you become someone who was able to be out then?

HM: I just... I always knew I was gay. I ran away from home because they beat me up. And I just had to be gay. There was no other way I could be. So I just... That's the way I was. And I was a socialist, too. I was in a little mini socialist group.

GK: Do you want to tell us a bit more about that?

AS: Yes. Did you...

HM: Oh. You want to know more about that, Gary?! [laughter] Well, let's see. How did I join that... When I went to Carleton, I had read Marx and...

AS: Were you from Ottawa?

HM: No. I was from Alberta. And I ran away from home, basically. And I always wanted to go to Carleton. I knew one person at Carleton. And I always wanted to go to journalism school. So I ran away to Ottawa because I knew this one person. And I never actually got into journalism school because it was really hard to get in. ... It's complicated. But, anyway, so I got into, what was then Mass Com [? Communication?], which is now similarly impossible to get into. So I took some journalism courses. Anyway, that's why I ended up in Ottawa. And I think the first thing I did was I went to Octopus Books and volunteered. That was good. And then I went to the Women's Centre at Carleton. Because there were all these signs in the tunnels that... [laughter] Oh, what was her name? "Cait Cochran is a dildo queen," And "Try the Women's Centre." [laughter] So you could *find* the Women's Centre in those days. And the Women's Centre then wasn't part of the Student Union operation. It was funded by a project out of admin somewhere and the feminist faculty helped, and the students helped. But they gave us a space. So it was much more political then. Like, we even had a policy that if you're a member of the Women's Centre you had to be pro-choice. We stuck it right on the wall. And I remember someone came in once who wasn't and I wasn't really paying attention and realized she was wearing an anti-choice button. And she said she was some kind of feminist. I said, "Why are you wearing that button?" Then someone who was in the back and got really mad and wanted to shove her out the door right away. So, anyway, that was one of our little fights on campus.

Oh, and then I heard that there was a talk at Carleton. Some socialists were going to give a talk. So I went to it and that was the IS [International Socialists], which David McNally is a founding member of. And so I just joined, because they were going to do something and they seemed interesting. And the NDP was kind of boring. I worked on one of their campaigns. So that's what I did. I got a little red beret and had a little IS pin with the hat. We would go sell our newspaper at the hospital. It was interesting then, because people who had jobs could still afford to be students. So there were actually regular working class young lesbians who were at the Women's Centre and were taking courses. And sort of around the IS. So it was very interesting. And I met these really interesting and clever young feminists, socialist women who were in the IS. They were just really, really, interesting. They knew much more than I did. So I really liked the culture. So it was a group to hang out with, too. Like, socially. So there was like this little radical group... There was about six of us, these little IS lesbian, feminist, socialists that ran around the city and Carleton. And we'd go visit other organizations. We would actually go to GO and get mad at them once in a while. And, you know, suggest they should be doing something more political, than talking to the government. And then two of our members worked for Bell and it was in the middle of Bell getting a more progressive union, and they were on strike. So we actually did strike support from the Women's Centre. People, taking them to the picket line. So it was very interesting and you're active all the time. I never got very good marks. [laughter] That's why I'm not a professor today. Because between running around the political stuff, and if there was some way to meet a woman and have a date or do that extra studying, well... [laughter] I just somehow couldn't crack a book. And, fortunately, because I had a good memory, I could get a B without even going to class or reading the material. I would write the essay and write the exam and get a B. [laughter] But now many of my professor friends are very kind to me. And every once in a while I send them fundraising emails and it works out. [laughter]

AS: Have to redistribute...

HM: Exactly. And, if I get mad at them I quote how much they make because it's public information. [laughter] And I say, "Do you know you make 20 times what I live on in a year?" And they go, "Really? Oh, do you really? Okay. I'll send you 50 bucks with a book or some food." [laughter] Anyway, it's kind of outrageous!

So, anyway, that was it. That was my little group, right. And then that changed. People moved away and that's when I sort of somehow got more involved with GO. Because I always worked with men, I never was a separatist. And you know separatists were always... Well it just was stupid, really. And it never made any sense to me. And they seemed kind of mean and unhappy. They didn't want to have sex with me, anyway. [laughter] So it really wasn't an issue when you're 20 years old. These people are just no fun. [laughter] I've got to tell you about one group. They were so funny. They were not only lesbian separatists, but they were Quebec nationalists. [laughter] And they had a little co-op. Some of them seemed to live together in Quebec. And I swear to god they were almost a cult. All dressed alike. They wore Birkenstocks with big wool socks, sweaters, and...

AS: Jeans?

HM: Jeans, tight pants, and really big earrings. [laughter] But, anyway, they were funny, because they were just this little group. But they had nowhere to go to dance, either. [laughter]

AS: So would they come? Would they come to the GO dances?

HM: Yes! [laughter] So they would come to GO, to dance at the pub night. And one time I was working at *GO Info* and I got this idea that it was March and we should have more women's stuff in it. So, I actually had a guest editor who was from that group, and they did four pages in it. ... We think of it now, but it was so hard to get information out there. We actually had to do news briefs. You know, you just didn't know what was happening. And I think that was part of it, when AIDS came along—getting the information out to people quick enough. There was this lag. You know, all the time. And then with Jake Epp and then Ottawa being where it was. And Toronto. You know, we wouldn't have had the link of some of those individuals. And Bob Read used to go to Boston a lot, because he worked for Digital. So he knew. He would go out to the bars and talk to people about the AIDS stuff in there. So he would bring back information, too. And then the guys would go to Montreal to the baths, like, take a quickie bus. And they would be like, "Should we go to Montreal? No. Should we go to Montreal? Well, okay! Let's go to Montreal!" [laughter] The bus left every hour for Montreal. I don't know. I don't think they even took a bag. I think they took a jacket, and that's it. They went to Montreal with their wallets, right. And when you'd see them later Sunday night... [laughter] So they got information, too. And people would move from Ottawa to Montreal, too. It wasn't just to Toronto. So that sort of helped. But Ottawa was weird like that. Yes, there were these various groups that had names, but a lot of people were in one or two and new people and would cycle around.

AS: It's still like that.

HM: Of course. Of course. It's just its size. And anyway... and then we got Pink Triangle Services.

AS: And so how did Pink Triangle Services happen?

HM: Well... They wanted to get more involved. Judy Girard and others at GO worked on this, really hard. They wanted to start an agency. And some of the social workers... it wasn't all women, but it seemed to be more women working on that aspect. And she had a girlfriend or two that seemed to be social workers. Judy worked for the federal government for years. And so, one time the NDP got Ottawa Centre. And it was a really, really close fight. And the gay community had come out and voted. Not for a gay candidate, but for the NDP. And so we kind of wanted something. And they kind of wanted to reward us. So there was a government program, and that's how Pink Triangle got its first funding. That's how they hired me and another person. But Pink Triangle was the first gay, queer, whatever, charity founded in Canada. And I think it was walked through back channels. It went on and on and on forever, and they wouldn't pass it. And this went on. They'd have meetings at the Gays of Ottawa board of directors, on and on and on and on... But, at that time about half the people on the board of directors—I'm not exaggerating—worked in the public service. And, eventually, somebody I think got through to somebody with our complaining. And threatened. And I think it might have had something to do with that NDPer getting elected in Ottawa Centre. But it finally went through. I mean, I can't prove that or anything. But it took a

really long time for it to go through. And then they got this grant. You know, then MPs could pick groups they wanted in there to have jobs, but they made a mistake with ours. And we actually got the secret notes when we got our contract. [laughter] And the secret note said not to accept it. Because basically this was the same organization as Gays of Ottawa, so it wasn't really starting a new organization. And this was like the minority opinion on three people who were judging. [laughter] And right away there was a phone call: "I think we sent you something..." [laughter] And, right away the photocopy machine was whirling away, right? So, then GO really had no—besides running the lesbian pub, still—the politics sort of went away. Young activists got older and they got jobs. And AIDS came along. And, so, GO was no longer a political group. And so, basically, it closed. And Pink Triangle Services went on. But in many ways GO continued, because there was Abiwin. And there was Pink Triangle services. And there was the AIDS Committee, right.

AS: Yes. It had started all these things.

HM: That's right.

AS: Yes.

HM: And by then the *Xtra!* chain had come out.

GK: Yeah.

As: So the newspaper was less... *GO Info* was less...

HM: Yes. ... It was sort of a membership news, too. Like announcements and stuff. But GO actually made a breakthrough with the city in getting ads. Because, okay, what kind of ads are you going to get? Like, bathhouse ads? The bar ads? But they actually got city funding. And that was really due to Marion Dewar. Right from the beginning she was very, very positive and active on gay people and gay rights in the city. And, so, basically, they said, "Okay, city advertisements and community newspapers." And they didn't advertise the kitty pools, or whatever. They were somewhat sensitive in what they gave us. But the hours of community centres are basic... I don't know, garbage collection. You can look at old copies of GO. But we actually, that was really good income in advertising income. But you know, they didn't want to do it at first.

AS: Yes.

HM: It was really hard to find a place even to rent in Ottawa, because there were these Lebanese businessmen that owned—one or two in particular—almost all the restaurants or spaces where the restaurants were. And they wouldn't rent to GO. And we had all this trouble trying to get space on Elgin Street. It just went on and on and on. Like, they put the kibosh on us: no we don't want you. And Pink Triangle Services had this same problem. That's why their first office was above a laundromat with all the fucking chemicals coming up the back and everything else, right.

GK: Maybe we could back up again to the formation of the AIDS Committee of Ottawa?

AS: Were you at that meeting when the...?

HM: Yes. I was at the very first meeting. And I don't know how I knew about it, I guess because I was hanging around GO, and because I knew Bob. So, I went more for support for Bob, because he was my neighbor and friend. It was kind of a strange meeting, because he was, I think, the only one there that—now I know that there were other people there that were HIV/AIDS, some who kept it secret from me, almost until the day they died, but they never said anything. So it was kind of uneasy, because some of us were there supporting Bob, but we knew there had to be a meeting going... And so, I don't remember what happened. Except that when they published the part about his diary, he quoted me as being there, and he called me some kind of radical socialist or something. He named who was there, and he made a little note about me, and I thought that was kind of sweet. [laughter] But I never went after that.

GK: So the article was in *GO Info*?

HM: Yes.

GK: Okay.

HM: So I just sort of—because it was mostly just guys, like I was saying before, but I would hear about it all.

AS: Yes.

HM: And I was doing the supporting at Abiwin.

AS: And so how did people talk about it? Was it, like...

HM: Well, people were just starting to get tested. And, of course, there were little rumors who might be positive. And then you'd find out that someone you didn't really know was dead. And someone would be bawling their eyes out in the bar. And you didn't really know them and there was no support. But they were dead. And I wasn't on the phone lines, but the phone lines—GO had phone lines, helplines—and the helplines started ringing. And people out in suburbia, guys out in suburbia, who were closeted, their doctors basically told them to quit work, go home, and die. You know, the most basic of information, they couldn't get. And we also—at Pink Triangle, because I answered the phone, and then answered it before at GO—would get questions from the public. But also, every time there was a story, I remember for the first two years of AIDS, every single story was wrong.

AS: Right.

HM: Every. Single. One. They couldn't get the most basic facts.

GK: Right.

HM: So it was almost our job, we read them and phone them up or send them a letter, “No, it was wrong,” and just have to give them the most basic information. Like, it was really frustrating. You know, there was no money, either. I don’t remember anybody getting any money for this. But if they did it was probably the city, or there was this Centretown Community Health Centre, I think, that was always pro-gay. So the few out doctors that there were, I know they were taking patients. They were really swamped. And, of course, there wasn’t any treatment. And it was soon figured out that AZT was garbage. So, people basically had AIDS and they either weren’t telling you about it—nobody really talked about it. Or planning, what are you going to do? Nothing like that. You know, we knew some people who had it, but we just included them like we always did. Or, you know, go out and help them with groceries or what. At Christmas one time, we took Bob Moore—all he wanted for Christmas was gin and tonic—so we snuck in with gin and tonics. I had a pair of shoes, I called them my dead fag funeral shoes. [laughter] And when I wore them they were my best pair of shoes.

AS: What were they like?

HM: Well, you know, they were kind of like fancy Doc Martens. [laughter]

AS: Yeah.

HM: And the funeral parlor that would take—and that was the other issue—that would take people was like half a block from Abiwin. So it was really weird. You know, that whole thing.

AS: That was the only one in town at that point?

HM: Yes. Right on Cooper Street. That was the first one. And, for me personally, it was a bit odd, too, because I got Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Fibromyalgia, then. So I actually spent a lot of time with Bob Moore because we both were sick and we lived next door to each other. So that was odd for me, too, because I had this illness. And, you know, but I didn’t think I was going to die, obviously. But these rumors went around that I had AIDS from some of these really stupid lesbians who didn’t know anything. “What’s wrong with Heidi?” And then some people thought, “Oh, god knows what Heidi does.” [laughter] Thinking up these things. And, so, actually, I had to have that HIV test, which was really weird, because the clinic I went to, it was the first one they had ever done. And...

AS: For anyone, or...?

HM: For anyone! It just wasn’t that common in Ottawa, right. And so they got all nervous and they acted weird and they dropped something and they put it in this tube that, I think, had more holes than an oil tanker and they did the needle wrong and it hurt. The whole thing was just ridiculous. And I said, “I don’t have AIDS. I’ve never slept with a man in my life.” Oh, you know, they were just like, “Yeah, but we’ll test you anyways.” And I’m like, “Why?” but, “Okay.” And, actually, I was tested again and they didn’t inform me.

AS: Really?

HM: Another specialist said, “I got this special test... It’s the blah blah blah test.” And I said, “Yeah, yeah. I have to send away.” And it was the second level AIDS test. And I didn’t know until I went home and looked it up that that’s what he was doing. And he didn’t ask me for my consent.

AS: And I can’t remember what the scientific name is... It was the more accurate one. Yes. It was more extensive...

HM: Yes. I never thought I had AIDS or anything. But it was just sort of happening at the same time, so... That was extremely, extremely strange.

AS: Yes.

HM: But people in Ottawa knew—people around GO—people knew they had to do the condom blitz right away. And we started getting ads in *GO Info* from Toronto and putting them in. And that’s where we got most of our posters, and most of our ads that we put in. And information, too, really.

GK: Do you remember a controversy around one, in particular, ad?

HM: Yes.

GK: In *GO Info*? Maybe you could tell us about it?

HM: [laughter] Well, it was weird because I was on the editorial board of *GO Info*. [laughter] So I said we should publish it.

AS: Can you just describe what it was?

HM: I don’t know, it must have been a dick. What was the ad? I don’t know. Oh, yeah, we swore up and down. It was... [laughter] It was Kevin Orr’s ass, but it turned out it wasn’t. [laughter] Those in the know claimed it was...

GK: Was it one of the AIDS anal sex posters?

HM: Yes. With a dick and a bum. But I don’t think they were even together. But now you think of what you can see on the internet and everything. But this wasn’t that long after the whole *The Body Politic* thing. So, more and more women had been coming to the Centre and reading *GO Info* and this whole thing about women being abused was coming up at the same time. And so some people said they didn’t feel safe reading *GO Info* now. And it was their newspaper, if they had to look at this and... It was just... There really weren’t that many. They were just really vocal ones who complained. And then there was a few guys on the other side who were like, “People are dying! We have to have these ads!” And, you know, the other side was, “Wow, this is our newspaper, too. And we don’t like it.” So, I just remember that whatever we came up with was kind of a compromise and no one liked it. And it kind of was a contradiction. [laughter] But it got

printed. So, and then I think the suggestion was that we not take the naughtiest of ads. But now that I think about it, it was so mild.

AS: Tame.

HM: Yes. But there was a couple of women who weren't even separatists, they just were women who've been victimized—and I've been victimized—but they actually, I remember the ones who complained the most. They weren't even organized separatists, they just sort of really hated men because of the abuse they had suffered in their life. And they were just so angry about the space. And they went there every Saturday. Same reason, like, the compromise of the paper towels, right.

GK: Right.

AS: Yes. Now sometimes I feel like, there are so few spaces now that I feel like it would be nice to have these spaces...

HM: Well. Now when you think about it, now there's sex, sex, sex, sex. You know, nine year olds dressed up. You know. It's just everywhere. All the time. And I think it's just so different.

AS: Yes. But there aren't, like there isn't a Saturday night queer dance or a lesbian dance in Ottawa, anymore. You know, those things, they don't exist.

HM: I thought they were having those a couple years ago, again. They'd started organizing them again. Marie and her crew and Steph were organizing them for a while.

AS: Yes. There's a queer seniors dance that happens pretty regularly.

HM: Ah. That's the one they organized.

AS: Yes. That happens pretty regularly. But in various community centres. But there's not a space. There's still the Living Room in Ottawa. There's various dances and stuff that happen in bars. But there's not, you know, the quality of... When I hear people talking about these times when there were collective spaces that were community owned and run. You know, that doesn't, like, in Halifax where there was a community owned bar, too. You know, it's, those things are gone. They got gentrified out.

HM: An interesting thing has happened. Way off topic. An interesting thing is happening here and it sort of was my dream... Like, for forty years, that the neighborhood house, Gordan Neighborhood House, where I volunteer, now has a community-wide project party. Which, even little old ladies come. Everybody comes. And it's sort of like celebrating, but not in a token way—they're serious about it. Celebrating pride. And this year they had Black Lives Matter, was the main theme for it. And it's everybody in the community sort of like the way people celebrate... I don't know, Not Canada Day. I don't know, But something. But that everybody celebrates. And this year one of the woman who is like 86 in the crocheting group, she crocheted little rainbow wristbands and gave them out to all the 20 year olds. [laughter] And they had a trans flag and it cost 5 dollars

and you would get a hamburger and a beer and it's like this... The funnest party you can go to. And it's the second year in a row. And this was what I always wanted, right. Like, I don't believe in separate gay centres, really, anymore.

GK: Right.

HM: That's just my personal opinion. Some of them are kind of like, work projects.

AS: Yes. I mean... I'm not into the separate thing, but I am into having a community run space.

HM: Yes. Yes. But my line is: they're there now funded and we should be part of them.

AS: Yes. We should use them.

HM: And that's sort of... And a lot of gay people seem to—and Ottawa especially, this was another connection... A lot of lesbians and, again, because of Marion Dewar and the city had through the union. I guess other people who worked for the city who weren't in the union, had one of the first non-discrimination clauses for gay people in Canada. And so—and they meant it. So all these lesbians worked at the City of Ottawa for all these different services. So they used to deny women's dances and even socialist dances at community centres. That changed. So that was—we got access. And GO had those dances at community centres. But the police, you know, would still come. They'd make a production of it—the women's dances, especially. And they'd come and turn on all the lights and do their little thing, you know, in full uniform. And check our license. You know, to kind of put us in our place. But there's a whole other department, I guess. That's the other topic. The other study.

AS: Yes.

GK: I think there are a couple of different directions we could go now. One is to actually go into Queer Nation, or whether there was or was not an ACT UP group in Ottawa. Or the other one is to talk more about the two Bobs.

HM: Okay. Well, I was one of the first members of Queer Nation. And Queer Nation actually met at Abiwin in the common room, because I had a key. [laughter]

AS: How did Queer Nation arise in Ottawa? How did that happen?

HM: I don't know. I think there were some artists, and people were reading about it. And they weren't the crowd around GO. ... A lot of them were performance artists, actually, and some political people. And they just decided they were having one. I remember the first meeting we had to decide if we were Queer Nation or Queer Planet.

GK: Queer Planet is what the group here was called, in Vancouver.

HM: I would have rather been Queer Planet, because Queer Nation, you know, there were these Americans with Queer Nation and they were big jerks. But somehow I don't remember how that went. But we got to be Queer Nation. For a couple of years we had a lot of really effective actions. And, one, we went to this bar... Well, for years it was called Peppers. I don't know if it's still on Elgin. And it had a history of throwing gay people out. One time they threw my girlfriend and I out of the place because we were sitting close together kissing. And we just got up from the night before and we were both in leather. And they said, "it's not that cold in here, girls." [laughter] Anyway, it was infamous for doing this. So they opened a bar upstairs. So, Queer Nation went there for one of these kiss-ins. And they discovered what we were doing, because we had shirts and everything. And so they went around, and it was really funny, because they picked out who they thought were straight. And they told them to stay sitting in the bar. Of course they got it wrong. Quite a few times. And they told these so-called people they thought were straight that they were going to do something, but they didn't have to leave. And so they said that, they suddenly turned off all the lights and said the electricity didn't work, and that we all had to leave. Except for these people who were gay didn't have to leave, because they thought they were straight. [laughter] So we all went out in the street and demonstrated for a while and got really mad. And then the next day we phoned all our friends and we showed up there at peak brunch time. And we managed to ruin their entire brunch on a Sunday. And we felt really good because this place had been harassing gay people for years and years.

AS: So, did you talk to the brunchers? Did you have signs with you?

HM: Yes! Yes. Well. Some of them just got so pissed off they'd leave. And some of them would argue with us. But, all in all, it was pretty successful. And so we would do that at a couple places. Some places wouldn't do anything, they would just be happy to sell us beer. But the weirdest thing happened... We got kicked out of a gay bar. [laughter] We went to this gay bar in the market that was run by this really conservative gay person, and had this even more conservative rat-bag manager and we went in there with our Queer Nation t-shirts and we were just hanging out and they kicked us all out. And, so, we stood outside and we started writing things on the sidewalk about this particular place, and lying on the ground doing various things. And telling the people that were going in that this place was so repressive that they didn't like Queer Nation, that it was too political, and we couldn't come into their bar. And, again, Philip Hannan was there and took some great photos. And then the manager came out, and he literally whitewashed the sidewalk where we had written everything. There's pictures of him with a mop and pail, taking off the Queer Nation chalk stuff off the sidewalk. Oh, and he called the police.

So it [Queer Nation] went for a while and that was pretty good. ... But it had this interesting thing, whenever you got to the meeting, It was kind of like AA. Even if you weren't gay you had to say at the beginning that you were queer. And this particular bunch of people insisted on this, to say—meaning you were *with* us. So, whatever action you were going to come to with us, or to be at our meeting, you had to say you were queer. [laughter] It was kind of funny. Again, it was some of these artist guys who just liked to make people really nervous. [laughter] Who you should talk to about this is Andrew Griffin. He was one of the people who started it. He's at McGill. He was a writer for *Xtra!*. Actually, a staffer for Ottawa *Xtra!* for a while.

GK: For *Capital Xtra!*

HM: Yes, *Capital Xtra!* And his partner Carl Stewart who, again, is even more of an artist, a drama queen. And they like to organize, too. They would do interesting plays and stuff. Carl had incredible outfits that he sewed himself. He was a textile artist, actually. ... You know the guy who got thrown off the bridge in Ottawa? In the '90s. And they said, as they threw him off the bridge between Ottawa and Hull, they said, "Nice shoes, faggot." He actually made a giant textile that said that. And he hung it off Abiwin one morning.

AS: Wow. When did that happen?

HM: In the '90s.

AS: Wow.

HM: And he was just walking home, he worked at the Chateau Laurier.

AS: God.

HM: And there were some queer bashers. He wasn't gay, but that doesn't matter, of course. But, yeah.

AS: Did he die? That's a huge...

HM: Yeah. He died. They killed him. And they didn't get murder, because they used that stupid panic thing.

GK: Homo Panic Defense.

HM: Yes.

AS: So. Was Queer Nation involved at all with AIDS stuff? I mean, it was connected to Abiwin...

HM: Yes. People would often have ACT UP shirts. It wasn't at everything, but... That whole sort of artsy crowd would do different art exhibits, too.

GK: Right.

HM: There was something in Ottawa called the Bakery ... It's an artist co-op, on Gladstone...

AS: Oh! Enriched Bread Artists. I'm in a pottery co-op that's downstairs from it...

HM: Yes. That place! A lot them hung out there.

AS: Okay! Cool.

HM: And did various things...

GK: Were the connections with ACT UP groups, like, in Montreal or New York City, or anything?

HM: No. Not really. We got their information. Again, people used to visit. I think people got it from Montreal. There was a bunch who used to go to Montreal all the time. The artist types. And they ended up living in Montreal, actually. And they'd go to the bars there and stuff. And of course, we read everything about the other groups. But I don't remember ever doing a die-in in Ottawa. Except in front of the bar, [laughter] where they kicked us out of the gay bar. [laughter]

GK: Do you remember if anyone did any support work? I'm thinking about one particular action that AIDS ACTION NOW! organized. That would have been in May of 1988, where people went to Parliament Hill and were actually using unauthorized treatments. And there was also a demonstration at the Federal Centre for AIDS that same day. I wasn't there, but I know that people came from Toronto to it. But I can't remember whether there were any Ottawa supporters...

HM: I remember there were protests at Parliament Hill. I don't remember the details. Again, because of the Mulroney government and Jake Epp. He just would not meet with us. It was just disgusting.

GK: We helped get rid of him.

HM: I know.

GK: By burning him in effigy in the streets of Toronto, right?

HM: Good.

GK: I was in AIDS ACTION NOW!, actually. It was also in May of '88.

HM: And what's the group, Gary, that was founded... It wasn't... They finally got some money and they were supposed to deal with the Federal Government on AIDS stuff. It was the first sort of official AIDS group in Ottawa.

GK: Are you talking about the coalition from across the country? The Canadian AIDS Society [CAS]?

HM: Yes. And I remember I knew the guy who worked there.

GK: CAS already existed in '88.

HM: Right.

GK: So it must have been formed in '87 or maybe earlier. But, yes, it's head was headquartered in Ottawa, for sure.

HM: Yes. Anyway, we used to talk to them. I don't know whether they were formal or informal links. But there was this little cute guy... I don't even know, I want to call him Evan, or something. And he would go on about Jake Epp. And then when we would run into Kevin Orr would come to town to visit Bob, and he would go on about it, too. And then, we always had access to this channeling of stuff in Ottawa from the Public Service. Like, we never once had to ask for... The whole time they were doing the constitution and all the meetings, these packages would just come. Senate of Canada with all the briefing notes and everything. We never once had to ask for it. They just were sent to GO all the time. There was some guy in there who just sent it to us all the time.

AS: Anonymously?

HM: Yes.

AS: Yes.

HM: Yeah. It was good. So, no, Gary, I don't remember that. I just remember the complaints. I do think there were a couple of demos ... A couple of times, but, you know, I go to everything. Well, not everything. [laughter] I'd know about it and go. But—and we did talk about it, Queer Nation, but it wasn't a big part of it.

GK: Right. So as far as you know there was never a distinct ACT UP group in Ottawa?

HM: No.

GK: Okay.

HM: I mean, there might have been a couple of people who wore t-shirts and ran around and said they were the ACT UP group. Who knows? [laughter] You know, they went to Toronto or Montreal or the States and got some t-shirts. But the funniest thing about the Queer Nation thing was this really conservative guy who was sort of one of the last people on the board at GO. And, somehow, he was never in Queer Nation, but he found a t-shirt and he wore it to that bar and they threw him out! [laughter] And we all just laughed.

GK: That's very funny.

[laughter]

HM: Okay, what else do I have here... I did the kiss-in, being kicked out of the gay bar, Queer Nation t-shirts.... Oh, I have some other names! Cecily McWilliams. Cecily used to work for Buddies in Bad Times, she lives in Ottawa now, and works for... what's that group that tries to work with

girls? International group... You can find her easily. And then Andrew Griffin, Carl Stewart, Catherine Browning, Barbara MacIntosh, and, he's dead now, but Kelly McGinnis was one of the main doctors. He actually didn't have AIDS. He died from Hodgkin's.

GK: Yes. I remember that.

HM: And then David Hoe. I don't know if David Hoe's still alive.

AS: Yes. He's here actually.

HM: He is?! He's still alive?

AS: Yes.

HM: I went to a party once at Bob's and there was this dumb fag there, and I introduced myself as Heidi Hoe, and he says to me, "Are you David's wife?" [laughter] Did you interview him?

AS: We're supposed to interview him tomorrow.

HM: Anyway, he would know more about the official kind of stuff. Bob Moore had this friend, I wish you could find him, he wrote something in one of those journals that you've co-published in...

GK: Are you talking about *Upping the Anti*, and then talking about Robinski (Robin)?

HM: Yes. He was a good friend of Bob Moore.

GK: So tell us more about that.

HM: And, is he dead?

GK: Robin is a long-term survivor and is not dead.

HM: Really?

GK: Yes. If you go to our website there's an interview with him and someone named Sri.

AS: Together.

GK: Under Toronto.

HM: Oh!

GK: Yes. So, Robin is still around.

[laughter]

HM: I'm amazed!

GK: I've known Robin for a long time. But probably you knew him before I knew him, from hanging around with Bob. But, he's still around.

HM: He was, like, Bob's best friend, too. And so... Bob Moore was a bit of that.

GK: My understanding from just having looked at the interview again to prepare for what we're doing here is that somehow Robin got enrolled in some sort of study of the partners of seropositive people. And that's how he found out he was HIV+. How Robin found out. But I think that was in Toronto.

HM: Well...

GK: I think Bob also came to the, Bob Moore came to the, research project, whatever it was in Toronto.

HM: Yes, of course. Well, then you knew that Robin was an anarchist and he was famous. He found some old anarchist bunch of Yiddish-speaking Jews in Toronto and he used to hang out with them. And he had this famous leather jacket he used to wear that, I don't know what it said on the back, some anarchist thing, but in Yiddish. [laughter] He's just sort of a hardcore independent stubborn activist guy, probably why he's still alive. Well I am glad he's still alive. That's nice to think of him still out there. Bob had a really good friend that we got a lot of information from and he actually... If you ever do talk to Kevin Orr... His name was... we always called him Fresden, but I think his first name might have been John. And he was a doctor *and* a dentist. And he was in Toronto for a while and did all the dentistry for the AIDS people through the AIDS group there. [...] Anyway, he might be back in Australia. But he was a link, too.

AS: Between Toronto and...

HM: Yes. But also he had all the medical information. And he would update people. But sort of informally.

AS: Like, he would get it from CATIE? Or from...

HM: Yes. And Bob used his computer skills to set up, I think, the CATIE system in Ottawa.

AS: And he was... John Fresden?

HM: I don't know... Something like that. Yeah.

AS: But he was connected to Kevin Orr? Or they would just work closely?

HM: Yes, they were good friends all of them. And because Kevin worked at the AIDS Committee of

Toronto for so long, and Fresden was a dentist and a doctor, he was one of the few people that would do the dentistry in Toronto.

GK: Kevin is no longer in Toronto. But I'm not sure where he is.

HM: No. London.

GK: London, England?

HM: Yes.

GK: Oh, well let's go there!

HM: You can probably find him. ... I once asked him. He said, "Why did you ask me such a hard question?" And I said, "Kevin, what would you have done with your life if AIDS never came along?" Because basically he got involved so early and he spent about, like, 15 to 20 years non-stop working on it. And then he couldn't take it anymore. And he actually moved to England and worked in other stuff for a while. And then he got working in the international AIDS movement and ended up being assigned to Benin or someplace like that. But, anyway, he was actually from Ottawa. So, anyway, he would have some more of that.

GK: I was part of his defense campaign when he was arrested at Glad Day.

HM: Yes. And there was the poster, one of the ads for Glad Day was—the court case, was on Kevin's birthday—the little picture of Kevin. And guess what he's celebrating on his 21st birthday? He's going to court. [laughter] Anyway, so those kind of informal links were really important with Toronto. I am just trying to think of more women. Any of the women who were presidents of GO, which would have been Barb and Katherine... Okay, Kiss-in, kicked out, yeah, that was good... Okay, and the Living Room I've mentioned a bit about it. I knew the guys who helped set it up. And they lived in Abiwin, actually.

GK: Right. Well, that's great.

AS: Yes.

GK: Maybe we should talk more about the two Bobs?

HM: The two Bobs...

GK: Well, Bob Moore and Bob Read.

HM: Well I met them, I guess, when I first got that job with the provincial government, and I said I was a young person who wanted money. I don't think Bob Moore was ever on the board, but he was friends with the whole gang that hung around there. And he was a very sweet, easygoing guy. I think he was like, a Radical Faerie, really. I think that was his thing. And his friend Robin was

quite different from him, but they seemed to complement each other. But Bob Moore was really tough. It was interesting: to have to go out there and do all that, and he was able to do it, but it wasn't really his nature. He wasn't like a performance kind of guy. You know, it wasn't his thing to do that. But somehow he just knew he had to do it.

AS: To go out and talk to people about AIDS and to be...

HM: Yes. Like, he just quietly did it. Yeah. It was amazing, really. He never complained—about anything. We would drag him out sometimes, he wouldn't want to go, and we would make him go out. And the horrible things he went through without any treatment, like going blind, and he'd have yeast infections in his mouth. They didn't even know what to feed him, really. Like, it was so primitive, right? And who knows how much pain he was in. I mean, he smoked pot, but, I mean, I think that was the only thing. They probably didn't suggest it, but that was the only thing that helped, you know.

AS: Yes.

HM: And his parents were just like him. They were this sweet little couple. And they were always positive. They obviously loved him to death. And they never said a bad word, and encouraged him. His mother, for the Quilt Project, made a really—Bob Moore loved to garden—and his mother made him this very sweet quilt. It was just like this daisy, or something, which she made, and it says, "Bob Moore." [laughter] And it was... He was just a really sweet guy.

AS: Did he garden at Abiwin?

HM: Yeah he did, a bit. So, yeah, that was lousy. But, you know, he never said he was going to kill himself or anything. He wasn't one of those guys, right. Who says when I've had enough. He actually went to palliative care and right to the end.

AS: Did Bruce House exist then?

HM: No.

AS: No.

HM: So we went to Bruyère. Which is where everyone went.

AS: Everyone went to Bruyère?

HM: Yes.

AS: Okay.

GK: Do you have any rough idea of when he would have died? Like, what year?

HM: What year did the Quilt come out? It was like the year before, or something.

GK: The Quilt came out in, I think, '88/'89. But I'm not entirely sure.

AS: When it comes to Ottawa...

GK: When it comes to Ottawa...

HM: I think he died in '86. '85/'86. '87. Maybe, maybe not. I don't know. He was in and out of the hospital a few times, but he always came home.

And then Bob Read was, what you call it—he was an old responsible wasp kind of guy, right. His father was a country doctor in a little town. And he just always felt he had to work in the community. And he told me the first time he went to GO he was really young, and he heard about it somehow. He started having relationships with guys, like, really young. And, I think, they were fixing up the second GO centre. And he knew how to fix things up and everything. And he came and he said, "Oh, tomorrow can you be here at 9? We're gonna fix this ceiling." And I thought, yeah, we'll never see him again. You know, the guys there... Yes, sure... And then there he was with coffee at 9 o'clock, ready with his tools [laughter] to fix the roof. Interesting politics. Because he really didn't have any. You know, he'd vote NDP, but he didn't have any particular politics, except that you should always be involved in things, and always should do things. And he was very fortunate that he was really smart in computers. And he got into it, but he never finished his degree. He only ever went to his computer courses. [laughter]

AS: That was all that was useful to him.

HM: Yes. [laughter] And then they kicked him out of Western. Because they said, "We know what you're doing." And he goes, "Really?" So then he got a job, either at the newspaper or the radio station, or something. And then he just got right into computers. And he made—he called himself a corporate whore. [laughter] And he made more money than anyone he knew.

AS: Because he was right there, right when computers were starting.

HM: Yes. That's right. And he...

AS: Why did he come to Ottawa? ... He came from London?

HM: I don't know why he came to Ottawa. I guess it was for work. They had their office there. Digital had their office in Kanata. And then he got involved with GO right away. And, since he'd worked for a radio station, he became the DJ. And he was involved in setting up Abiwin, and moving in. And he just gave us all this money all the time. And if you went for dinner with him and you'd try to pay, he'd tear it up. I had this girlfriend one time, that I was dating from this Dutch reformed family, who was really uptight about money, among other things—didn't last long. [laughter] And she gave him ten bucks and he tore it in half in front of her and I thought she was gonna die. [laughter] She just didn't know what to do!

So we used to call him Uncle Bob. [laughter] Bob's your uncle. And he was famous with the guys. I never went to one, but he had hat parties, and he would invite everyone. He'd have these great house parties. Like, he was one of the few gay guys who had really fun house parties. And all these people would come. And they would be really fun. You know, they'd wear silly hats. Or, you know, they'd play music. And they were like house parties, right. So he was famous for these house parties. And he worked really hard. He worked ridiculously hard and long hours. He would get up at five in the morning and go to bed at nine.

And I never knew he was HIV+. He never told me, for years and years. Although other people knew, but he never told me. I found out by accident. I used to take care of his house when he would go to work in Boston, and there was a pill. I was sweeping the floor, and there was a pill on the floor. And I picked it up and looked at it. And I knew the brand name. And I went, "You fucker!" [laughter] And he never talked about it with me. Never mentioned his own status with anyone. He did with some of his friends —when he got really sick. But before then, he never talked about it. And actually, what's his face was the one he talked to the most, David Hoe.

AS: Do you think that that's connected—I mean, you were saying that... This is so interesting to me: people who are very engaged, very active...

HM: So, even though, he was out and active he never talked about someone himself as being someone who was HIV+. And he never had that as an identity.

AS: Is it that thing, that sometimes people who don't identify politically, right, they don't...

HM: Well, no. He was very, very political. He would go out and say he was gay to anybody, all the time. He was the main guy in the Digital Gay Association. He was out at work, wherever he went, before everyone was out. And he never identified as being HIV+. I guess he didn't see why he had to. He just wasn't. Whereas some people who didn't come out until they became HIV+, they came out being HIV+, but they had never told anyone they were gay. Now, it wasn't like that either. Like, I don't know why he didn't. The only time I ever talked about it—it was really strange. Somebody's little kid, who was a friend of Bob's said to me, "Oh, hi. Bob has AIDS." And he said it... She said it right in front of Bob, or something, like this. And I said, "I don't know why she said that, Bob. That's so weird." And he didn't say anything. [laughter] And then, until I found that little pill, I never suspected it. He was always so healthy, until he got really sick. Who knows?

AS: Yes.

HM: But that was kind of interesting. I guess, different people. But, you know, he would always say that being HIV+ didn't mean you should get disability. Like, people who just became HIV+ positive and weren't sick and quit their jobs and went on disability, he didn't like that at all. ... But then again, he had a really good job, and really good benefits. But, if you had a crappy job that was stressful, you know, you might have had a different point of view. And he went back to work after he was sick and recovered. He actually went back to work. Again, this wasp thing. [laughter] But his parents were great! His parents were the founders of PFLAG [Parents and Families of Lesbians

and Gays] in their area. And I once went to Pride Day with Bob and walked with the parents. And this would have been in '85 or something, '84. And people came up to them crying and hugging them. Like, it was an incredible experience to walk with them in the parade. It was just absolutely wild.

AS: Because people were just so excited to see some parents? Or...

HM: Yes! They were walking with the PFLAG group, right. It was just a little group, but they would come up and hug them and bawl their eyes out, just to have parents there. You know, they were very nice people. He could be very frustrating, too. Absolutely fucking stubborn. He would get upset about something and he couldn't work it out, so he would get in his car and drive to the Gatineau and cry for two hours. [laughter] And he wouldn't solve the problem. And he'd come back and he would still be crabby. [laughter] One of these guy things, you know. [laughter] Trying to have emotional relationships with men... God. [laughter] The bane of my existence. It's good thing you don't have to have sex with them, too. [laughter]

But the thing that happened when Bob died is he linked all these people, almost internationally, together. And when he died we don't keep in contact, anymore. He was our link. So he was that kind of community person that was a link. And he was asked to run for city office. And, Diane Holmes, a long term alderman [Councillor], whatever they call them in Ottawa, I can't remember, asked him to run on various boards and stuff. But he never did.

AS: He wasn't interested?

HM: No. And there actually is a memorial to him on Elgin Street, in a park. The same park the Montreal memorial is in.

AS: I'll check it out.

HM: So the city did that for him.

GK: So he dies later?

HM: Yes. He died when I was out here. He died in...

GK: Weren't you trying to go back when he died?

HM: The queen bee stood me up. [laughter] I said, "That fucker stood me up!" He died an hour before I landed.

AS: Wow.

HM: [laughter] So I stayed, anyway. But then I couldn't come back for the memorial, right. Yes, he kept going for treatment He went for this treatment. It was, "I can live longer, I can try this treatment." And he went for the treatment. Although he always said he wouldn't, he had this

stockpile of pills. And he always said when he'd have enough, "Forget it." But, you never know what people would do. But, I've had a couple friends who died. And the only thing that made it better for me was I actually talked to the people who cared for them on their last day. And if I hadn't had that, I'd just feel awful. That's happened a couple times now. But, somehow, having that, it was okay.

AS: Did people narrate what happened? How they were?

HM: Yes. Like, on the last day Bob was conscious he was dreaming and he'd seen *Angels in America*, in New York, of course. And in this dream there were these big studly angels, and he was sort of half out of it, and he said that the angels were in his room—these big naked studs. [laughter] *Angels in America*, right? I thought, of course, there are angels in your room! And, of course, they look like that! I hope they *have* come for you! [laughter] But, anyway, yes, he was dead three hours after he got to Elizabeth Bruyère.

AS: Wow.

HM: One could conclude what happened.

GK: So I think, do you have any other...?

HM: So, you know me, I could go on for hours... But I don't have anything else.

GK: Well, I think, you've already given us lots of other people to talk to. And...

HM: Well, I do think the main thing about why Ottawa was puzzling to me is women and the AIDS Committee... That's an interesting question... Like, there may have been people I don't know about, or other people I haven't thought of doing things. And how slowly did Ottawa respond... Did that committee respond to women...

AS: Do you have any speculations?

HM: No. I don't. Maybe the people who started organizing the Living Room, but I don't remember anyone ever talking about sex workers in Ottawa and AIDS. Hustlers, yeah. But...

AS: In the context of the park?

HM: Yes.

AS: Yes.

HM: That's another thing, Bob...

AS: Do you want to say anything about that?

HM: No. That's another thing Bob used to do with everyone he met. He used to carry around condoms and he would educate all these guys he met. And always, he would always educate them. I always found that was a good thing. And he said this thing—and I always think about it, and it's true: he said, "You don't have to be scared of AIDS, as long as you protect yourself." And, ultimately, it's true. In the final analysis, no panic, no whatever, if you're careful with yourself, you won't get AIDS. Unless through a blood transfusion, or whatever. But, generally, if you're a gay man and you continually practice safe sex, you won't.

AS: I guess my only other question, if you have any thoughts about it: in the other places there tended to be this—I mean we've only looked at a few places—but, often, there would be a kind of AIDS service organization like ACO. And then there would be a, like a PWA coalition, but in Ottawa it seems like that was kind of the Living Room.

HM: Yes.

AS: And then sometimes there would be conflict, right? Sometimes between PWA coalitions, or sometimes there would be a group, like ACT UP, that would form... And I've been trying to figure out why in Ottawa...

HM: There was conflict. There was a big thing with an executive director having to be fired. And it was a complete shit show. I don't know the details, but I just remember it was a nightmare. So somebody will have to talk to you about that one. And the guy's name I don't remember. But, you know, there's the other issue which we only started to figure out is that HIV affected people's brains. And that there were some people running organizations that were sicker than they knew, and in ways people didn't think of. And I think a couple of times, in some cases, that that's actually what was happening. Besides the pressures and the stresses that the disease itself, people didn't know much about...

AS: What was happening...

HM: Because now we see with people who are longer term HIV, it does have its own little dementia. But we didn't know that then. So I always wonder about certain situations, what really was happening... Danl Lowen.

GK: Was that the executive director that got...

HM: I think so. I may be wrong, but...

AS: I'm going to be talking to more ACO people, so... But do you have a sense of why? Like, it sounds like, Queer Nation did a bunch of sort of collective action kinds of things. Like kiss-ins, and...

HM: But the thing that you always got to remember about Ottawa is... You know, Gary's work, public servants' greatest fear was being caught out. And, you know, losing their job. But, as far as being a political bunch, they were a very comfortable bunch of people. You know, who had good

jobs, money... I mean, so you had a lot of—well the difference was Francophone or English. So you had a lot of guys who had a lot of good money, and owned homes, and it made them conservative. And so in Ottawa it was always like that. Even among lesbians. There were a few who had been involved in the feminist movement there, who got good jobs in the government, and were incredibly generous to those, you know, raggy-bag rest of the feminists. They had cottages and houses and helped people out. You know, office equipment disappeared in one case and, in one case during International Women's Day, I heard whole coolers disappeared. [laughter] But, generally, they were pretty conservative people. So they weren't into that. They didn't want to lose their jobs. So you get the younger people who come to university. And then, you know, you had working class gay men that you'd run into, but it was always a class thing. Because it was just the way it worked in Ottawa. Unless they were in the bureaucracy, then they were poor, right? And the same with working class lesbians. French lesbians, they had, they seemed to have, unless again, if they had gone into the civil service and had an education, they had really crappy jobs. [laughter] And often these richer guys would go out with these other guys, right? So there was that kind of conflict, too. It was even certain bars were—I don't want to call it rough trade or hustler bars—wasn't even quite like that, but there would be, basically, working class young French guys and guys with money.

AS: Yes.

HM: So, I think that's why.

AS: Yes.

HM: But you always had the university's younger people coming, all the time.

AS: It's funny how it can just feel the same. Like, this is still what it feels like 20 years later.

[laughter]

HM: Well. It is, more or less. It's kind of the same.

AS: It's kind of the same, yes.

HM: That's just the... And it's even worse now, because there are even more people who get these contracts to do the same kind of work. [...] Perfect, we're done!

AS: Thanks so much for this.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]