

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

**Interview Transcript 17**

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<b>Interviewee:</b>	Dan Guinan
<b>Interviewers:</b>	Alexis Shotwell & Gary Kinsman
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Persons present: Dan Guinan – DG  
Alexis Shotwell – AS  
Gary Kinsman – GK

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

**AS: We are talking to Dan Guinan on October 29th, 2014.**

**GK: Where we've been starting the interviews is when people first heard about AIDS and what they heard about it. If you have any memories of when that might have been and what you might have heard.**

DG: Yeah. Well, I don't know about the first, but I do remember when there was something about AIDS on the cover of *Maclean's* magazine and that would've been sometime in the early '80s. And I was studying biology at the University of Manitoba and I remember being out at a pelican colony in Manitoba, helping a guy who was studying pelicans. And so with these biologists, or biology students, and the guy said, "That must be scary if you're a fruit." So, at the time there was still that homophobic words, and that was his kind of macho defense mechanism, but there was not empathy. And I wasn't out to them so, then I was, you know, just processing, "Okay, well that's how he feels about it." And that's an interesting reaction, right. "It must be scary if..." So, at least there was a bit of empathy already starting, but it came out with that homophobic remark. I mean at the time because I was studying, I do remember – like, you're asking about what I was reading – and one of the things was medical literature, because I was in the science library studying as a biology student. Even though I wasn't in medicine, but I was able to follow stuff that was coming up and that was interesting.

**GK: Do you remember anything distinctly about the stuff that you would've been following?**

DG: Well, at the time it was *The Lancet* and the *New England Journal of Medicine* and *Nature* magazine. It was when they were starting to figure out about the virus and, you know, very early stuff at that time. So, it was interesting to follow it at that point, and from that kind of science perspective.

**AS: At that point things were in process. People were not... didn't know even medically – what is this?**

DG: Yes.

**AS: Was that palpable? Like, now looking back it's something that you can really perceive. People were just trying to understand. Did you have a sense of that then? Like, "Oh, they don't really know."**

DG: Oh, I had a sense that most people didn't understand, especially transmission routes. Even still we have that, where people are not understanding a lot of the basic science behind it so, yes you could definitely see that. In terms of... I mean, I guess, the news was interesting to follow just because people were trying to figure out so many different things. What is Kaposi Sarcoma? And why is this happening? And what's happening in New York? And Patient Zero, and all those kinds of things, or all those theories. I mean it was kind of a fascinating field at the time. And at some point, I would have come out sometime around then – you know, to myself even. So then, at first that would've been part of my coming out process, which was interesting. So, I would've been able to protect myself from the very beginning in terms of having that knowledge, because of looking at it from that scientific perspective – I knew kind of what was going on. I had all the knowledge right from the start.

**GK: Right.**

**AS: Yeah. And so you were living in Manitoba then?**

DG: I grew up in Manitoba and I moved here in 1986.

**GK: So, do you have any idea of when you would've seen AIDS, not simply just as a medical question, but as maybe a political question or perhaps even an activist question?**

DG: Well, sometime in there I came out and I met Tom Patterson in there. And sometime I was working at the... something like a Lesbian and Gay Resource Centre or some kind of a thing that they had. And I was working as a peer counselor on the telephones. And somehow I got involved – I think as a small contract – doing some work, collecting some surveys. So, the community at the time were trying to figure out who's vulnerable here in Winnipeg. And I can't remember the name... I think there was a psychologist who was helping at the time. And so it's all kind of mixed up, but I was kind of active from the get go in that sense, right, because I was doing that. So, I do remember somehow being familiar with some of the survey results. It ranged where there were guys who had three hundred or six hundred sexual partners in a year and some who had zero, one, two, three, whatever. And at some point, there was a scandal where some of the survey forms were found on the street by somebody and somehow I got implicated as if I had lost them, which I don't think that I would have or could have, but in any case that was part of a perception. And there was some media coverage about that, and I don't remember if that was just a confidentiality issue but, you know, this was at the time when there were two private clubs and they were kind of underground. You had to be a member to go in them, and they were across the street from each other. So, I was essentially going back and forth between the two clubs and talking to people and getting them to fill out these forms and collecting them and putting them somewhere. And I was doing the phone counseling at one of the clubs. So, you know, I was kind of involved talking to people. I knew what was going on.

**GK: So, it was probably a gay line you were doing the counseling on. Was a fair amount of it actually AIDS and HIV-related?**

DG: It was mainly coming out stuff, but that was part of the discussion, yeah.

**GK: But you weren't directly involved in it, because there must have an AIDS group starting to form in Winnipeg at that point.**

DG: I remember there was somebody, a person with AIDS, I think from eastern Canada who came to speak. So, that was the first person with AIDS that anybody was ever going to meet in Manitoba – or most people – and have a chance to talk to him. So, I went to that and, yeah, it'd be interesting to see what that must've been like, in '82-'83 or something like that.

**GK: Right, very early on.**

**AS: I wonder who that was. We could probably find that out somehow, but it's interesting.**

DG: Yeah. So, that's how it was happening from the very start. That whole community was just deciding, you know, is this going to affect us? And I knew that it was going to affect people. I saw how it was spreading, etc. People were being diagnosed all over, whether or not there was one in Winnipeg at the time, I can't remember. And then shortly thereafter groups formed and, you know, there were whatever dozens of people infected, etc.

**AS: Yeah. So, when you moved to Vancouver you had quite a good sense of how things were moving. Did you identify then as someone who was doing AIDS activism or was that something that...?**

DG: Well, I guess it would've been when I met Tom Patterson at the University of Manitoba – I can't remember how that happened anymore – and then eventually moved in with him. And he was living in a housing coop in Winnipeg, which had been going from the seventies, I think. It started as like, a Lutheran House and then it became an NDP House, and now it was kind of like a radical activist house. And so we were in this political milieu and he was doing activism and radical politics so I learned a lot about that. And so it started a before I came to Vancouver. When I came to Vancouver, we very quickly got involved with *Angles*, doing the writing work for *Angles*. And that was basically the location where a lot of this happened, and then we were adding things on kind of from that core group.

**GK: And you moved to Vancouver in '86?**

DG: 1986.

**GK: That's also the year the PWA Coalition gets formed.**

DG: Is that right? Okay, yeah.

**GK: So, you almost immediately get involved in working on *Angles*, like, writing articles?**

DG: So, it was the *Angles* collective, so there were the collective members or anyone who came to a meeting, a collective meeting, the planning meeting. And then there were others who just came to volunteer on producing the paper, because it was all cut-and-paste and everything at that time.

**AS: Amazing to think about that.**

DG: And I went to the meetings, so I was essentially part of the collective. And at the same time I got a job at the Vancouver – what's now called People With Disabilities Coalition – something like that. They changed their name a few times. I've forgotten. So, and that was actually through Fred Gilbertson who was on the *Angles* collective as well. And I'm not sure what the timing is, but eventually with the Coalition of People With Disabilities, we received a grant to do this AIDS education project for the disabled community.

**AS: Interesting.**

DG: So, that would've been late 1980s because I started here in '91. So, that was kind of spilling over that way too, right. And then through that I also met... because at some point the Coalition of People with Disabilities was working with the PWA [People with HIV/AIDS] Coalition or Society, whatever it is on joint funding through doing the AIDS walk.

**GK: An AIDS walk, okay.**

DG: And so I met with one of the presidents of the PWA Society – Alex Kowalski.

**GK: Okay.**

DG: It was a little bit after that, yeah. And I worked with a couple of them at that time. At the same time, I'm doing writing with *Angles*, so meeting people in different things and going to some different events. You know, it's sort of activism. It certainly became activism at different stages. So, some of it was just community work, service work, writing a newspaper, writing articles providing information and sometimes it was more active.

**AS: Did you have a kind of corner of *Angles*? Like, an area that you wrote in, that you sort of curated?**

DG: Well, I can't remember in which order... I often did International News. And then at one point I was the Features editor, and then at one point I was the News editor.

**AS: Okay.**

DG: That is generally what I was doing. And *Angles* would have probably a better record of what's there, what happened.

**GK: We need to actually look at more issues of *Angles*. We've got a few, but we haven't really looked at them in detail. So, I was wondering, you came in contact with some people in the**

**PWA Coalition in relationship to the work you were doing around the Coalition for People with Disabilities. Can you tell us anything about what your sense of the PWA Coalition was at that point in time?**

DG: Well, it was a little bit chaotic because these were guys who were dying, and trying to save their lives at that point, and trying to organize as much as they could for the community and for each other. And a lot of it was about just providing services, like, money for this and money for that. And so when I was helping with the two organizations working towards the AIDS Walk. We were going to Seattle to meet with the people down there, but one of the guys from the PWA Society couldn't get across the border because he had a criminal record and, you know, that kind of chaos was going on, because these are just people trying to do stuff. Yeah. And eventually somehow they were working together and they were starting to get some funding through those early AIDS Walks, and at the time the Coalition of People with Disabilities was run by a woman, Margaret Birrell, who was involved with NDP politics. So, she was very supportive of gay liberation work and was right on top of the AIDS stuff. So, that was all good.

**GK: Good.**

DG: Yeah. Well, through writing for *Angles* I met some guys who were people with AIDS and did an article on them. One I did was on the McLaren Housing Society, which at the very beginning, when they first started, before they opened – I think now they still own a building, not sure about that. Eventually they had a building, but to start they had a house lent to them, possibly rent-free for a year, I think, or a summer. I think it was a year. So, they moved people with AIDS into this house. And so then I was writing this feature article and I met this guy and, you know, wrote some of his story. And so then I got to know him, and then we spent time together. So, he eventually moved in with another guy and then I became friends with the other guy as well. The first guy died; the second guy – myself and Paul Craik, who you're going to interview?

**GK: Yes.**

DG: Yeah. So then, and this other guy – the third guy, Benoit Lantier, he was from Montreal; he was member number three of the PWA Society. So, he was not exactly an activist. He was a very mellow kind of a guy. So, he was not really an activist but he was member number three. So, he was involved from the very beginning. And so knowing Benoit – you know, I knew quite a bit of what was going on at the time. And so he was relying on the PWA Society for different benefits and programs that were going on.

**AS: So, could you talk just a little bit about what kinds of things he would've been able to access because of them or would've been working on as member number three?**

DG: I do remember Doug Van Volkinburg who was the first guy that I met who was living in that house with McLaren Housing Society, who then became the roommate of Benoit. He – through the PWA Society – he got hooked up with somebody who had money and wanted to support people with AIDS, and he would go and get a hundred dollars I think in cash a month from them, just to help support himself – cigarettes or whatever.

**AS: Things that you need.**

DG: Yeah, just things that you need. So, I remember that with Benoit, even though I lived with him maybe six months or a year, I can't remember. I don't recall what he was getting. Certainly, he was getting moral support by being able to meet with these people and talk about issues.

**AS: Yeah.**

DG: Yeah. I don't remember. Like, John Kozachenko would probably know more about exactly what was going on, because I think he would've been going.

**GK: Yeah. We talked to John today, but there's obviously more things we could have talked to him about.**

**AS: Yeah, there's always more.**

**GK: Just in terms of *Angles*, do you remember any issues or controversies around AIDS/HIV issue that might've been going on in the paper when you were around?**

DG: Oh boy. Well, I mean there was a general sense that what we were putting out in *Angles* was seen as leftist and radical as opposed to what people who were organizing, AIDS Vancouver for example, even McLaren Housing Society, would've thought that that was too radical – what we were doing. So, there was that discussion going on about, "Why aren't we doing proper journalism and showing both sides of the story?" etc., those kinds of things.

**AS: And could you just characterize what the sides would've been?**

DG: Well, I guess *Angles* was promoting more of an activist agenda. So, it was like, "People are dying. We have to work to support each other and save each other, and we have to educate people. So, prevention is the first thing, and safe sex education. But then also, you know, no quarantine and working against these laws and trying to shut down people – the religious right – who are trying to argue against, to limit our rights and those kinds of issues." All of that is in the context... the AIDS stuff is in the context of the general lesbian/gay rights discussion that's going on at the same time.

**AS: Yeah, and my impression also is that *Angles* was really holding a line that also seems to have been part of *The Body Politic* saying, "Sex is not bad. AIDS does not mean that sex is bad." Was that your sense when you were working in that context?**

DG: Yeah, absolutely. So, essentially trying to help people – the readership and the community – figure out, "What do you do about this? What do you do about this virus? How do you react to it?" And, you know, that discussion. I guess maybe it's still going on. Like, for example, you know, is cock sucking safe? You know, those discussions maybe are still going on. But at the time it was very fraught with all kinds of concern and can we possibly do this? And because of the thing about

'sex is bad' and 'gay people are bad' was all wrapped up in it so, trying to tease those apart and get people to see. You know, number one, prevent yourself from getting the virus. Look after each other. Be kind to other people. And then, if you do have sex, these are some things you can do. And for people who are saying, "Lock them all up" because of this virus, then this is what we can do. So, and we were promoting an activist agenda because we were coming from that radical left position. And that was because Tom Pattison... Patterson?

**GK: Patterson?**

DG: [laughter] He was my partner for about five or six years. That was a while ago. So, when we were living in this radical house coop, Dorchester Housing Coop in...

**GK: This is in Winnipeg.**

DG: In Winnipeg, yeah. He might've had that radicalism even earlier. I'm trying to think of who were his mentors and there were a few probably. But in any case, he was involved in revolutionary Trotskyist organizations. And so there was, for example, this one called the ASA. What is that – The Alliance for Socialist Action?

**GK: Yeah. I called it the Aspirins.**

**AS: Gary.** [laughter]

DG: So, he had come to Toronto and met some people here. And then some people came to Winnipeg, and I think they actually had the founding convention for the ASA in Winnipeg. And so somehow he was wrapped up in those things. So, then in 1986 when we moved to Vancouver he still would've been involved with those people, but in the gay community we met the people who were already running *Angles* so, Fred Gilbertson. And Fred Gilbertson was an interesting character because he went back... he flip-flopped back and forth from being a radical Trotskyist to being a Roman Catholic, and wanting to...

**GK: Yes. I remember that about Fred.**

DG: He liked the ecclesiastical drag – is what he liked. But in any case with Tom there, he was getting into the radical politics. And Richard Banner was getting into them as well, and I was coming along for the ride. And Tom was a force to himself. He was just very sure of himself and very confident and felt that one person can make a difference in history. So, somehow he was committed to learning about these things and following these things, and promoting these things. And he was very social so, he was out meeting people all the time, and going to meetings.

**GK: So, some of you would've been involved in a group called the Front for Active Gay Socialism or FAGS. Do you remember that group?**

DG: Yes. So, that was Tom, Fred, Richard and myself, and Paul Craik. So, probably the five of us were the core, and then there were maybe just a few other people who were coming around. And

most of our links were actually with the Dykes for Dykedom. So, that whole thing was happening. How does that link go? There was a group of women living in a communal house in East Vancouver and a friend of one of those had a girlfriend who was from England who wanted to emigrate to Canada so they could stay together and Tom married her and we moved into the house next door. There were like, four houses on this industrial street and we were in these two houses and the back was a roofing company. [laughter] And so there was the Dykes for Dykedom house and the Front for Active Gay Socialism house – sort of, it was just two of us from one and a couple from the others. But there was kind of a locus that formed there.

**AS: And what was the Dykes for Dykedom?**

DG: They started the first Dyke March in Vancouver.

**GK: Okay.**

DG: And they started like, renting out the gay bathhouse and having Sex Positive nights, and things like this. It was a bit of a social force, you know, at the time.

**AS: Cool.**

DG: Also, some interest in AIDS protection like, dental dams and stuff like that was coming in. So, the Front for Active Gay Socialism – all of this stuff was happening and, I guess, it was sort of like a radical gay group and it was activism. It was also very social, but also kind of like a learning group – like, we're learning and we're discovering things and we're taking about things. And so we're dealing with issues like racism and, you know, we're just educating ourselves and sometimes educating others. And so it was odd because we had the *Angles* collective, we've got the Front for Active Gay Socialism [FAGS], and we've got the AIDS organizations sort of forming. So, we were kind of a nucleus for starting different things and then people would get mad at us because we were so radical and [go] off and do something else.

**GK: Did FAGS try to do anything specifically around AIDS?**

DG: Well, I can't really remember what the distinction is with the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation [CRHL]. I know at some point we created some posters and put up posters and had a meeting, or a couple of meetings. And one of them was successful with probably about forty people talking about issues around AIDS, probably the more political issues. I don't remember specifically much about that. So yeah, my memory is not clear enough to distinguish really. But I mean we talked about it. I think we understood it fairly well. We would've been following what was going on in other places. But we were doing that at *Angles* partly too. We had John Kozachenko who was going to marches in DC and stuff like that, and coming back and giving us all the pictures and we would put in a story. It was interesting because we were doing news feed stuff, whatever we could get, however we did it in those days. [laughter] Newspapers or something. But also having almost like a reporter with Kozachenko who went to these things who was like this... he was into the socializing, but he also knew the value of getting that and being there participating, and then also spreading the word.

**GK: Then Bill 34, the Quarantine legislation, comes up, so the CRHL gets formed somehow around that. What was Bill 34 about?**

DG: Well, I don't remember it very much.

**GK: But people did organize around it?**

DG: People did organize against it. What I do remember is like, the Social Credit government and how, ignorant they were and trying to get some different discussions out there – some different viewpoints and getting a bit of coverage, and probably having quite a bit of influence. Yeah. But Bill 34... Other people will remember it a lot better. I remember, there were a couple of things like when Dionne Warwick was brought to Vancouver to sing at a Socred fundraiser and then we went to the Queen Elizabeth Theatre where it was, and there was this kind of scuffle that happened. And, I don't know if John told you this, but somehow Lillian Vander Zalm fell or something and John found her belt or something like this.

**AS: He didn't tell us about the belt. [laughter]**

DG: And lots of media coverage. So, it was from an activist perspective. Here we were going and causing this disruption, but that was one of the only ways for the general society – the media and the general society – to say, "This is not just a bunch of..." homosexuals, however gay and lesbian people would've been talked about at that point, like, sick or degenerate. You know, so it's saying we're fighting back. So, it was part of that whole activism thing. "We're fighting back. We care about ourselves. We're standing up for ourselves. We are a community." Just those very broad messages were very important to get out. Oh the chant was, "Dionne Warwick, if she knew, she would never sing for you," probably Kozachenko's. [laughter] So, I don't know if that was part of Bill 34 stuff or whatever. And the other thing that happened was the arrest. So, I got arrested with John and Paul Craik. And that was a demonstration at the Vancouver Convention Centre, and what was going there? Could it have been an International AIDS Conference? Did they have the first one here? Which would've been very small if that was true.

**GK: No. It's before that. There's not a conference here until '96, so it's before that.**

DG: Yeah. Because that was just before I got the job here. I started here in '91. So, this would've been about early '91 maybe.

**GK: Right. It must've been after ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power] was formed.**

DG: That could've been an ACT UP action.

**GK: I think it was. So, there's Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation, which is around for a bit. Just before moving on to ACT UP, do you remember anything more about the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation? John calls it – what did he call it?**

**AS: CORAL.**

**GK: CORAL, yeah, which I've never heard before.**

DG: I do remember in *Angles*. There was an office up here on Broadway and as a reporter for *Angles* I went there. And it was somebody who was some right-wing religious group, Christian group who was saying, "All gays are going to die" or "Gays go away and die" or whatever, a message like that. And so I was writing an article about it. So, I don't know what time that was, if that was linked to those because maybe it was just an *Angles* thing. The interesting story about that was, whether it was a couple of years later, whatever, that pastor who was working at this – this was at the office of the radical Christian political group, and then he had a church in Burnaby. And eventually I think he came out as a gay man, or he came out as a person with AIDS and maybe that he was gay, and then he died. So, it was funny that there was that direct link between this guy whose radical, Christian right-wing hatred was really stemming from his own struggle with his homosexuality, and his HIV diagnosis possibly at the same time. I don't know. But in any case, yeah, that's all I know about CRHL.

**GK: Okay, so we'll come back to the arrest, because obviously we want to know more about that. But do you have any memories of how ACT UP got organized here or how it was put together, anything like that?**

DG: It's got Tom Patterson written all over it. [laughter] But I mean we were doing everything. And I don't think that ACT UP... well, it might have had, you know, the core group and then some others. I don't remember who. And so the organizing... I mean the meetings all blend in to each other.

**AS: Yeah.**

**GK: So, apparently the first meeting was held in a back yard in Kitsilano. Do you have any memory of that? I mean you may not have been there. I have no idea.**

DG: No. I don't remember.

**GK: So, any ideas about how ACT UP would've been organized or what it did? I mean obviously you were at an event where you got arrested.**

DG: Which was probably an ACT UP event. And then the other thing I remember is marching in the Pride Parade. I'm trying to think if my parents were watching at that point, but anyways – a different issue. We weren't very theatrical. You could tell that we were more political people and not theatrical people because we were just marching. We were a small group – six or eight or something like that. But the community knew about us, and so there was some applause and recognition that there needed to be some of that work done. And what was the other thing? Oh, the other thing was that there was a spray paint campaign. So, we did a pink triangle and I don't know if it said "ACT UP" – although I wouldn't doubt it if it did, or something about AIDS. And we spray-painted them maybe ten places around the West End, and I know one at the Vancouver

Aquatic Centre stayed for like, six-eight years after that; maybe it's still there. I don't know. So, it had some... it was known. What else happened with ACT UP? Oh, there was this guy – was he the starter in New York? Michael somebody? He came to the Vancouver Folk Music Festival.

**GK: Oh, was he a musical performer?**

DG: Well, that's what I can't remember.

**GK: It probably was Michael Callen.**

DG: Yeah, it was Michael Callen – I didn't see him perform so, I guess so. I just remember him sitting in the dining tent for the performers. So, I don't know what year that was and how that was linked up. And even so much before that, in *Angles* we would've been reporting what was going on in New York with ACT UP and what was going on in the DC protests and whatever else happened – the March on Washington. That wasn't exactly ACT UP but different things going on.

**GK: ACT UP was there.**

DG: Yes, okay.

**GK: They had a gigantic contingent there.**

DG: Yes. I can imagine.

**GK: Maybe we should come back to the situation you were arrested in. What can you tell us about that?**

DG: Well, there was some kind of event at the Convention Centre, and... it must've been Tom as well so, Tom, Paul, I think, and John and myself – four of us? Maybe. It must've been four of us. So, we had prepared for civil disobedience and we were there and Paul went to great efforts to go and buy some kind of paint, finger paint for kids that would wash off anything. It was removable. And then, so we had that planned out, but then at this event whatever it was, which would've been in the Convention Centre. So, in the back of a big building and we were out front on the street, and we did some kind of protest. I don't remember if we did... you know, if there were placards or whatever, but I'm sure there were. And then what we did for kind of the drama was putting this paint on our hands and then putting it on the building, and I don't know if there was something around, "Get your hands off us" or whatever it was, right.

**AS: "Blood on your hands," or...**

DG: Yeah, something like that. I don't remember if the four of us decided to get arrested or to do that part, which was the civil disobedience part, where we could be arrested for damage to property. Even though... if they knew that it was removable paint, maybe not so much. But I was one of the people that got arrested. And so I was being carted off by the two police officers and I had all this stuff on my hands. So, they were kind of bumping into somebody ahead of me, a guy

wearing a suit, so I wiped my hands off on the guy's suit. So, he was really mad about that. [laughter] But anyways, then we went to jail for... I don't even think it was overnight. I think it was a few hours. I know that they gave us a bowl of chili in a Styrofoam cup.

**GK: So, were you actually charged?**

DG: And then we were charged with something, but then we were given the opportunity to do a diversion program, which was for us not to clog up the court system. And I think that meant probably we had to sign something and that we... this would've remained on our record; although, I have a vague recollection of going to court. So, maybe there was a court appearance as well.

**GK: Usually, if there is a charge against you and diversion happens, you still have to have the court appearance where it comes up formally and the Crown says they accept it. And whoever is representing you says they accept it; stuff like that. So, that's probably what happened.**

DG: Probably, yeah.

**GK: So, they didn't actually dismiss the charges. It was a diversion arrangement.**

DG: Yes.

**GK: They might've given you community service or something.**

DG: I didn't get community service, but it was something like it would be on our record for some time. But it wouldn't like, limit us going across the border and things like that.

**GK: There would be a statement in your file probably for a period of time. I think that's probably what would've happened.**

**AS: "Uses finger paint." [laughter]**

**GK: Do you know what they charged you with? Do you have any memory of that?**

DG: I think it was some kind of damage to property. But, you know, it wasn't much damage. And I think I actually ended up paying the dry-cleaning bill for the guy with the suit. You can't just wash a suit. So, that was not a good choice. [laughter]

**GK: If you had to do it again, you might have done it differently.**

DG: Pick something that wasn't wool, I guess.

**AS: Do you remember anything about... I don't know if this is the same action, but John was telling us something about a limo and some ketchup. Do you remember? Was that the same action?**

**GK: That's a different action.**

DG: I don't remember that.

**GK: That's the State of the Province address, which is I think the next January in 1991.**

**AS: See, this is why we have Gary here because he remembers things.**

DG: Yes. The timeline.

**GK: But I did want to come back to one thing. You implied that there was some sort of training for civil disobedience. Was there training or getting ready for it that existed in ACT UP, or existed somehow at that time?**

DG: Well, Paul will remember this, but there was also some other instance at Grandview Park in Commercial Drive district where... I don't remember what the event was, but it was anticipated that there might be right-wing people or maybe it was even like, Marxist-Leninists troublemakers or something like that. People from the Marxist-Leninist whatever Party of Canada or something, who caused those kind of problems. So, I don't know if it was training, but there was a car that had in its trunk, it had like, some kind of sticks or something – baseball bats – which then we could use as weapons. And I think some of us wore cups, jockstraps with cups on it for protection, and leather jackets and leather boots. And so we were a little bit prepared for that. So, I don't know that that was specifically an AIDS activist event, but it was kind of wrapped up together. It probably would've been a gay activist event. And training... well, I don't recall any specific meeting to have training, but certainly it would've been at least informal dialogue about how to get arrested, how not to resist. I mean how to get arrested and make them carry you, let your body go limp and all that stuff. And I'm pretty sure there would've been training at somewhere in there within the larger group – maybe even the CRHL – around that kind of stuff. Very basic stuff, but we certainly had access and I know I'd heard a lot about it from training that John had done at the bigger protests in the States. I don't know if it maybe linked with other activism work within Vancouver. I'm not sure.

**GK: So, when you were arrested that time did you go limp?**

DG: Yes.

**GK: Okay, except for the time when you actually put your... [laughter] Okay. Right, because...**

DG: I was limp, but I wanted to be clean.

**GK: No, I mean to actually go limp implies that there's been some sort of training or at least preparatory discussion. That's really important to understand.**

DG: I mean we... probably FAGS, in conjunction with Dykes for Dykedom, would've been... I know I was involved in stuff around an abortion clinic – I think it was the Morgentaler abortion clinic on Fraser Street. And we actually met across the street and formed a circle to protect women going into the abortion clinic from the right wing people who were showing them models of fetuses and stuff like that, right. So, well, some of that was with Dykes for Dykedom, and some of that would've also been through Tom and Richard and Paul – the three of them were really involved, maybe Fred as well. But I was never really involved with going actively to some of the socialist or Trotskyist organizational meetings that they went to probably on a weekly basis. Because with that, there was another group that also did some pro-choice work, for example. And so that might've been the link more so than through AIDS, Dykes for Dykedom stuff.

**GK: For sure.**

DG: It all blends in at some point.

**GK: Yes.**

**AS: Well, it's a lot of the same people doing work in these different areas, but that's an interesting connection – the abortion defense stuff.**

**GK: That's also present within people involved in AIDS ACTION NOW! in Toronto too.**

**AS: And in Halifax. So, you know, it's one of those things that gets kind of forgotten, or people don't think about it. They have this sometimes quality like, "Oh, it was only gay men doing AIDS activism and it was only straight women doing abortion activism," and this is not true at all.**

DG: No, because it seems like there are a few people who are really willing to do that who have a vision that society can change and has to change, and are willing to make that happen on some level.

**AS: Yeah. Did you feel a commitment, as a gay man, to abortion access? Or is it more general like, "This is the world that I want to live in"? Do you know what I mean?**

DG: I mean, as a gay man, I didn't have any need for abortion services but recognized the rights of women to have that service. And I actually did some of that in Winnipeg as well. I did a spray-paint campaign around access to abortion in Winnipeg with another group. That was in the early '80s. Activism is like that.

**GK: Do you have any other memories of what might've been ACT UP stuff that you were involved in during that period of time? ACT UP seems to be around through 1990 into early 1991. And there seems to be some activities that occur prior to ACT UP formally being formed, not just the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation. There's also the PWA Coalition facilitates something at Fantasy Gardens in '89, so there are other things that happen before it too.**

DG: Yeah. No, I don't think I remember anything else.

**GK: Okay, so ACT UP just sort of disappears. Is that your sense of what happens?**

DG: Well, I don't think I have a great sense of what did happen. I knew I withdrew a lot when I started working here. So, I was working full-time and I wanted to develop a career. Who knows what the timeline was with, you know, relationship break-ups and whatever else was happening. It was probably pretty linked now that I think of it I might've been distancing myself from the... at that time, I probably was no longer with Tom, but I would've been with Paul, or then breaking up with Paul and maybe distancing myself a bit from that group. And then at some point Fred dies, or gets sick and dies. So, it's all pretty mixed up in my mind. To me, I kind of remember that I was distancing myself, but not so much that... specifically how those organizations were kind of wrapping up.

**GK: Right.**

DG: And where the *Angles* wrap-up kind of falls in that too, which was timed with the *Xtra! West* forming in Vancouver. And then – because there was you know a commercially published newspaper then at some point – the collective was just running out of steam, or made a conscious decision to wrap-up and not do a collectively produced community newspaper anymore.

**GB: Right. Do you remember a group called Queer Planet that might've been around?**

DG: Oh yes. Well, I remember that Tom Patterson was involved with that. And I probably was too, but specifically what they did... I mean you can see that we had these names for things, but really we were just the same people going to a lot of different meetings and doing things. Queer Planet. Yeah. What did they do?

**GK: I think it was the Vancouver name for Queer Nation.**

DG: Which was a Canadian organization, or American?

**GK: It started in the USA, largely around visibility and anti-violence questions. So, I don't really know what it would've done here. But I think you're right that there was a certain overlap at least between ACT UP group and this Queer Planet group in Vancouver. Queer Planet may have actually lasted longer.**

DG: I mean certainly part of the whole thing, which was gay liberationist kind of work, or activism, was reclaiming names. And that for me goes all the way back to Winnipeg, where – and so I guess this is part of the activism, which I haven't thought of – we started a lesbian and gay film festival in Winnipeg, and that's actually continuing to this day, this film festival. It started with this very small group and just kind of like a social event. And then one evening or something like that, spread out into this big thing. And also we tried to start – and maybe only had one or two events – a gay outdoors group in Winnipeg. And one the things we did was we set the meeting place for

going these outdoor adventures at the nude statue of Louis Riel on the legislative grounds, not because it was a nude statue of a man, although that helped, but because it was the gay cruising grounds. So, that was linking... it was kind of like reclaiming space. And then we had a lot of flak from the members of the guys who were helping on the film festival. They thought that was horrible that we would associate with those gay people who were going cruising at night. And we were educating them around sex positive stuff and, "It's okay," and "Maybe that's because that's the only way that some people can connect." And that was even the start of a gay marriage kind of a discussion, because some of those guys were a committed gay couple.

**GK: You're talking about Chris Vogel?**

DG: No, this is... I forget. I wouldn't remember these guys' names. Actually, one was Barney and one of them had a collection of kitschy plaques in the kitchen. So, it's like, fruit and they were... it's funny, that's the thing I can remember. But we would have a Sunday brunch, potluck brunch, at the different houses and that was the way we organized this film festival. It was like back in those days there was the feminist slogan, which was "every party a meeting and every meeting a party."

**AS: We should bring that slogan back more.**

DG: Well, that's how you do activism. Like, it's just integrated into your life, right.

**GK: Yeah, for sure.**

**AS: Yeah. Sometimes I feel like I have a lot of meetings that aren't parties these days.**  
[laughter]

DG: And that's the other part, yeah. That's why most people drop out.

**GK: So, we're moving more towards the end of the conversation. Anything more that you can remember about AIDS organizing or AIDS activism in Vancouver? I mean I assume that once you got more involved in a full-time job here that became sort of the centre of what was happening for you. Were you still involved in *Angles* until it died?**

DG: Yeah, I don't remember the timing there.

**GK: It was a number of years later.**

DG: Well, I might've dropped out or toned down my connections at some point. I mean I probably was one of the first ones to see the writing on the wall that we're not going to be able to sustain this. And others might've felt more commitment to trying to maintain it longer.

**AS: It sounds like there was kind of a general shift. Maybe partially coming out of the personal, right – personal break-ups and grief about people dying.**

DG: Yeah.

**AS: But also something institutional that, for example, the shift from a community run, collectively produced paper to a commercially run and produced paper – the shift from something like ACT UP to organizations that had government funding.**

DG: Yes, that shift was there.

**AS: That's all happening in the early 1990s here, all at once. When did *Angles* stop publishing? Do you remember?**

DG: I don't remember.

**GK: I think it's like, the mid-1990s, so it's later. *Xtra!* moves in with the intention of destroying *Angles*, it's pretty explicit. Also, with the funding to be able to run a deficit for years, right. So, that actually makes it really difficult for you to survive.**

DG: And I mean I would've thought, "Okay. Well, there are other ways that we can do activism." Although, I guess it did have an impact by not having that, but I mean, yeah. It was those funny debates where people said... you know, we knew that, with *Xtra! West*, they wouldn't have the same editorial content. They wouldn't have the same news content. It would be more of a lifestyle magazine where they would promote "gay is fabulous," which was good for their advertising revenues around bars, etc. They became a bar rag essentially. I mean they were a little bit better than that even to this day. And yeah, I mean the community was changing in a lot of ways and things were becoming institutionalized around AIDS care in support, and eventually around... I mean even when I was doing work with people with disabilities at that time, in their newsletter, *Transitions*, I remember very early on seeing... because there was somebody who wrote in a homophobic letter. So, I wrote a response to that letter saying, "If somebody has a car accident and they're driving, we don't blame them for breaking their own neck, so why do we blame people who have sex and then acquire a virus?" – those kinds of things. And saying that this is a natural disaster and it will go on to become a disability rather than a death sentence. And this has all come to pass. So, it's interesting, you know, to be an early kind of believer that that's how it was going to unfold; seeing that, having that vision at least.

**AS: Yeah, which is probably situated coming out of a disability, right. That actually might have not been a very common understanding in AIDS organizing with people who weren't holding a disability view, which I think is more common now actually, to have a kind of disability orientation.**

DG: Yes. I was there. I saw that whole evolution where people have no clue what AIDS was at the time and, because of homophobia, they were just distancing themselves and saying, "I don't want anything to do with it." Or because we were reaching out into these niche areas of society, like, people with disabilities, you know, who get this little newsletter from the People with Disabilities Coalition, and then all of a sudden in their faces. And we had a valid argument – how were you going to prevent people who are deaf? I mean how are you going to get information of HIV transmission prevention to people who are deaf, who are blind, who have all these different

disabilities? And we didn't yet see the transfusion, which is where it really came, is the people who needed blood transfusions for hemophilia. They're the ones who actually got it, and then I was working with people in that group who then died of AIDS too, right, from that side of things.

**AS: So, just one last thing – I'm thinking about these transitions – it seems like the Social Credit government was quite, we might say, evil. And that there was, even when they brought this quarantine legislation in... so, even when things didn't get won there was a way to be in opposition to that conservative government. What did you see happening? Or do you have any memories about when the NDP came into governmental power? Was there a shift in people's lives, in the queer community? Just if you remember anything about that.**

DG: I think there was a different attitude, but I mean it was changing throughout society as well. You know, we had that thing with Ronald Reagan not using the word "AIDS" in public until more people had died of AIDS than American soldiers had died in the war in Vietnam. That was one of those little facts that we were promoting. So, I mean, yes, I don't know how much of it was that shift. In our small group, we were closer to the NDP. Even though they were revolutionary socialists who didn't ultimately believe in NDP governments, they still supported them as a tactic rather than as a strategy. And yes, but, you know, the Social Credit government was a bit of a buffoon government as well so, we were able to play on that to some extent. And it was kind of a weird coalition between buffoons – for example, Bill Vander Zalm has recently gone on to champion the removal of the HST in BC, where we had to spend millions of dollars to go back to the GST because he got this voter thing going. So, that was the only thing he's done in the last ten or twenty years. It's just kind of a stupid thing, right. That's how they were. And then there was a coalition between those kinds of people who were just put out by the real money people to be their front people and get elected. And the real money people who were just basically the people who, through their links with the Social Credit government, got multi-million dollar contracts for concrete highways and all that kind of stuff. So, to end up going to the NDP, it became a bit of a more focus on social issues and more care and understanding of those social issues. So, that was good. I mean, you know, it's hard to say the stuff that we did locally – even ACT UP or whatever or even just safe sex education – how do you segregate that from what's happening nationally or internationally? Because we were already getting so integrated, particularly with American media that a lot of people were getting their information through that – Rock Hudson and, you know, and that. It's a funny thing how the AIDS epidemic actually helped with the gay liberation struggle because it just brought it right to the forefront. There was something concrete to fight against, fight about, and it did really raise people's awareness. And particularly because it was linked to sexuality. So, it brought sexuality right up as a topic of conversation and understanding. People had to face what it meant.

**AS: Yes. What people are doing, and how they're doing it and what they want.**

DG: Yes. It built the community quite a bit and now we're seeing less of an organized community, but more rights everywhere.

**GK: So, we're moving towards the end. One of the things we're trying to do in the project is not just to talk to people who are still around, but also to try to build into it some**

**remembering of the people who have passed, who were activists during this period of time. Are there any people in particular? You would have known Fred; obviously, you knew Tom. Is there anything you wanted to say about them? So, if there's anything you want to say about those people or other people you would have known during that period of time who had AIDS and passed away, or were AIDS activists.**

DG: I was sort of recalling the name of the guy who I said was one of the heads of the PWA. I think his name was Alex Kuchinsky or something like that. Yeah. And he was a very gentle guy, but I don't remember him very much. I didn't work with him that closely. Tom Patterson. So, I met Tom Patterson when I was kind of coming out and he was my first long term relationship. He was my second boyfriend and I moved in with him in this coop house. And so I learned so many things from him and there's tons of stories around that. And then moving here, and then all this activism and all the stories around that, and the Dykes for Dykedom and those houses in East Van, which I called the one that we were in the Home for Wayward Lesbians. It ended up being... because it was and I and then a bunch of women, and then Tom and I broke up and he moved out. I forget how that all unfolded, but it ended up... eventually I had to leave because I was with these people who were totally dysfunctional. I mean I was worried that my stereo was going to get sold for someone to buy Percocet because people were just... it was just a crazy situation. I told lots of stories about that.

So, Tom and I broke up. When I was with Tom I realized that I had seen him when he was probably in junior high school. I was in Fort Gary, south of Winnipeg, and he was north of Winnipeg at Selkirk, but I remember seeing him and his twin brother at this science fair that all the school kids of the same age would've gone to. And so that's totally funny that I had that memory. So, he was a kind of force of nature in terms of making this difference, but the thing is, looking back now we know, at least I know, that Tom was bipolar. So, when I first lived with him, he would start a semester of university and by midterms he would spend a week in bed reading vampire novels and blow off his courses, so that was the depressive phase. There was the manic phase and the depressive phase. So, the manic phase was always about all this political activity and meeting tons of people and having tons of energy, and living in this co-op house with what, six or eight other people; so, he was surrounded by people and lots of things going on. So, he was a force of nature, but we didn't have that understanding where we could have helped him more and he ended up... you know, when we were together he was still HIV negative, and then after he became positive. And this is after doing years and years of this AIDS activism. So, it was the depression that allowed him to do risky behaviour that allowed him to catch the virus. It was kind of a combination of whether that was actually what killed him or something else. Because he wasn't at the level AIDS-infection that he should have died the way that he died – kind of a sudden ending up in the hospital and dying a couple of days later. So, that was sad, and that this activism was linked with this disease and dysfunction. But yeah, he was a lot of fun and we did a lot of fun things together.

**AS: And it is one of those things where... one of those patterns of activism or rhythms of activist life really lend themselves in certain ways to kind of real highs and then crashing lows.**

DG: Actually, you know, at the same time, I had kind of a social anxiety that was allowing us to have this relationship. You know, kind of just enabling each other or whatever it was. And we actually broke up when he went off to Paris or somewhere in France to do like, four months – maybe four weeks – of Trotskyist school. And I couldn't imagine being alone. Well, I was kind of hinting with him before he left, but then that was a really messy breakup. When he got back I was still living in the Home for Wayward Lesbians, but he stayed there that night and I went to Paul's place because now I was hooking up with Paul. So, it was messy.

**AS: Very messy, yeah.** [laughter]

DG: And Fred Gilbertson was amazing. I mean I remember meeting him at *Angles* and he was very open about his story. So, he called himself I think Pedant Number Two, and there was this other guy – something Jacobs, can't remember – he was Pedant Number One, this friend of his. And so he was very knowledgeable and he knew a lot of stuff but he was too knowledgeable for his own good. He was working for Canada Post, which I think was part of the turn to industry. He would've been involved in a Trotskyist organization where they told their members to get jobs in unionized industry. But at some point he embezzled a whole bunch of money – like, \$40,000 or \$60,000– and he ran away to San Francisco and he spent it all on the bath house or something like that.

**AS: That's kind of wonderful.** [laughter]

DG: Yeah. But then he went to prison... came back and went to prison, probably a couple of years. He was well respected in prison because of his knowledge. Like, he was a smart guy. And so he was telling us about the prison experience. So, I was meeting somebody for the first time, from my sheltered, middle-class, white Winnipeg suburban background, and meeting these people, fascinating people, and all these different stories. So, Fred was... oh boy, I don't know. He was... yeah, he was just kind of a character that way, because he had all this rich history of going back and forth and doing different things. And he actually grew up in Salmon Arm, B.C., and he told us that, you know, the only way he could have sex with men is by hitchhiking. So, he was hitchhiking every weekend to Banff and Vancouver. Can you imagine hitchhiking on the highway and then hoping to randomly meet a gay person? Like, that's... or, you know, a person who was open to having sex with another man? So, that's bizarre. But that's what we had to do back then. And the sad thing about Fred was he, at some point... he was always really heavy. He was very overweight and always struggling with it, and we did a lot of fat liberation stuff. You know, for example, he would kind of... I might characterize it as pouting. I guess he was trying to educate us. He actually once came over to my place and asked me if I would have sex with him for political reasons. And he talked about how on his birthday, and I think other days too, he would hire a hustler. Yeah, he would mostly have sex with hustlers at some point when he was really fat, but on his birthday he would get the hustler to force feed him chocolate cake. [laughter] So, you could see he was quite a character. But eventually he got this job working for the law firm – the gay law firm – Smith and Hughes. And kind of stabilized his life a bit that way. Then he started losing weight and we were really happy for him because he was losing weight, but little did he know this is because of the virus. And the virus infection probably goes all the way back to the bath house days in San Francisco.

It's the magic of history I guess, when you're looking at this activism work and how it's all really similar to the personal stories are kind of in there too, and all related to this change that was going on. Quite a radical change where, you know, people just a few years ahead of me, older than me, in the suburb where I grew up probably would've gone on to keep their homosexual desires secret. Maybe they would go into the priesthood, maybe they would be married, all that kind of stuff. And then there was this kind of change. I always talk about how I was born in '58, so the Summer of Love 1969, I was eleven years old, very impressionable, and this whole birth control debate was going on and sexual liberation, women's liberation, all that stuff was going on. We were really affected by that. So, you can see how that kind of builds into that big change in society. It all goes back to those huge patterns that go back there. Yeah. So, those were the main people I knew really well who were the activists I think who died of HIV.

**AS: And did Fred die here?**

DG: Fred died here, yeah. Saint Paul's Hospital.

**GK: And Tom was in Toronto.**

DG: Tom in Toronto quite a few years later.

**AS: One thing I haven't heard very much about is care-teams and people being... like, when Fred was dying, would you have...?**

DG: I wasn't, because I think I had been...

**AS: ...stepping back more.**

DG: Stepping back, but also not dealing with death very well. But Richard Banner's partner, Bruce Horn, they're still together, Bruce was the primary caregiver of Fred. And I think that was through AIDS Vancouver or something, where they actually had some organization that was helping organize those teams.

**GK: Yeah, I think AIDS Vancouver did that.**

**AS: Okay.**

**GK: So, we're at the final questions. One, is there anything that has come up as we've been talking that's come into your head, that you haven't had an opportunity to talk about? This is your opportunity.**

DG: Yeah. I think I've done that as I went along.

**GK: And then the last question we ask everyone, and I think you've already given us some hints throughout the interview, is just other people you think we should talk to. We already said some of the people who we're talking to.**

DG: Yeah, and I think you've covered the ones that I would know.

**GK: But no one else pops into your head.**

DG: No. I can't think of anybody else.

**GK: Okay. You've been really helpful. So, thank you very much.**

**AS: Thank you very much.**

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]