

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

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<b>Interviewee:</b>	Paul Craik
<b>Interviewers:</b>	Alexis Shotwell & Gary Kinsman
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Persons present: Paul Craik – PC  
Alexis Shotwell – AS  
Gary Kinsman – GK

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

**AS: We're talking to Paul Craik on October 30, 2014 in Vancouver.**

**GK: Paul, how we're usually starting these interviews is by asking when people first heard about AIDS and what they heard. Do you have any memories of that?**

PC: Yeah. I first started coming out in 1982. Let's see, I was 19 years old and I met a gay man by the name of Bob Summerbell, and he was the first person I had sex with and he was active in Gays and Lesbians of UBC. I met him actually through the Young New Democrats, and anyhow, we went to his place... we dated a few times and he told me that a whole bunch of stuff about what it was like to be gay and he said there was also a gay cancer that had been in the news in Los Angeles. Some guys had come down with gay cancer. And later that year he also got me involved, or introduced me to other people in the gay community in Kamloops, which was where I was living at the time with my parents. I had met people from the Thompson Area Gay Group, which was the gay group in the area. And so I met people, and got a subscription to *The Body Politic*. My first issue was the November issue of *The Body Politic*, and it was "The Case Against Panic" and it talked about AIDS. That was when I first heard it basically – around that time I heard the terms "AIDS." I'd also heard the term "GRID- Gay-Related Immune Deficiency," which was another term that was used, but that was earlier. The term was AIDS. The article said one of the reasons why there was so much paranoia and fear amongst the gay community was that it was basically rooted in internalized homophobia; that we believed that our sexuality was still bad at some level and this allowed AIDS stigma to be perpetuated. So, that's when I first heard about AIDS.

**AS: It's also right as you were coming out. So, really those things come together – that your first lover is also the one who says there's this cancer.**

PC: Yeah. And I was involved... like, I was starting to become more lefty, involved in things in Kamloops at that time. I dated another boyfriend who ended up I think being one of the people involved in Gay and Lesbian Educators in BC. I can give you his name if you want; it's Steve LeBel. Although Gay and Lesbian Educators wasn't formed at that time, he was very progressive and left wing, and that's where I learned a lot of politics and awareness from as well, about my sexuality as well. Bob and Steve were role models for being openly Gay. So, that was a good influence on me. I also was getting involved a little bit with the Caribou College Students Society, when I was going to college there. So, I was interested in more leftist politics. And then when I moved to Vancouver in February 1984, I started getting involved. I got involved with an anti-nuclear group called the Trident Action Group. They had a branch in Vancouver, an affinity group here. And although they were planning civil disobedience action, I never did civil disobedience action with them, but that

was one of their sort of long-term goals. They wanted to build a campaign and build support against the Nanoose weapons testing base in Nanoose Bay on Vancouver Island. That was one of their foci. So, I had been involved with going to End the Arms Race's marches against the arms race. So, I had a lot of those sort of leftist kind of progressive influences when I came here. I had heard about AIDS Vancouver and I went to one of their safe sex workshops. I thought it was around 1985, but I think it might've been 1986. I looked on the website and I think they said 1986. So, they had been doing safe sex education stuff. That was broadly what they did. I can't really shed a whole lot of light on the founding of the Persons With AIDS Coalition. It's now called Positive Living Society of BC. When it was formed it was called the Persons With AIDS Coalition, and their basic mandate or goal was the self-empowerment of people with AIDS through collective support and collective action. I had met John Kozachenko by that time, and was aware of some his left politics. And he's given me a lot of buttons and cards and all kinds of stuff over the years.

**AS: Can I ask about the safer sex workshop, if you can remember. I know it's like, 1985 or '86. Do you remember if the tone of it was more how to prevent transmission, or if the tone of it was more – "Here's how people who know that they're positive, or don't know that they're positive, can have good sex together." Do you remember the way that the AIDS Vancouver was telling...?**

PC: I remember that it was how to prevent. It was "Use condoms, reduce the risk of transmission." Yeah. I think. I don't remember if it was from that workshop or from where, but I remember from reading, having had a subscription to *The Body Politic*. I also had started volunteering with *Angles*, this gay and lesbian newspaper in Vancouver, and just reading stuff like that. Even if you thought you were HIV negative or weren't infected, you didn't know if you actually were. So, you could be because there was a delay in the time of when you got infected to the time when you would show symptoms. So, you could be infecting people unknowingly. So, it was best for you to always use condoms with your partners. And the same for your partner, even if he didn't know that he was HIV positive. It was important that he use condoms because he could unwittingly pass on the virus to you. So, that was sort of the big thing that I remember about that time period, and that sort of thing has always influenced me about my thinking about HIV. It wasn't necessarily that you knew your status, or knew the other person's status. The thing was practice safer sex; reduce your risk of transmission, of giving or receiving.

**AS: Yeah. I mean I ask that partly because in that issue of *The Body Politic* you were mentioning one of the things it said was it's not that people need to stop having sex or that gay sex is bad; it's that we need to be having particular kinds of sex, where we can still really enjoy each other and not necessarily transmit this. Right? I know that was kind of a live conversation in Toronto, so it's interesting that the line wasn't – "Don't have any penetrative sex," or "Don't have sex."**

PC: Yeah. It was actually... I remember the workshop and one of the leaders was a woman. I think she demonstrated how to put the condom on using a dildo. Like, she was very bold. So, I think there was some sex positivity there, and the gay men clapped. Like, that was great. And I think that it was really important, especially in those early days because there was so much negativity and so much fear going on at that time within, and without, the community.

**GK: So, you move from Kamloops to Vancouver. You're involved with the Trident...**

PC: Action Group.

**GK: And you're also starting to volunteer with *Angles* as well?**

PC: Yeah. I got involved with *Angles* a little bit later, about 1987 I think – '86-'87. I was doing other stuff too. I got some leaflets once and leafleted outside the liquor store on Bute Street encouraging people to boycott South African ports, wine and sherry in support of the anti-apartheid boycott of South Africa at that time. I went to all kinds of different leftist demonstrations. When I got involved with *Angles*, I also started meeting different people and I met Fred Gilbertson, I met Torvald – he went by the name of Tom Patterson at that time – and Dan Guinan, and Richard Banner. So, there were all these leftist people that I was making more contact with. And I remember seeing Tom Patterson and he had these round glasses, round-framed glasses, and they had red rims. I just thought... I was tempted to say to him, "You look like Leon Trotsky." [laughter] Because, I think, Fred Gilbertson had already told me that he was Trotskyist. And so I thought, "Oh, this guy." And so that was sort of my first thought that came to my mind when I met Tom or Torvald. Anyhow, one of the things that happened was, by 1987 there's a lot more activity happening. By that time there was a split within the leadership of AIDS Vancouver led by Kevin Brown and he wanted to have people who actually were infected with the virus, who were living with AIDS, to actually have their own organization where they could deal with supporting themselves and empowering themselves, because that wasn't part of the mandate of AIDS Vancouver, which more was general education of the gay community, and of the general population as a whole. But Alan Herbert can tell you more about that.

**GK: But just from your memories of that, can you tell us anything more about what the PWA [People with HIV/AIDS] Coalition was and what it did?**

**AS: And actually, even before that, not very many people have told us very much about Kevin Brown and so if you have anything to share about him, what he was like or what his story was, that would be really wonderful.**

PC: Yeah. I could. I could actually talk about the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation. I could go into detail on that. Yeah, I didn't really know Kevin Brown. I didn't know very many other people that were in BC PWA at the founding time, at the time it was founded. Now, I ended up being roommates with someone who was one of the co-founders. His membership number was in the single digits. So, he was one of the original founders, along with John Kozachenko. His name was Benoit Lantier, but he moved to Montreal years later and passed away in about 1992. But I was going back to my activism around 1987, I got involved with Torvald and Richard Banner and Dan Guinan, and Fred Gilbertson, and I think there's a guy by the name of Kevin Robb. And I think there were other people later on who joined the group called the Front for Active Gay Socialism [FAGS].

**GK: So, Kevin Robb was involved in that group?**

PC: I think that was his name, yes. He was a guy who lived in my apartment building actually, just across the hall.

**GK: There was a Kevin Robb involved in ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power].**

PC: Yeah, that would've been him. So, we started meeting you know just in our apartments, whatever, and we dealt with things like, how do we get the Gay Games Organizing Committee for Celebration '90 to respect the anti-apartheid boycott? You know, saying, "No, you cannot have South African athletes participate. We have to maintain the boycott in solidarity with the black people of South Africa." And let's see, we also did things like we brought in a speaker by the name Simon Nkoli who was – that was a couple of years later who was an anti-apartheid activist – gay anti-apartheid activist from South Africa, and he did a speaking tour. And we sponsored his speaking tour in Vancouver. I was not able to attend that because I was working, but I did some phoning around to help arrange things and help with that. What else did we do? We did a lot of stuff. We went to things like the International Women's Day march and had a banner saying, "Fags for Feminism." And we supported the pro-choice movement, and some of us got involved with that. I remember Torvald leading a chant. I remember there was a protest against the censorship of books being seized by Little Sisters and Little Sisters had a demonstration... It was in downtown Vancouver and at the end of the rally someone started shouting, "Gay Rights Now! Gay Rights Now!" and the whole group just started chanting with him, "Gay Rights Now!" I thought, "Wow! Someone is actually saying that." I was like, "Holy shit. This is incredible!" I think that was around 1986. Well, it turned out that was Torvald that started that. The thing with Torvald was that he was always one to call for a demonstration or, you know, he always wanted to do a demonstration or a rally, or some kind of action because he said that gives people the chance to feel their collective strength in resistance to oppression and in the fight for liberation. So, I think that was very core to who he was.

Anyhow, I was getting involved with these groups, and in 1987 we were hearing a lot more stuff... for instance, there was talk of quarantine. It was a ballot initiative... I think it was in San Francisco in 1986. I think it was somewhere around that time, to have people with AIDS quarantined and it was sponsored by the Lyndon LaRouche people who were a bunch of neo-nazis. And they still linger around apparently, and I always bring that up whenever I see them. I keep a long memory of that. Let's see, there was the provincial government under Bill Vander Zalm, the Social Credit government. They were consistently hostile to gay rights. They consistently refused to deal with the AIDS crisis. One of the cabinet ministers would say, "What we said in the army was if you shot yourself, it was a self-inflicted wound" and that's what their attitude was with AIDS. And then there was talk of quarantining, I think Bill Vander Zalm himself actually came out in favour of quarantining. And they brought in a law, and we discussed this in the Front for Active Gay Socialism in one of our meetings, it was the Health Statutes Amendment Act – Bill 34. And basically what it did was it dusted off provisions for quarantining people with any kind of infectious, communicable disease. But there were already provisions in the law for that. They didn't really need to bring that up legally, because that was already in place. So, the real reason I think they brought that up was as a propaganda ploy to stir up homophobia and get support from their social conservative base. But I also think that there was a real danger of quarantine, because I think there was enough homophobia. Gay bashings were on the rise. We were beginning to see as

the decade wore on bomb threats and bombings of Little Sisters bookstore several times, bomb threats. I remember walking down the street one time and Numbers was emptying out because there had been a bomb threat.

**AK: Numbers is one of the gay clubs?**

PC: A gay club on Davie Street, yeah. They're actually still around. We were starting to feel really besieged. We really perceived ourselves as being really besieged at this time. So, at one point, the Front for Active Gay Socialism had been doing some connecting with some other leftist groups, and there's a group called "Dykes for Dykedom," which were anti-capitalist dykes in the community. And we had done things like gone to a demonstration against Doug Collins – against homophobia, and racism and sexism. He's a right wing – one of those shock jock type of columnists with the *North Shore News* -- and we demonstrated outside. And we never called for censorship. We just said, you know, "Sexism is unacceptable". "Dykes out against racism," and stuff like that. And so we worked with them – and with other women such as, Bet Cecill from the Vancouver Lesbian Connection. We called for a public forum on the quarantine law and it was well attended. A lot of people in the broader community were very alarmed by this quarantine law that was proposed and people were very receptive to doing something about this. Richard Banner said, "We ought to just occupy an office and let them know we're angry." You know, do something like that. So, what we did was we contacted all these people. After that forum, we got a contact list of as many people as we could and we said, "We want to build on this momentum." We had more meetings and formed the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation, CRHL. At that time, I think there was still a lot of division within the community – the queer community – about how do we deal with AIDS? How do we deal with quarantine? I wasn't in favour of the name Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation because it sort of implied some sort of legislation would be acceptable. For many of us in FAGS and other leftists, we wanted the legislation withdrawn. You know, there's no point in it. The whole purpose of this had to be challenged, because it is to stir up homophobia. That's the whole point of this legislation. You can't legislate AIDS away. You know, you can't make the legislation more "responsible." So, when you say "Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation," the name sort of implies that if you just changed the legislation, the wording of it somehow, that would make it okay. And promoting homophobia and scapegoating persons with AIDS was the whole point of bringing in the legislation.

**AS: Not okay.**

PC: Yeah. That was the whole point, and so it had to be challenged. It had to be opposed. But I guess enough people... someone said they wanted to be *for* something as opposed to against the quarantine laws. So, enough people voted for that. So, okay, we've got that name. [laughter] That's democracy. That's how it works. You know. Anyhow, we, the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation, did a whole bunch of different things. We held a number of demonstrations. I remember Karen Tulchinsky was there and she was one of the speakers and she talked about how this set off alarm bells for her because – being Jewish – she knows the history of the holocaust and how scapegoating can really snowball and can end in disaster. So, that really resonated with me. And we had another march. I remember we marched down Davie Street. And I remember Kevin Brown saw us marching in protest against the quarantine law. And that was also around the time

when he had actually gone to the provincial government office – Office of the Premier, I think it was or the Health Minister, I don't know which one it was – because he wanted to talk to them about the issues of Persons With AIDS. They just booted him out of the office unceremoniously.

**GK: Were other people from the PWA Society involved in CRHL?**

PC: Yeah, it was some people from PWA that did that. What else did we do? There's a whole list of stuff that I'm trying to remember. We did like, a bar blitz where we had leaflets telling people about the quarantine laws, and we had an audiotaped message about the quarantine law, and they played it at the Castle Pub, if I remember. And we went to some other bars as well and handed it out.

**AS: Such a good idea.**

PC: Yeah. I think it was good that we did the actual going to where the gay community was and leafleting and organizing. I think that organization is incredibly crucial for winning change. And let's see, we also made up placards. I remember we cut out stencils and we made signs saying "Stop the Quarantine Law" and we marched in the Gay Pride Parade. And we just carried our placards in the Gay Pride Parade and that was in 1987. Yeah. We also got involved with groups like... we invited groups like POWER, which was Prostitutes and Other Women for Equal Rights, because we knew that we needed to do alliance-building with sex-trade workers. There were debates in the community around things like, we need to do education – safe sex education – around IV drug use. Like, clean needles and stuff like that, washing them in bleach to prevent the spread of HIV. I remember this one gay man there who said, "Well, you know, IV drug use is illegal. So, they shouldn't be doing it anyhow. It's illegal, and just the fact that it's illegal should handle it." I guess he figured that we were somehow giving it legitimacy that it didn't deserve. And so there were divisions within the community, within the coalition – the CRHL – itself around stuff like that.

**AS: Do you remember how those kinds of divisions got worked out? Like, in meetings was there a consensus process? Did things get voted on?**

PC: That's a good question. I think we voted on stuff. I'm not really sure. We might have done some consensus stuff as well. I think there was some debate about whether to use consensus or voting. I honestly don't remember. I wish I could remember precisely.

**AS: Well, you didn't consent to the name.**

PC: No.

**AS: So, there must've been some voting on that.**

PC: There must've been. I think it was voting. I think it was we voted on that. We also did some solidarity work with sex workers. Like, there was one prostitute who was fired. She was also a stripper and she spoke up publicly about I guess the violence against sex trade workers on the

street and her boss fired her. She was a stripper at a club on Granville Street and her boss fired her without pay, without back pay. So, we all had a demonstration and I remember us outside the bar shouting the owner's last name. And so we were all yelling "Pelleck pay up! Pelleck Pay up!" [laughter]

**GK: Just around sex workers though, you mentioned POWER. Is that the group that Marie Arrington was involved in?**

PC: Yes. Marie Arrington was involved in that as well. So was Flo, who also now goes by the name of Jamie Lee Hamilton.

**GK: Okay, so that was the sex worker advocacy group.**

PC: Yeah. And there was also another woman involved in that by the name of Karen Mlednevic, and I don't know what happened to her. She just sort of disappeared, and I don't know what the story was.

**GK: I wanted to ask a question, just to go back a little bit to the divisions in the community.**

PC: Yeah.

**GK: My understanding, and this is partly because George Smith wrote a column in *Rites* magazine criticizing Stan Persky. It was critical of Persky who was on the board of the BC Civil Liberties Association at the time, and Persky argued quite strongly against CRHL and that you should simply try to reform Bill 34. It is actually quite an interesting column. But my understanding was that Bob Tivey, who had been the executive director of AIDS Vancouver, had to actually leave it because AIDS Vancouver also adopted a position that they wanted to just modify Bill C34. I just wanted to know if you had any recollections of that.**

PC: You know, it's funny. I remember stuff about Stan Persky opposing CRHL but I didn't remember that from *Rites* magazine. Although, I had a subscription to *Rites* magazine; I had a couple of copies of it. *Angles* published a debate about the quarantine law between Stan Persky and Bet Cecill of the Vancouver Lesbian Connection. But I remember, I used to subscribe to a publication called *This Magazine* and Stan Persky had an article – a cover article – it was "AIDS and the State." And he said that, first of all, the quarantine law was never going to be used. And it never was used. Well sure, he was right. It was never used. But it wasn't because it was never going to be used. It was because people actually organized and fought against it. Not just here, but throughout the US and other places – including in San Francisco, I think there was a real danger of this happening.

**GK: Yeah.**

PC: Yeah. If I recall, they actually had quarantined people in Cuba.

**GK: They did.**

PC: That was Stan Persky's position and I remember I thought we were being betrayed by the people that thought that the law should be reformed; it should be okayed. It was missing the whole point of why this law was brought in and dusted off, you know, it was to stir up the homophobia. That was the whole point. The very fact that they did it means that they already had won on that, so our point was that we had to actually say, "No, we're not just going to take this lying down. We're actually going to stand up and fight back." And that was critically important for the queer community at that time to do that, because if we didn't we would've been crushed. And I honestly believe that to this day. So, yeah, I've seen Stan Persky's politics on a number of other issues over the years and I don't agree with his politics.

**GK: And you're aware of who Stan Persky is, eh?**

AS: No.

**GK: So, Stan Persky was actually an activist in the Gay Liberation Front. Anyway, part of the thing between George Smith and Stan Persky was George was also involved in the Gay Liberation Front here, along with lots of other people.**

AS: Here? George was in Vancouver?

GK: Yes.

AS: Oh, I didn't know that.

**GK: He moved with the Dorothy Smith crowd to Toronto, but what was I saying?**

AS: Persky's politics.

**GK: So, Persky started New Star Books. He was also really involved in Operation Solidarity. He was actually a pretty well known activist and writer.**

PC: Yes, he was.

**GK: A left publisher, journalist, and intellectual. But he was also involved in the board of the BC Civil Liberties Association, which had exactly the same position. So, there seemed to be a linkage between the majority of the board of AIDS Vancouver, the BC Civil Liberties Association, and Stan Persky around this question. He was a very significant person.**

PC: He was, yeah.

**GK: So, we're still talking about CRHL.**

PC: Okay. Yeah, those were some of the big things. The other thing we did was, I remember, CBC had a forum – a public like, town hall meeting called, “Is gay okay?” And I thought, “What kind of a loaded question is *that*?” I mean gay is fucking fabulous, but I thought, “Okay, alright.” So, we went in there and we spoke up. I remember Bet Cecill getting up and speaking. I think it might have been Peggy Stacy. I think it was a person from REAL Women – Realistic, Equal, Active for Life – which was a right wing anti-choice, anti-feminist organization and so I remember Bet Cecill got up and spoke against her position on that. She condemned... And there was a lawyer, whose name I forget, but he’s a prominent lawyer in the gay community, a gay rights lawyer in Vancouver, and he spoke on the panel as well. And so there was a lot of tension in the room because they had a lot of anti-gay people there, a lot of gays there, and there was a lot of arguing after the forum was over, but we were there.

And there was also a demonstration. I know the Social Credit government was doing a fundraiser at – I think it might’ve been the... I don’t know if it was the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, or it might have been the Orpheum. It may have been the Orpheum. But they brought in Dionne Warwick, and she was unaware of the politics of what was going on. She was I guess, apparently the star performer of the fundraiser for the Social Credit government and – she was known to be pro-gay – I was not at this demonstration, I had to work – but people were chanting, “If Dionne only knew, she would never sing for you.” The anger against the Socreds was really starting to build as their attacks kept mounting. I remember the BC PWA Coalition at some point had a demonstration outside of Fantasy Gardens, which was a business that the Premier, Bill Vander Zalm, owned in Richmond. And it was basically an amusement park, and so they had a big demonstration outside of his amusement park, because of these constant attacks, and lack of attention to gay rights, and to dealing with the AIDS crisis. I remember one of the things that the Socreds did was that they absolutely refused to allow safe sex education in the schools. That was one of the big things that people were really pissed off with.

**AS: So, when people would try to bring in safe sex education and the government would get involved?**

PC: I’m not sure exactly what the story was. I remember there was some kind of... I don’t remember the details, but I remember there was some... I don’t know which organization was doing it, but it may have been... What was the group? The pro-choice group at the time? Planned Parenthood. They wanted to update sex education. I think it was just basically sex education. And the Social Credit Government didn’t want to do that. And of course one of the things about sex education is preventing STDs and AIDS, and using condoms. Well, the Socreds didn’t want any kind of thing to talk about contraception or anything, because Premier Bill Vander Zalm was a fundamentalist Catholic.

**AS: So, were these things like the... Fantasy Garden?**

PC: Fantasy Gardens.

**AS: Fantasy Gardens – really weird that the Premier had an amusement park. So, did these things...?**

**GK: He had it before the campaign.**

PC: He had it before. Yeah. He also owned “Art Knapp Garden” stores. That used to be Vander Zalm. I don’t know if it still is.

**AS: Okay. So, were these protests happening alongside the organizing against Bill 34, or had Bill 34 already been passed or reaffirmed?**

PC: You know, I don’t remember the exact chronology of events. I think it was actually after that. I think it was actually after the CRHL and before ACT UP.

**AS: Okay, got it.**

PC: I’m not sure about that. I mean there will be archivists who might have a better...

**AS: That’ll be fine. I guess what I wanted to ask though is how... because the Bill was passed, that must have felt like a failure, or it must’ve been hard. I was just wondering if you could say anything about... do you remember what it felt like, or how that affected the organizing in town?**

PC: Well, I think we had one last demonstration against it even though it passed. And of course it was a smaller turnout, but we did have a demonstration opposing it. And I was feeling a little I guess dispirited a bit, you know, and frustrated and angry, and really concerned. I was involved with Operation Solidarity. I was also involved doing support picketing during Operation Solidarity, the Solidarity Coalition back when I was in Kamloops.

**GK: Maybe we should just... just tell us a little bit about what that was.**

PC: Well, back in 1983, the Social Credit government, I think in 1982, had just got re-elected and they got a majority government. And of course they went “Oh goody.” This was the era of Reaganism and Thatcherism and neoliberalism was just in its early years. And they went “Okay, we’re going to bring in cuts across the board” – all kinds of tax cuts and elimination of the BC Human Rights Commission. And they even changed I think, the Human Rights Act because there had been a provision in that for any other groups not specifically listed to be covered under the act. And so therefore there was, theoretically, possible coverage for us on the basis of sexual orientation, but that was eliminated. And so it wasn’t just fiscal cuts, although there were a lot of fiscal cuts. There were attacks on unions; there were all sorts of wage cuts and wage freezes. I remember just a lot of these things happening and we’ve seen this again and again since then, but I think Operation Solidarity was sort of the first time that this happened in Canada to my awareness. And what happened was I remember the protests happening and we were picketing outside the BC Courthouse on Columbia Street in Kamloops. Some construction workers were crossing the picket line and we were yelling at them. I think we got a little out of hand and began calling them scabs and thumping on their car, but they went through. They crossed the picket line. And I remember the Supreme Court of BC, I guess, ruled that pickets were not allowed to picket outside the Court because it denied people access to justice. I think that was a result of that

particular event. I'm not absolutely certain about that, but I believe that's how that originated. Anyhow, there were protests province-wide -- all over, demonstrations. And people were calling for a General Strike and they were just on the verge of a General Strike. I think that the attack was against the BCGEU, the BC Government Employees Union. And I remember Jack Munro flew off to Kelowna to the home of the Premier at the eleventh hour before the General Strike was supposed to be called to see if he could come up with a last minute deal to prevent it. And so he went there, and then he came back and said, "Okay. I've reached a deal with the Premier, so the union leadership called off the pending General Strike." So, everyone demobilized and then they released the information about what the deal, which was the government didn't back down on anything.

**AS: Oh, wow.**

**GK: Jack Munro was the President of the BC Federation of Labour.**

PC: Yeah, and I think Art Kube was the Vice-President, or he was the head of the IWA? I'm not sure which union he was involved with, Art Kube.

**AS: That's awful.**

**GK: Many people refer to Operation Solidarity as the largest mobilization or protest movement outside Quebec since like, the 70s in terms of the...**

PC: ...numbers. Yeah, that would be my guess.

**GK: I think it was more significant than the Days of Resistance against the Harris government in Ontario.**

PC: Yeah. That was a real influence on me, I think. I also had come from a family that had experience with union militancy. My dad was never particularly leftist or anything. He voted Liberal for years until Trudeau brought in Wage and Price Controls after campaigning against it. Then he voted NDP after that. That was because of his experience also in the union. He was in the Telecommunications Workers Union and they had a couple of strikes. One of which where the workers went in and they locked out the bosses and they ran the phone company and didn't charge the customers, if I recall correctly.

**AS: Wow.**

PC: Yeah. And I remember reading a book by Johanna Den Hertog. She ran for the NDP here in this riding in Vancouver Centre years ago in the '80s, and she wrote a book called *The Long Distance Feeling*, which talks about the history of the Telecommunications Workers Union. And that was one of the events that she talked about in that book. But I don't unfortunately have the book anymore and I don't remember the exact details. You'll have to ask my dad. He'd remember these great stories.

**AS: So, all of that had oriented you toward a kind of collective resistance to the Socreds when it manifested again here in the later '80s.**

PC: Yes. And to this day I still hold those values.

**GK: So, coming back to the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation.**

PC: Yeah.

**GK: Is there anything more that you wanted to say about that?**

**AS: So, you were saying it was kind of dispiriting coming to the end of that organizing.**

PC: I thought, this health crisis is going on and in New York – at the same time the quarantine law was being brought in here – they were forming the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power. I think if I recall correctly one of us actually suggested that as the name for this organization, and people said – I think it was actually Torvald said – he didn't want to copy the name of other organizations. We wanted to come up with something of our own, but unfortunately it ended up being CRHL. And so there you go. [laughter] I'm trying to remember if there was anything else; I think that's most of what I've written down. So, after that it just seemed like for about a year, it felt like forever... I think it was just about a year before there was another upsurge in AIDS activism, and there was a meeting to form ACT UP. It was in somebody's backyard in East Vancouver.

**GK: People seem to suggest it was in Kitsilano and David Lewis was the name of the person – not the David Lewis who was head of the NDP. Another David Lewis.**

PC: Okay. You know, that's probably what it was. I remember it being in a backyard. I remember it being sunny. So, it probably was Kitsilano. Maybe it wasn't East Vancouver.

**AS: How big was the backyard? Do you remember anything about it? Just people keep saying the backyard, but I can't picture it.**

PC: Well, people had lawn chairs and a picnic table. And I think they had a kitchen dining table with chairs out there, and just people sitting... you know, people probably sitting on the grass. I don't remember the whole thing. I don't remember who called the meeting, and I don't even remember how I heard about it. Being involved in leftist stuff, I got it on the grapevine somehow and I thought, "Yes! About time!" Because we were seeing things like in Washington, DC they had marched for lesbian and gay rights in 1987, stuff like that. And I think, "Nothing's like that's happening here." Even though things were happening here. Of course, you know, it's the grass is always greener on the other side. Anyhow, I was so excited when this happened. I remember people who were involved with FAGS were involved – so Torvald and Fred Gilbertson – and there were the Dykes for Dykedom, I think some of the people were there. There was Janis Kaleta who was involved... I think she was involved with stuff with CRHL and ACT UP. She was also involved with the International Socialists, so she was a Marxist as well. So, it was all these different groups of people and leftists, people from the PWA Coalition, all came together to hold the meeting. And I

remember Janis saying that we don't need to have a necessary blueprint of how the organization is going to be. I think the intention was to have the organization, ACT UP, and then you have little affinity groups within it, which would organize their own little actions. I think that was generally how it functioned, or at least that was the intention.

And ACT UP at this time was a lot more militant than the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation. I remember when we had the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation, when we first called for a demonstration and people were saying, "We can't walk on the roadway because that's illegal. We should walk on the sidewalk." And I said, "No! We take the street! That's the whole point is to be disruptive." And then they said, "Well, we could get arrested." And I said, "We're not going to get arrested if we have enough numbers." So, there was more militancy and more boldness on the part of people in the queer community around ACT UP. And I think that a lot of that had to do with the fact that there had been that history already of just a couple of years before of the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation. Segments of the community started to rise up and say, "No. Fuck you. We're not going to take this sitting down. We're going to fight back." And that's what happened I think with ACT UP. And there were all kinds of actions that ACT UP did ... I think that ACT UP was a lot more focused on civil disobedience. There were demonstrations, but there also tended to be a lot of civil disobedience. I should back up a little bit. I remember at the meeting, we had someone from one of the major news outlets there, and he or she identified him or herself. I don't remember who it was and someone said, you know, "Well, the news media is here. Why are they even here at this meeting?" And someone else said, "Just lighten up." But I guess that was enough to alienate the news media, so they slagged us from the get-go. Yeah, they never gave us positive press that I can remember. But, you know, bad coverage is better than no coverage, right. So, the first action that ACT UP did was actually a fairly tame one. They did one where they had some effigies hanging and it was at Robson Square. I wasn't able to get to that demonstration.

**GK: Because you were working.**

PC: I was working. [laughter] But there were other things that we did. There were other things that happened. I remember there was another one – again, I was working – with John Kozachenko I remember he ended up getting arrested for... he got on top of the hood of the Socred car or something. Like, a limousine... I've seen the picture of him holding onto the car being dragged, but I was never there to see that. There was a demonstration outside of the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. The Socreds were having a fundraiser. I remember my sister was down from Kamloops visiting and she was pissed off at the Socreds because she didn't like the fact that they were anti-choice on abortion. We were all demonstrating. Dan was there and other people, and Benoit and John and so forth. Anyhow, I remember there was a group of people. Apparently, there was this one woman by the name of Squeege and I heard that she apparently spat at the Premier, or something like that. I don't know what the story was. And John Kozachenko apparently, from what I understand, he was laying on the ground to try to block the Premier from entering. Instead of the Premier and Lillian Vander Zalm taking the back entrance, they decided – no, they were just going to boldly walk through past all the protesters. Well, John apparently grabbed him by the leg and Bill kept walking with Lillian in tow and she tripped over him. And of course the newspaper said that she was knocked to the ground; although from what I understand she tripped. That was when I really

noticed that people were really so angry, you know. They were willing to really push the boundaries on this.

**AS: Yeah. So, you said to your sister, “Let’s go to this protest.”**

PC: Yeah. And then when I saw what it looked like when they started swarming in and that. I could feel the tension and the potential for violence. And I said to my sister, “Let’s just stand back a little bit.” You know, because I wanted to be a little more protective of her. I didn’t want her to get caught in this.

**AS: So, ACT UP was there. Were there also other groups?**

PC: Yes. There was a group called End Legislated Poverty. I think that was led by Jean Swanson. Yeah, so they were the other group that were there protesting the Socred government.

**AS: Because there was so much to protest.**

PC: Oh yeah. They just... ever since the defeat of Operation Solidarity the Socreds just went, “Oh, great! Yeah. We’re just going to go to town here and we’re going to, you know, cut disability, cut welfare. You know, make things harder. Make people on welfare stand in line to get their cheques, and all kinds of stuff. We’re going to start dismantling the welfare state.” And it’s continued on to this day. I don’t remember any of the other groups that were there, but I remember they were there. I think we marched in the Pride Parade. What else did we do? I remember we occupied a government office and... I think you were asking a question about what was the November...

**GK: 30<sup>th</sup>.**

PC: November 30<sup>th</sup>. I assume that was the same one as that demonstration. I remember that was where the city health officer’s office was and I think it was also the provincial government offices were there too. And that was kind of an interesting story because we went there to scout it out and thought, “Okay. We can get in here and go there.” And then when we got there the actual day to do the occupation. We went there. The entrance to the stairway from the outside was locked, so we couldn’t get in that way. “Okay, we’ll take the elevator.” So, we all pile into the elevator. It uses a security card. And this woman comes into the elevator and says, “Oh. You don’t have your card. Don’t worry. I’ve got mine.” We just sort of looked at each other poker-faced, didn’t say anything [laughter] and so she...

**AS: ...took you up.**

PC: We said, “Yeah. We’re going to whatever the third floor” or whatever it was. “Thank you.” And so we all filed out and I’m just thinking like, a motley crew of us, and it didn’t raise any red flags for her? But I was just grateful. “Thank you.” Because sometimes things just work out that way and I’m just grateful that they do. And we all said, just after we walked out of the elevator and before we went into the office, “Don’t mention how we got here.” Like, we don’t want to get this person into trouble. And so the receptionist said, “How did you get in here?” And we just said, “We’re here

to peacefully occupy your office.” I don’t even remember what the demands were specifically, what it was about. Shamefully, I don’t remember these things. Someone I’m sure will have a record of that, I hope – maybe John. Later that afternoon, there were some support demonstrators outside, and we opened the windows and said, “We’re here. We’re queer. And we have power!” And we were chanting and they were cheering us from down on the street – there were supporters out there. And John had handcuffed himself to a chair and I think he glued the lock to the handcuffs. I think that’s what he did. But he did handcuff himself to one of the chairs.

**AS: Was that part of the plan?**

PC: Well, I think the plan was that we’d get arrested, you know, and that whoever wants to... and John always wanted to take everything to the next level. He always did. That was always his way. For some people like, most of the women decided they’d walk out under arrest, under police escort. Me and some of the guys there, we laid down, just went limp, and so they had to carry us out in wheelchairs. So, they hauled us out in wheelchairs. Once we got to the police station we were processed and everything, and John was non-cooperative the whole time. He just said, “I’m being non-compliant,” “I’m being non-compliant,” the whole time. Even when he was in processing, he wouldn’t answer the questions. He’d just lay there and be non-compliant. And one of the police officers at the jail said, you know, “Do you want to tell your friend he’s making this harder on himself than it has to be.” And I said, “Well, that’s John. That’s just the way he is. If that’s the way he chooses to be, you know...”

**AS: I’m not going to be able to change that right now.**

PC: So, let’s see. I remember there was one guy there that would not tell his... I don’t know if it was his HIV status, or what the story was. And so they pretended to do a strip search on him without taking his clothes off. You know, telling him to bend over and stuff like that – just all these little things to humiliate him. And when they asked me what my HIV status was, I said “I will not reveal my HIV status,” so off came the shoes and they put me into the hole for, I don’t know, half-an-hour.

**AS: Really?**

PC: Yeah. They put me into...

**AS: Solitary?**

PC: Solitary confinement. Yeah. It was the hole. Basically, it was like a closet with a door on it. Yeah, so I was in there for a while.

**AS: Was that your first arrest?**

PC: Yeah. It was. So, I wasn’t working that day. [laughter] And I remember one of the other actions that we did...

**GK: Can we just come back to that one?**

PC: Yeah.

**GK: So, were you charged? Like, did you have to go to court after this or did they...?**

PC: No, we didn't, because this was all of our first time for all of us except for perhaps John.  
[laughter]

**GK: It was not John's first arrest, for sure.**

PC: I know. It wasn't his first and it wasn't going to be his last. But yeah, for me... so, for the rest of us it was our first arrest. I don't remember if Richard Banner was in that. I was involved. I think Dan was involved. I think Janis Kaleta was there. I think Ivan Coyote. Karen Mlednevic. I think may be involved. I don't know if Marie Arrington was or not. I don't remember who all was involved in that. So, we were fortunate. I think we actually had some Monopoly 'get-out-jail-free' cards. We handed it to the police officer when they released us. They got a chuckle out of that, you know. For the most part they knew that we were not dangerous people, right, as far as like, we're not going to threaten anybody's life or limb or anything like that. We were there to be disruptive and make a statement. So, that was sort of what I recall of that event. The next thing that I recall from one of the demonstrations that we did ... I think Torvald was in that one as well. Yeah. I remember a number of us went to the BC Legislature. This was about the time of the Iraq War I and it was Torvald, Alan Braud... was it John Kozachenko? I'm not sure if he was there. I don't remember. He might not have been there. I think it was Dan Guinan was there, if I recall correctly. And I think Janis Kaleta may have been there, maybe Ivan Coyote. I don't remember who exactly. A number of us were there, and our plan was to... we had those zap straps. We thought we couldn't use anything like handcuffs because they were metal. We'd be caught by the metal detector when we were going into the Gallery. Our intention was to go into the Gallery and – oh, Ken Walker was there. I think he's another one involved in that demonstration. And we went into the Gallery and our plan was to start a chant and then unfurl a banner, and then throw condoms and leaflets onto the Legislature. So, we got in there and I had the... so, I very discretely – I had it hidden under my sleeve – I had the zap strap and put it around my wrist. I had another one and looped it through that zap strap and zap-strapped it to the chair, you know. And the security people were out, but they didn't see us do it because we were being very discrete about it. And Alan Braud was sitting on the other side of the Legislature, and he was the one to start the chant. So, I'm sitting there and we all had ourselves strapped and I'm sitting there waiting for Alan, and I'm looking at Alan and going...

**AS: "Go."**

PC: You know, like, "C'mon!" I forget what they were talking about in the Legislature, but Alan waited and then they brought up a thing about support for the Gulf War. And that's when he started to chant. He thought that was a good thing to disrupt. I forget what it was that they were talking about beforehand, but he didn't want to interrupt it because it was something by the opposition, I think, or something progressive. So, that's what it was; finally Alan started chanting, "ACT UP! Fight back! ACT UP! Fight back!" And so that diverted the attention. He was the diversion

on the other side of the Legislature. And then that allowed people to get up and unfurl the banner over the edge of the bannister, overlooking the Gallery of the Legislature – an ACT UP banner. And other people had condoms. We started throwing condoms and leaflets onto the Sacred side of the House. And then we started chanting, “ACT UP! Fight back! ACT UP! Fight back.”

**AS: Amazing.**

PC: I remember the security guard finally came... a couple of security guys come up and they had these huge bolt cutters [laughter] to cut off our zap straps, which would've been cut with ordinary household scissors. I guess be prepared. So, they cut us away from the seats and they dragged us to the elevator. And I remember they dragged Tom – Torvald – into the elevator and then they released him in the elevator, and they went to throw one of us in the elevator and Torvald got up and was scrambling to get out of the elevator. They grabbed him and threw him back into the elevator. Then they threw the rest of us into the elevator, and dragged us out of the Legislature and into the front yard of the Legislature. So, that was our action.

**AS: And they didn't arrest you.**

PC: They didn't arrest us. Amazingly. And the news media thought that we were there because apparently, that was the first time they'd actually brought cameras into the Provincial Legislature. But we didn't know. I didn't know and I didn't care. It had nothing to do with that. But I was so caught off guard by the question that I just said, “Yeah, whatever.” And so I think they assumed that I was saying, “Yes, that's why we were there.” So, I wasn't very quick on my feet with answering the news media.

**AS: Well, it's hard to...**

PC: Yeah. And my adrenaline was just rushing, you know. So, that was the next civil disobedience action that I was involved in. And then there was one other one I remember that I got involved in, was the one where the Social Credit government was having its provincial leadership convention. And I remember we had posters with... it was the two leaders. They had Rita Johnston and, I forget. There were the two leaders who were running and, I think, it was Grace McCarthy. Yes. They were both running for the leadership of the Social Credit party, because Vander Zalm had been disgraced due to one of his scandals. And so our slogan was, “Educating Rita. Sacred AIDS Policy is a Dis-Grace.” You know, like a pun on Grace McCarthy and Rita Johnston. And it was at the Pan Pacific, I think, where the sails are at Canada Place. We had a slogan on our banner. It was, “The Government Has Blood ON Its Hands-AIDS Deaths Every Hour.” That was from ACT UP – in the US, across the US – had that slogan. We used the same image of a bloody handprint. So, we got some red water-based paint and we had a demonstration through downtown, and got to the Pan Pacific Hotel. It was cordoned off, but we did the bloody handprints – on the pillars of the Pan Pacific Hotel. And the police said, “Okay. You've made your statement.” So, they grabbed us by the arms – you know, a cop on either side – and took all of us away and into the paddy wagon. And I guess, apparently when Dan was getting hauled away he had paint on his hand, and one of the participants from the conference, walked past Dan and Dan just went pshhhhhh! – and smeared

his suit with the paint ... I guess the guy was pretty angry. And, I think, John actually did spray-painting with oil-based paint on the sidewalk because John wanted to take it to the next level up.

**AS: Water-based paint. Oil-based paint.** [laughter]

PC: So, the three of us were arrested and we ended up... that was the one where we were actually charged. Yeah. Because ACT UP had been doing so many civil disobedience actions – not just the ones that I mentioned, but numerous others as well. And we ended up going... they tried the three of us together... Is that right? It might have been three of us, or maybe just Dan and I together and then John separately. I don't remember, but I thought it was all three of us together. And we ended up getting what are known as diversions, which basically meant you talk to a social worker and they give you community service work. And the social worker just said, "Just go and keep on doing work with your group." So, we were very fortunate. But that was the end of my civil disobedience. I've never done civil disobedience since then, because if I did it – if I ever got arrested again, I'll have a criminal record. So, I had to stop – "Okay, time to cool my jets."

**GK: What was the charge against you in that particular situation? Do you know? It must've been damage to property or something.**

PC: Probably damage to property or public mischief, if there's such a charge. I don't know if public mischief is really crime. I think it is but I'm not sure.

**GK: Yeah.**

PC: If I dug around in my file cabinet... I was trying to find things in my file cabinet. I didn't see it there, but I thought I had the actual page. But I don't remember what actually the charge was. I think it was more serious for Dan because he had allegedly damaged somebody's suit. I never actually saw that happen, but that's what Dan told me.

**GK: He told us that too.**

**AS: Yeah.**

**GK: He said he thought he had to pay to get the suit dry-cleaned.**

PC: Yeah.

**AS: He said, "which I guess it was water-based paint, but you can't just wash a suit, so maybe that's fair." [laughter]**

PC: Yeah. And when we were in jail, first they put us in the cell together with all the other people they processed and then they processed us. And we had the paint on our hands. So, there was a sink there and we rinsed the paint off. And then a police officer asks me, "So, what happened to the paint?" I said, "Well, it was water-based paint, so I rinsed it off in the sink." I think one of the police officers says, "Well, you know if they charge you for this, it's just ridiculous" or something like that.

I forget what it was, but the police realized that we weren't dangerous. I remember Dan and me, and John were all kept in a sort of special holding cell later on after we were processed. I think it was for the rest of the day. And it was just for people with medical conditions. They assumed that we had AIDS because we were AIDS activists. And so every hour on the hour they would come and check and see "How are you doing?" "How are you doing?" Every hour. I was just thinking like, "Boy. I'm glad I'm not..." you know, when I got out of there, I was like, "I'm glad we weren't there over night, because I would not have gotten a good night's sleep," because every hour you'd get woken up. "How are you doing?" "How are you doing?" "Well, I'm still alive but I'm getting a little cranky from lack of sleep." But that fortunately didn't happen.

**AS: They let you go at the end of the day?**

PC: Yeah. So, Dan got a lawyer. I got advice from a law students' advice clinic I think. It was one of those ones, pro bono things. And so I didn't really face many charges. I think Dan's was for damages, and we all had to write little letters saying how we were being thoughtless. We apologized for the harm we'd caused on the people and so forth, and our intentions are to never do that again and stuff like that. So, you know, you have to eat crow, I guess.

**GK: I just recently had to do that stuff with civil disobedience we did in Sudbury. Yeah, you have to do some sort of statement.**

PC: Yeah. But I remembered, yeah, stuff like that... I remember the demonstration with John Kazachencko at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. He was arrested at that one, as a number of, I think, some other people were too that were sort of involved in the melee around Vander Zalm. And I remember as we were chanting, John was in the paddy wagon and to the beat of the chant he was kicking the window of the paddy wagon – BOOM BOOM "ACT UP! Fight back!" And he was kicking in rhythm to the chant, so... I mean it was... I don't remember what else I was involved with there that we did.

**GK: That's a lot.**

PC: Yeah, the office occupation; the legislature, convention; the Queen E. And my other memories of ACT UP... Oh yes, I remember John doing his... he did a stint at the Vancouver Centennial Monument where there had a "100" for the 100 years of Vancouver, and he just added another zero to mark a thousand AIDS cases in BC at that time. I was not involved in that. Again, I was working. Yeah. What happened to ACT UP? You know, it's sort of after that last action that the three of us were charged, well definitely for Dan and I, it was like, "Okay. We can't do that. We've used up our get-out-of-jail-free cards. You know, we can't keep getting arrested." So, that was sort of what happened with me. They ended up... John ended up getting arrested for marijuana possession or something. It was kind of like, because it was some other way to try to get at him, I think. So that way he wouldn't be able to cross the US border. I think that's what happened. You'd have to talk to John about that. I don't remember the details. As I recall, it was something to do with that or somebody had said something to me about that. I think the thing with ACT UP was it was really good with doing civil disobedience. I think we didn't do – and I think it was possibly the same with the CRHL – was I would've liked to have seen more actual, organizing of actually going

out and leafleting people, talking to people face-to-face. Holding public forums and educational, not just on civil disobedience, but on AIDS activism. I think that perhaps it would have built a stronger base to make the movement last longer. I think after that it seemed to sort of fizzle out, after that – yeah, a couple of years after that.

**GK: Do you remember participating in any other ACT UP actions?**

PC: I remember two more actions that I was involved in; Peanuts for Perrin and the Grey Cup Parade. Peanuts for Perrin refers to a group of ACT UP members including Richard Banner, Ken Walker, myself and I think Ivan E. Coyote and maybe a few others at a public announcement by then Federal Tory Health Minister Perrin Beatty. He was announcing federal funding for AIDS after almost a decade of neglect. Our point was that the amount of funding was both insufficient and that the government waited far too long to begin addressing the crisis. When he got up to the podium to speak we tossed peanuts at him shouting “Peanuts for AIDS! Peanuts for AIDS!” We also tossed a leaflet onto the podium for him listing our demands. They included allowing inmates in prisons free access to condoms for safer sex and bleach to sterilize rigs used for injection drugs. He actually offered to let us take the podium after he was finished. Unfortunately we weren’t on the ball enough to take him up on it. If we had, we would have gotten our message out more effectively.

The Grey Cup action involved Torvald, John me and one or two others. We intended to hold up an ACT UP banner along the sidewalk on Beach Avenue at English Bay in the West End during the Grey Cup parade. This was shortly after the incident at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre where John grabbed Bill Vander Zalm by the leg and his wife Lillian tripped over him. Anyhow, John started mouthing off to the police along the parade route, bragging to them about how Lillian “fell for him.” Before the parade got under way, two or three large cops grabbed our banner and towed us to a vantage point where we would not be seen or heard. Our plan to be visible being thwarted, we left. That action was a flop.

**GK: So, did ACT UP sort of involve more people at the beginning and then as time went on it involved less people? Is that your sense?**

PC: You know, I think it was sort of like the bell curve thing. It was up and then it sort of slowly declined. So, it wasn’t like an even bell curve. It slowly dwindled. And I think part of that was because a lot of people that were not prepared to do civil disobedience were afraid to go to a demonstration. I remember on Coop Radio they announced, “ACT UP is going to have a legal demonstration, and if you believe that I have real estate I’d like to sell you” or something like that. It was joke. They joked about that, you know.

**AS: Right. So, then if you were someone who was worried about getting arrested, you would feel like, “well, I can’t go to that action.”**

PC: Yeah. Not even to be a support demonstrator on the periphery, you know, because you never knew if you’re going to get arrested. So, I think there was a real problem with that. I remember Dan was actually saying before this last action he thought, you know, “Civil disobedience is stupid.” He was saying that this is not a good idea to do another civil disobedience action, but then

he ended up doing it anyhow. [laughter] Because I think he wanted to support John. And I think the fact that it was just the three of us, I believe, that did that last action – as opposed to the larger numbers in previous times – was a reflection of the fact that people were probably getting a little afraid. You know, that that's all that ACT UP was known for was just going over the top and not doing other stuff to actually build support.

**AS: And there's this curious thing, like you were saying, we're not going to get arrested if we have the numbers to take the street, right. There is that thing where it's much, much safer and more empowering to do these things with lots of people.**

PC: Yes.

**AS: Yeah. And so you can do much more when you have more people. Everyone feels more... I've experienced that too.**

PC: Yeah, there's a certain safety in numbers.

**AS: Yeah. And a feeling like, "a lot of people believe this and are doing this."**

PC: Yes. That's right.

**GK: So, ACT UP seemed to just wither away?**

PC: By the time that John did his thousand cases demonstration, or photo op, I guess, at the Centennial Monument – that was 1992, maybe 1991 – I was working shift-work and I was doing 12-hour shifts working in the printing industry. I was very exhausted. By that time, I had been diagnosed with HIV. I was diagnosed in December 1990. And it was the recession, and that's one of the reasons why I was able to go to the Provincial Legislature action. Well, some of the other actions, was because I was unemployed. The last action, I was able to do that because I had been laid off from my printing job. So, that was before I got my nice printing job in 1991. And I was out of work for almost a year. There was a recession. I was really getting nervous. I couldn't get a printing job. Print shop after print shop, I couldn't get work. Or maybe just temporary work or something like that. So, I was getting really nervous. I'm thinking, "Here I am. I have no benefits. I have HIV." You know, it was 1991. You know, that was before highly active anti-retroviral therapy.

**AS: Yeah. Stressful.**

PC: Yeah. And I thought, I have got to focus on just work. And I was exhausted when I came home from work, you know. And I'd ride my bicycle from here to Richmond. So, it's a long distance. Yeah. That was in all kinds of weather. Like, weather like this and colder I'd be riding my bicycle.

**GK: So, just thinking back on both the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation and ACT UP, what do you think the impact of that type of activism was in terms of changing the situation here?**

PC: It helped, first of all, to build confidence in the community, the queer community, basically. I think it was the biggest thing. I think before then people tended to be a little more closeted, I think was one of the things. Also, they were more inclined to just not want to fight back, you know, against gay bashing and stuff like that. One of the things that actually spun off of Vancouver ACT UP was a group called Queer Planet. And that happened sort of at the time that ACT UP was still around but it sort of went on after ACT UP sort seemed to fizzle out. And that was, some of the same people that were involved, Ken Walker was heavily involved with that as I recall, and I think Ivan Coyote, and I can't remember some of the other names. Anyhow, we did all kinds of things like, we'd go just have queer-ins, just be visibly queer. We decided we're just going to be visibly queer and hold hands and stuff, and go through the shopping malls in Burnaby or wherever, in Metrotown, and just chant things, like you know "We're here. We're queer. We're proud of it. Get used to it." We put stickers in the washrooms and all kinds of stuff like that. Because I think we were so pissed off with all the harassment and the abuse, and I'd be wearing my "Read my lips" t-shirt, with two sailors kissing. It was from a famous postcard of two guys in these sailor uniforms, and it was only from the waste up on the t-shirt, but on the waste down in the picture I actually saw they didn't have pants on. [laughter] But it was a really sweet t-shirt. So, I'd be wearing that and, you know. Not at work. On my days off from work, I'd just wear it downtown or whatever doing things. And sometimes I'd get a strange look going into a gym and stuff like that, and I then I realized later on, "Oh, right. I'm wearing the t-shirt." [laughter] So, that's what the odd look was from.

I remember there was a demonstration because there was a lot of gay bashings were happening. There were bashings in the park, in the streets – everywhere. You name it; there was harassment. Ken Walker, I remember, spoke at... we had a big rally, demonstration on Granville Street, where we shut down Granville Street. Just the Granville and Davie area, and shut that down for about an hour at least and marched down Davie Street and back, and I remember John getting arrested. Well, what happened was he got pepper-sprayed by police. That's what happened. He was stickering. I remember he started stickering the ambulance. I think he tried to sticker one of the police cars or something. I remember him doing stickering. And then, I didn't see the spray, but I remember him screaming in pain and running into one of the local... actually, it was a straight nightclub right on Davie Street and going in there, just using the washroom to wash the pepper spray out of his eyes. And we phoned the police and said he was pepper-sprayed. We were complaining about that. I remember Ken Walker saying at the demonstration, "Look at the number of people here and remember this, because when you read about it in the newspaper they'll underestimate the numbers." And that seemed to be the way it was with demonstrations. They always underestimated the numbers. So, that was really good because I remember we had discussions in the community about gay bashing. And we had people who were being bashed in the park, or this guy that stood up to gay bashers and they were too afraid to talk about it – to reveal their names. They were still very closeted. They would say, "Well, what we're doing in the park is illegal. You know, having sex in the park." "Yeah, but bashing people in the park is illegal and I think it's the bigger crime" and that was what we were trying to argue.

Because we did these kinds of actions, I think it helped to lay the groundwork for some of the things that have happened in the city later on over the years with regards to things like, injection drug users started organizing around things such as Insite – having safer injection sites – that was one of the things around AIDS prevention, and that got the support of the establishment. Even the NPA councilors ended up supporting it, everyone except Conservatives – large 'C'

conservatives. Even the police supported it. I mean it was amazing – although I wasn't involved with that kind of stuff. I think that was part of the effect of the AIDS activist movement. When Aaron Webster was murdered in Stanley Park, there was a huge march ... like, a friend of his organized people in a demonstration. And the day after he was murdered, we had a massive... thousands of people, massive march down Davie Street and protested, and rallied at English Bay in protest against violence against the gay community. And that's when you had people like Jim Diva helping to organize. You know, getting the police and the City and everything like that to sit down and talk to the community. And I remember him saying to the police, "I don't want you to tell us not to have sex in the park. I want you to tell us what you're going to do to make us safe for when we go into the parks." And I think that what we did help lay the groundwork so those kinds of things could happen. And we did a lot of other stuff under FAGS. We held a forum called "AIDS, censorship and the right-wing". And so we talked about all those kinds of things, you know, back in the '80s and those big issues happening then, and also censorship of gay porn, especially at Little Sisters.

**GK: For sure. We're moving towards the end of the questions, so I wanted to see if there was something you wanted to bring in now. One of the questions we ask people is after... ACT UP is over, what is your continuing involvement in AIDS groups or AIDS organizing of any sort? We just want to establish some continuity.**

PC: Yeah. Well, the truth of the matter is that I'm not really involved in AIDS activism now. I am a member of Positive Living, and I make use of their services. So, that's been really helpful for me, especially around social isolation. We started going to Average Joes Café for a while, and stuff like that. Now, we've gotten involved in other things. For me, because I was so focused on just surviving and my work, especially in the early '90s, that I just sort of pulled back. I've ended up sort of pulling away from a lot of political activity. And then whenever I do get a little bit of burst of energy... in the early 2000s, there was again, the BC Liberals had replaced the Socreds as the right wing party in BC and they started doing the same stuff that Vander Zalm – or actually it was Bill Bennett – did. You know, bringing in all the massive neoliberal attacks against unions, against social services; the whole thing, attacking the Hospital Employees' Union [HEU], and privatizing services. And I got involved with the Prepare the General Strike Committee. I was involved with other people – lefties and Marxists, and all sorts of unionists and got involved in that. And we worked hard to promote a General Strike, but for us a General Strike would have been not just a one-day symbolic work stoppage like we had in 1987 – that's another story I could tell you about Torvald.

There were demonstrations and civil disobedience actions happening all throughout the province. And it was ignored in the mainstream media, but we were getting on the grapevine in places like Nelson or whatever – people occupying the banks or whatever, doing stuff, things around the city, shutting things down. And we wanted to create a discussion amongst the general public, and amongst unionists particularly about, "how do we prepare for a General Strike so that we have an open-ended General Strike throughout the province until certain demands are met?" You know, "how do we meet and organize to prepare for this? How do we formulate our demands?" I don't remember the year now, I think it was maybe 2004, when there was the Hospital Employees' Union was battling with the provincial government, because their services were being contracted out and their wages cut. So, the BC Federation of Labour said, "We're going

to have a General Strike. We're going to call a General Strike." So, and that was for the next day. And I remember my partner and I were doing support picketing outside Saint Paul's Hospital with the HEU. And I was talking to a nurse there and I was saying, "You know, I think this is going to be the same story that we saw in 1983 with Operation Solidarity," because at this time, we had Jim Sinclair who was the head of the BC Federation – president of the BC Federation of Labour – had flown to Victoria to meet with the Premier to see if he could get one last chance to get a deal. And I just thought, "Oh boy, this is a real feeling of déjà vu." And then he came back and of course I remember we were told, "Okay. Its been called off. Everybody go back to work. Leave the picket lines." And I remember some support picketers shaking their heads and saying, "This isn't right." So, everyone went back to work ... there were a few hold-outs in the liquor stores and stuff like that, saying "You know, we've got to support these people." A couple of days afterwards as the deal was revealed to us, of course, the government didn't budge on any of their things. They got everything they wanted. The Fed just capitulated, because it was more important for them to demobilize an action that they couldn't control than to fight for the membership.

**AS: Yes.**

PC: But it brings back something I remember about Torvald.

**GK: Yes, we want to hear about Torvald.**

PC: Okay. I remember this is 1987, and Vander Zalm had decided to bring in a bunch of anti-union legislation, which would allow... I think it was to allow scabs to cross the picket line. I think that's what it was, and non-union workers to work in union sites. There was a big rally that happened at the Pacific Coliseum on the PNE grounds, and Torvald and I went there. And people were really... just the outrage, you know, outbursts of anger and stuff like that. And someone yelled, "Kill Vander Zalm!" and I remember I started clapping, and everyone started clapping. I was a little bit of a hothead back then. Obviously I wouldn't advocate doing that. You know, I'm not now. I'm sort of more sensible I hope now. Anyhow, Torvald said, "Let's start chanting 'General Strike'." So, we just started doing it, started chanting – "General Strike! General Strike! General Strike!" and we ended up getting the whole Coliseum chanting "General Strike!" And here's the Fed leadership down there hearing all these unionists shouting "General Strike! General Strike!" and they ended up actually having a one-day work stoppage province-wide. The Fed actually called a one-day work stoppage province-wide. So, I guess there had been enough anger. And, I think, that had built on the previous activism around Operation Solidarity – that there was enough there to promote this one-day work stoppage where we and people from FAGS, or whatever the other groups were, we went and did support picketing at, I think it was Langara College. Yeah. We did some support picketing during that one-day. So, anyhow that's sort of what happened there.

But the thing about Torvald and Fred Gilbertson was they were both Marxists; they were both involved with the Fourth International I think at one time. Fred was never a part of Socialist Challenge, but Tom was a member of what was called Alliance for Socialist Action. They ended up merging with another group called Socialist Challenge / Gauche Socialiste and that's the new name of the organization. It was at that B.C. Federation of Labour rally at the Pacific Coliseum where we chanted "General Strike!" where I said to Tom, "Can I join this Alliance for Socialist Action?" And he said, "Yeah. You can join," and he started me going through the process of becoming a member,

and I joined. By the time I became a member, or an associate member, it was called Socialist Challenge / Gauche Socialiste, and then later on they became the official section of the Fourth International in the Canadian State. So, Tom and Fred really influenced me politically, I think, because before that I remember talking to Torvald, saying, "I'm not sure that revolution is still possible," and he said, "Well, actually it is." He really clarified that for me. I mean there were a lot of things within the Front for Active Gay Socialism, and there were personality conflicts and stuff like that between me and Tom sometimes. But Tom always had a good sense of humour. Fred Gilbertson did too. They were both very witty. Both of them were always, right to their last – activist, leftists. Torvald – was especially Marxist and very clear on his politics. And I think that probably scared a few people in the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation. There were a few people there that we sensed that were anti-Marxist. So, that sort of created some doubt within the people in FAGS, whether we wanted to continue with the CRHL at one time. Saying, "If this is going to be this anti-communist thing, then I'm not sure I want to be involved in that." I remember Fred and Richard Banner saying the same thing.

Anyhow, Torvald eventually moved to Toronto because, I think, he wanted to be in the centre of the action. And things sort of fizzled out by the nineties. I forget when exactly he left, but I think it was about 1991 or thereabouts. Actually, maybe even earlier... yeah, maybe 1990-91. And apparently he was involved in fighting for public health care and I'm not sure about all his activities. I sort of stayed somewhat peripherally involved. I stayed involved with Socialist Challenge for a while and then – because of my work and having to deal with HIV – I sort of pulled back from everything, including that. And then Tom came and visited my partner and I, and stayed here for several days. And he brought a bunch of publications from a group called New Socialist. Socialist Challenge had split apart, and Gauche Socialiste was still in existence in Quebec, but in English-speaking Canada it had splintered apart. But other people had come together from the IS, which had also had a split. So, some of the people from Socialist Challenge and International Socialists, and some others I think, came together to form a group called New Socialist Group. And so I ended up subscribing to *New Socialist*, and I reconnected with those comrades in joining a book study group with them, and leading a book study group called Rebuilding the Left. And I think just trying to deepen my understanding of Marxist theory. It really affected me and Torvald – affected me tremendously in that respect. I remember he visited me a second time – I forget when it was exactly – it was maybe six years ago, I forget now. And then he told me that he had been dealing with... one of the things he had been dealing with all of his life I guess is depression – really severe. And he told me, he's tested positive for HIV. And when he told me that I just had this sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. I just thought, "Oh no. You're the last person in the world that needs to have to deal with that," and it was a bad sign. And I found out of course... I got an email... I forget when it was but... I don't know what year he passed away, but I got an email saying Torvald – Tom Patterson – has died and he passed away in the hospital and someone was looking for a home for his cat. So, it was kind of sad, obviously. And we had a memorial here and I phoned up a lot of people like Elaine Arrowsmith, who Tom had... this is funny, because she brought some pictures of... Tom and Elaine had gotten married so that she could emigrate from Britain. So, they had wedding pictures and stuff like that. It was just so ironic, but it was so funny. So, they had these wedding pictures so that they could show the immigration officials.

**AS: That they had got married.**

PC: Yeah.

**GK: For sure.**

PC: Anyhow, we had a memorial and we had a bunch of people – my partner and I, and Elaine and Richard and Bruce – Richard Banner and, I think, his partner Bruce. And Will Offley and, I think, Gene McGuckin and a bunch of... I'm not sure if Gene McGucken was there, but a bunch of different people from Socialist Challenge, maybe Gary Crystal and them were there. Some people that knew Tom, and Ken Hiebert, I think, was there. So, we all had a memorial at English Bay at a picnic table, and just walked to the AIDS Memorial. He didn't get his name on the Memorial because he said no way would he want that. If anything, he'd want to hold a banner up from the Burrard Bridge... that's the thing he would've done. So, that's my memory of Tom – Torvald.

**GK: So, you've told us a little bit about Tom – well, Torvald – who I also knew, and a little bit about Fred, but were there other people... like, you mentioned Benoit, who I know moved away. Would you like to tell us anything about him?**

PC: Oh well, one of the things that we did... Benoit and Dan and I were roommates for a brief period of time when I was working at a print shop near Commercial Drive; it was Clarke Drive. And we lived in a house in the Eastside, Strathcona, a part of Vancouver, and he actually was one of the founders – original founders, I believe – of the PWA Coalition. And he was very angry. Like, a lot of PWA were against the Socreds because they were hostile towards gay people and towards persons with AIDS. And I remember when the Celebration '90 happened – Dan and I were doing safety and support – so we were like ushers and sort of security or whatever as volunteers for the Gay Games in 1990, and we got a chance, took turns being able to go inside into the BC Place Stadium and watch the Opening Ceremonies. And one of the things that happened was, they had different people like, Svend Robinson spoke and stuff like that. And then this guy came for the provincial government. He said, "I'm here on behalf of the Government of British Columbia," and someone started to boo and the stadium started to boo. Well, anyhow, I found out later on that that was Benoit that started the booing.

**AS: Fearless, kind of fearless.**

PC: Yeah. The Social Credit Party was having a convention downtown. And it was around this time that we were roommates, and I remember Benoit went off to a phone booth and apparently, and Dan says something about this, he went and phoned a bomb threat into the Socred Convention. Oh god. So, obviously I don't condone that. That's what Benoit did. So, it showed a little... I was sensing some hostility. [laughter] We were roommates for about a year with Benoit, but I think he was really feeling like time was not on his side and so he was doing things. Like, he moved to one of the Gulf islands for a while. I know for a brief period before that he lived near Squamish for a while, near Britannia Beach. And before that he had been roommates... we also knew someone else called Doug Van Volkinburg who died of AIDS. Doug died of AIDS just before, around the same time that the Socred minister made the comment about, "AIDS is a self-inflicted wound." So, that was particularly inflammatory; very hurtful at a time when, you know, we're losing people that we know – friends that we know and we care about. So, Benoit ended up going to travel a little bit. I

think he went to Morocco briefly for a vacation, and then he moved to Montreal because that's where his biological family was. I remember talking to him, and Dan said... by this time, Dan and I in about 1991 had been partners for three years, and we split up and I was living in a place near Francis Street, near Commercial Drive. And Dan phoned me up and said, "Benoit is dying right now. Basically, if you want to talk to him, now is the time to do it." And so I phoned him and Benoit says he's very loved and everything, and he's surrounded by people who love him. And I think he felt very supported and loved when he died. So, that was good to know. So, I was able to say my goodbyes to him, which was a good thing to do that. Unfortunately, I don't know much more I can really tell you about him.

**AS: No, that's great. It's just we want to have some presence of all of these folks, you know.**

PC: Yeah. You know, there's all kinds of people... I actually have pictures of several people that I know that were not necessarily AIDS activists – or weren't AIDS activists at all – but just people in my life, and some of them are in that book, who have since passed away. So, yeah, it brings up a lot of memories.

**AS: Yeah.**

**GK: For sure. So, we've got two final questions, and then we can maybe look at some of the images and stuff if you want to say more stuff about that. But one is, just as we've been talking, if there are other things that have cropped up that you haven't had a chance to talk about.**

PC: Well, I guess my big thing right now is my concern about the future. I always think small, right. Like, human civilization. I'm in contact with people from the Vancouver Ecosocialist Group, and it's very obvious that we're in the midst of a climate crisis. And I've noticed in the last decade in the union movement for example that as neoliberal attacks and austerity have accelerated there's been such a muted response from the workers movement as a whole. I find it eerie and scary. And I really think that the working class is in a really dangerous time right now and really needs to find ways to... new ways of organizing. And I think we need to bring whatever new movements, the workers movement and the old left, all those movements will need to coalesce to build a new movement and new struggles so that we can overthrow capitalism and create a new society. Because I think we're going to need to do that for the survival of the human race. I think that it's come down to that. And I think that that's one of the things that all of my activism has helped, and my theoretical learning from my Marxist groups has been, we need more militancy. We need more solidarity. We need more radicalism. The governments in this country like, Stephen Harper's Conservatives. They're very radical. They're very clear on what they want. We need to develop our own radicalism and understand what we want and where we need to go, and we need militancy about like... we need the militancy that we've seen from say the BC Liberals or the Socreds, when they wouldn't back down. We need that kind of militancy, like we had in ACT UP, you know. Not the violence of throwing bricks or stuff necessarily, but just the willingness to hold your ground, to stand your ground and not back down. And I think we need to do that. And I think we need to inform it with love. I really think that's important.

**GK: That's great.**

**AS: A lot of the time that feels like what's the difference between being on the radical left or on the conservative right, is this quality of love.**

PC: We are all here together to look after each other and care for each other.

**GK: That was really a good statement. The final question we ask everyone is – and you've given us incredible leads already in terms of what you sent me before – but just if there's any people, maybe as we've been talking that you've thought of, who we might want to talk to. And you've mentioned a number of names already, but if there's any other names that have come up for you about who we might want to talk to. We'll definitely try to pursue talking to a number of the people who you've mentioned. I think we need to talk to Bet Cecill. Do you have any idea where she is?**

PC: I have no idea. You know, a lot of these people maybe Richard Banner would know.

**GK: Yeah, we talked to Richard.**

PC: Yeah. Alan Herbert mentioned a guy by the name of Mike from PLBC History Project – Positive Living BC History Project. I don't know.

**AS: He might be the person doing the archival work.**

PC: Okay. He mentioned something else. You know what? I'm going to look on my phone because I think... I was at a long-term survivor meeting, HIV survivors meeting, and Alan told me the names of people. Let's look here and see if I've got... Cory Ashworth. He's doing ageing gay activists.

**GK: Ashford?**

PC: Ashworth. Cory Ashworth.

**GK: And he's doing stuff on ageing.**

PC: Ageing gay activists.

**GK: Actually activists?**

PC: Yes.

**GK: Okay. PLBC means Positive Living BC, right?**

PC: Yes.

**GK: I'm pretty sure that Mike must be the person that they've hired to do that work. We're not going to be able to connect with Mike on this trip, but we definitely will.**

PC: Alan Braud. He was the guy that was in the Legislature with us, and he was the one that started the chant.

**AS: Thanks for this.**

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]