

AAHP
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Interviewers:	Alexis Shotwell & Gary Kinsman
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Persons present: Glenn Betteridge – GB
Alexis Shotwell – AS
Gary Kinsman – GK

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

AS: I always start the tapes off by saying that it's April 4th, 2016 and we're talking to Glenn Betteridge in Toronto, but about Montreal.

GK: So, we start off with some general questions that we ask everyone. We start off with do you have any memories, thinking back, when you might have heard about AIDS and what you heard?

GB: I probably heard about in high school. It was a Protestant high school because I was in Quebec, so a Protestant high school on the West Island of Montreal. So you've got white kids, Hindu kids, Muslim kids, everybody who's not a Catholic basically. And I remember there were some clearly gay kids in school. I was fortunate enough to not be so obviously gay, so I didn't get bullied, or harassed. But, at that time around grade nine, ten, eleven I remember hearing about AIDS and hearing people making jokes about Haitians, hookers, heroin, homosexuals – the four Hs. It was very stigmatizing, the news coverage, the language, so that's probably my first memories about it, of AIDS and the AIDS epidemic.

GK: Thinking back, do you remember when you might have began to hear about AIDS not only as a medical health issue, but perhaps as something that people could do something about? Like, an activist or political question?

GB: I can't really.

GK: Okay.

GB: I can't put my thumb on it.

AS: So, you were in high school. Were you also lefty or progressive as a young person or did that come later?

GB: No, I was just trying to survive. I enjoyed playing sports, it was my refuge. It was a good place to go. In Quebec you go to CEGEP after high school, and my trajectory was I was going to go into Poli Sci [Political Science] or Exercise Science. So, physiotherapy or Poli Sci, and I went the Poli Sci route and ended up at McGill, and got introduced to progressive politics and causes there. There's a couple Marxists folks there – Sam Newmoth, who did development work and a really strong social justice communitarian with Charles Taylor, James Tully...

AS: They were in Poli Sci then?

GB: Yes, they were the political theorists. And I enjoyed their political theories. So, that was my introduction to thinking about the world in different critical ways. The first book we were introduced to in our survey course, which was taught by Taylor, Tully, and one other was Thomas Kuhn's *Scientific Revolution*. Still fundamental to the way I see the world and epistemology and knowledge and power. So, that was probably a part of the awakening for me. The idea of knowledge and the political way we talk about things was not from a deconstructionist semiotic point of view, but more from a traditional continental sociology point of view. That was probably my awakening in starting to think critically in the world. The anti-Apartheid movement, pro-Palestinian, anti-Israel, anti-Zionist. McGill was very strong and in *The McGill Daily*, in those sorts of forums. And when I came to ACT UP, Michael Hendricks and René, I mean they're socialists and draft dodger socialists, so people had progressive politics.

AS: Yes. So, how did you hear about ACT UP?

GB: So, after my undergrad I came out. I came out fully, or in the last semester of undergrad. I did an extra semester because I couldn't figure out what I wanted to do, so school seemed safe. And I enjoyed it doing my three, four courses and seminars. So, I started dating this guy and he was fairly political and his roommate was from DC area, and so she was more familiar with AIDS activism and politics. Her father was a Professor of Law at... Not George Washington.

AS: Georgetown?

GB: Yes, maybe Georgetown. Anyway, she was influential. And then it was just around us in Montreal. And so I remember we went to a demo at Complexe Desjardins. I think we read about it and attended a demo at Complexe Desjardins, and maybe he and I had gone to a planning meeting in the lead up to that demo.

AS: Do you remember what the demo was?

GB: Demo, die in, placards... [laughter] Calling on the Quebec Minister of Health to do something. It might have been around treatment access.

GK: And probably around 1990 or something?

GB: I think it was probably spring of 1990.

AS: Had you been aware at all about the AIDS conference in Montreal? Was that something that was on your radar? It would have been just as you were finishing university.

GK: It would have been in June of '89.

GB: I can't say that I was terribly aware of it. I mean maybe I saw some banners downtown, the way you do when conventions come into town, but I didn't really have a TV. I wasn't an avid CBC listener at that point, so I can't say that I was acutely aware that something was going on and the politics of it.

GK: So, things that would have happened in '89 like, the murder of Joe Rose, the formation of Réaction SIDA, the activism that happened around the conference. You would have pretty well been unaware of or unconnected with.

GB: Yes. I mean we heard about the murder. There was more of a cohesive community. Like, I can picture in my mind where it happened. I was aware of that, but not of the organizing at that point around HIV per se.

GK: So, before going to that planning meeting and demonstration of ACT UP, were you involved in any gay organizations or anything?

GB: I mean, it was part of that dance with internalized homophobia and finding out where you fit into the LGBT community. And I'd never found an entry point that engaged me in my comfort zone, which was thoughts, analysis. And so HIV, it just crystallized health and rights and gayness, all these things. All those things interest me together and it's not just gay, and it's social justice – it's even before you know what social justice is – but it just brought together a whole bunch of things that are fascinating, rich, complex, infuriating, that begged for attention, and analysis, and to use your mind, use your body... All sorts of things you could do and feel useful doing, and feel that you have a place. You know, I was uncomfortable in bars. I would go to bars when I was totally drunk, but not otherwise because I didn't feel that was my comfort zone. But, talking and doing work, that kind of socialization was much more comfortable for me, and engaging on so many more levels.

AS: You could bring yourself to it.

GB: Yeah, and there was always a sexual edge to it because there's such energy in a room of very, for the most part, very sex positive and sexual people, both men and women, and smart is sexy too. So, you got to see people shining in so many different ways.

GK: So, maybe you can tell us just a bit more about getting connected to ACT UP and what that was like for you. What was ACT UP like, what did it do, how was it organized?

GB: So, I think my boyfriend and I at the time probably went to one meeting down in the Village in the Gay Community Centre on the second floor, big open ground, big tables in the middle, everybody's sitting at the table. I think that was our first introduction to ACT UP per se. We'd probably seen an ad in the equivalent of *Now* magazine... What is it? *The Mirror*, *The Montreal Mirror*.

So, we probably saw an ad in the listings at the back and decided to go. I don't have any distinct recollections of that, but was engaged enough to say yes, and then ended up at this meeting on the Plateau just off of Parc, and this guy named Hugh, who was a translator and interpreter, French/English. And he was recovering from herpes on his face, poor guy, on a raft of experimental medications, but had a beautiful apartment. He had this office with glass windows and doors in this third floor condo and was obviously a very successful intelligent individual. So, we did some demo planning there. It was all very...

GK: Is that person's last name Hugh Ballem by any chance?

GB: Maybe. I couldn't remember his last name, but yeah it might be. And so by saying yes, got involved in that planning meeting and then the demo was a few days later. So, this was the Saturday or Sunday before. I just remember it being very dynamic and it was an environment where people could disagree, and disagree strenuously with one another. And the pulse in which David Shannon, Kalpesh Oza, Michael Hendricks, Hugh... These were all people who didn't hold back on their opinions and had a certain way of relating to one another, which appealed to me. There was not a lot attention paid to social graces. It was an environment characterized by respect, not consideration necessarily. [laughter] So, it wasn't super formal and it wasn't corporate. Like, people weren't careful around one another because the stakes seemed high.

GK: Was Blane involved?

GB: I think Blane was involved at that point. I know he was involved and I remember interacting with him a lot on many occasions, but I'm not sure if he was at the table. Because that would have been in February, March, April of 1990. I guess he moved there in the fall after the AIDS conference.

GK: I think so, yes.

GB: I remember his apartment, so I presume he was around.

AS: It sounds like a smaller planning group. Do you remember at that demo or other demos, would a lot of people from Montreal come out?

GB: Yes, a fair number of people from Montreal came out. Michael and his partner René, as you probably seen are great archivists, so I remember the clipping. And I think I still have one at home. I didn't get a chance to find it in the things that I had, but I can do that. Michael's sent stuff over the years and kept stuff. It looked like a fair crowd, you know, fifty to a hundred people at Complexe Desjardins sort of half way down that block. Across from Place des Arts, it opens up and it was right in there, with chalk outlines...

GK: Do you know if that was ACT UP's first demonstration?

GB: I don't know, to be honest.

GK: Because I think the one thing we do know is that the first major ACT UP Montreal event was on the anniversary of Joe Rose's death.

GB: Okay, and when did he die? In the spring, '89?

GK: Yes, I thought it was March.

GB: So, this may very well have been...

GK: March 19th, actually, would have been when that demo was that I'm talking about.

GB: Yes, from my memory of the picture, it was cold, wintery still. Laying on the ground was cold in Montreal, so it may very well have been that anniversary demo.

AS: And did most people lie down in the demo that you remember and were chalked?

GB: It was a critical mass, but not everyone. There were people at the die in and people standing, like documenting. You know, you had your coterie of dykes from Concordia in the Communications program documenting everything, so they weren't lying down, they were documenting us lying down. But I think it was fairly participatory. I remember being there with a bunch of folks from my McGill days, and the guy I was dating was a couple of years younger, so from his undergrad circle of friends. And I think they also did some World AIDS Day organizing or AIDS week at McGill, so some of those folks cross-populated.

AS: And do you remember what happened after that demo?

GB: We went to a bar and drank [laughter] on Saint Catherine Street. And I cheated on my boyfriend that night. [laughter]

GK: You can always take this out of the transcript if you want.

GB: No, that's fine.

GK: Okay. Well, then we want names! No, no. [laughter]

GB: I lost my heart that night to a very dynamic young gentleman that I'd seen at the planning meeting, at the big weekly meeting, and then at the small organizing meeting with James Paul, Jamie Marois. And he had lived through the epidemic in New York for a number of years. So, after his undergraduate degree he went and split time between New York and Provincetown, like a lot of older gay men in those days, but he was a younger guy. So, he worked under the table in an antique shop...

AS: In Provincetown?

GB: No, in New York. And then worked in Provincetown in guesthouses, and he was in a circle of friends, older friends like, owners of the antique galleries, film makers, architects, things like that. So, he saw ACT UP New York and he'd attended ACT UP New York and saw the devastation being in that community in Provincetown. And he participated in a clinical trial there, not a prevention trial, but I guess it was a large cohort just tracking seroconversion. He participated in a trial there and he kind of was scarred by HIV and the fear of HIV, and at the same time he came back and he went through a Bachelor's, a Master's, and an MD, and he was doing his public health training when he died. It inspired him to go back to school and take a completely different direction because he had been in arts and semiotics and theatre. And then when he came back he turned his attention to ACT UP Montreal and HIV activism and worked in Mark Wainberg's lab in the Jewish General. He discovered 3TC [Lamivudine, Epivir], the drug 3TC. Mark Wainberg is the forerunner of Canadian HIV science, so he went through Mark Wainberg's lab.

AS: He sounds incredibly seductive. Like, anyone would have...

GB: Yes, he was super sexy, super energetic, and just...

AS: ...brilliant.

GB: I was very shy and not super social, so not the type of guy that I was used to being attracted to being around.

AS: And what was his name?

GB: James Paul Marois, Jamie Marois.

AS: So he did all of that schooling and work in Montreal?

GB: Yes, he left home at fourteen and paid his way right through his post-graduate medical degree over time, and he did his medical at U of T [University of Toronto]. So, in '95, '96 he came to U of T to study medicine.

AS: And then was doing Public Health here?

GB: I'm not sure whether he had finished his residency and this was post-residency training in Public Health. I think it probably was, yeah, here in Toronto.

AS: And so he was involved with ACT UP Montreal in what...?

GB: He would have been there from the beginning I would say, being somebody who'd come from...

AS: ...from New York.

GB: Yes, he probably would have come back in the summer of the AIDS Conference because he'd been accepted to McGill, so he came back from Province town in New York after spending a number of years there.

AS: It's really interesting just to hear about him, but also because it's really interesting to hear who was circulating across those national boundaries. And so Blane's the main person that we've heard of in Montreal. So, this is really useful.

GB: Yes, and he attended weekly meetings there, so he knew that scene. You know, my impression is there it cut across class, gender, and racial boundaries a lot more than it did in Montreal. I mean Montreal was not a particularly diverse city back then. And so he brought that understanding of New York and organizing.

AS: So those things would be integrated into the conversations a bit more.

GB: Well, just how they did it. I mean we were a bunch of process queens and, you know, women included because that was the way to sort of tame the craziness of it all, like speaker's lists. People had

been involved in organizing, it was clear, but it was good to have people who understood how ACT UP worked, and reading at the beginning the ACT UP serenity prayer in a sense, “We are ACT UP da-da-da... If you’re a member of a...” You know, that whole ritual, “If you are police officer identify yourself now.” And I think the other small group work and organizing, I think, a lot of that came from Michael Hendricks. He’s a Maoist, right? So, small cell organizing, he brought a lot of that. He was super controlling, but he did stuff so there was respect. Like, he wasn’t telling people what to do without doing stuff himself. I mean I learned so much about getting things done and ways of interacting with people and that common cause, which has served me well and served me poorly in more organized and institutional settings. They just don’t operate that way, but my natural tendency in that early formation was, “Well, if you care about what you’re doing you’re all gonna work together to get it done.” And people are going to take care of their own egos. It’s not as if there weren’t really strong personalities.

AS: Yes, it’s an interesting mode where the care for the work means that there’s a sense of what are we here for?

GB: Yes, and there was an urgency, which post-’95-6-7 just largely hasn’t been there for a lot of folks.

AS: How did that urgency manifest as you experienced it in those early days of getting involved?

GB: People were sick around you. I was fortunate because I come out in my early 20s, I didn’t know a lot of guys who were living with HIV. I met them through ACT UP, but some people’s chosen family networks, roommates... You know, everybody was affected. The people at the table were affected. They knew people who were in various stages of illness and dying and taking horse-pill sized doses of ddI [didanosine] if they could get access, and reading everything about treatment that they could. It was very acute and they were living with HIV as their daily reality, so that presented an urgency and people had roommates with HIV, so they saw it. There was this immediacy that couldn’t be ignored. And I think it manifested in ... You know, there was always a lot of energy at meetings and it was always passionate. There were screaming matches and fervent disagreements and strong people.

AS: And did the things that people were experiencing shape the kinds of things that ACT UP was working on? I mean I’m assuming it did, but I wonder how.

GB: Treatment, access to treatment.

AS: Okay.

GB: Health and social services, and treatment being at the forefront. And not only treatment, but who’s paying for it. So, that issue and then prevention, and making resources for the community. And so there was this... It was the weirdest shape, maybe it was like, 11x17”, folded, the safer sex one – Michael’s probably shown you – you know, in French and English. So, doing stuff that the institutions weren’t doing. It’s like what we do today, what I do today as a policy analyst – know your science, know your facts, know your audience, know how they talk and relate with one another, work on your best perception on what’s going to attract their attention without stigmatizing. And so I remember participating and writing that a bit ... But, the ethos was always, “You can learn, you can do it. We’ll do it together.” And just say yes, and nothing happens without people saying yes. And nobody’s going to actually try to convince you to say yes, in the sense of there were people who would say yes and if

people didn't say yes it didn't get done or it got done by the people who did. And I've never really seen that to that extent elsewhere in my life, but that's also a lesson I learned. I guess it was a point in my life with the energy of the group and I felt such an attachment to this way of doing things, or an excitement, terrifying comfort that it's something that I was socialized into. And there was no judgment. As soon as you said yes, you appeared equal just by virtue of saying yes. And so there was no hierarchy. Like, obviously people were older, younger, had more experience, had better or weaker grasps of French or of the science, but there was nothing you couldn't learn and take a good crack at doing.

GK: So, two aspects that come out of that that would be interesting for us to talk a little bit more about is what was the language of operation in ACT UP Montreal?

GB: English.

GK: That was one thing I just wanted to get some clarity on. That's interesting in Quebec at that time, so you might want to talk a little bit more about that. The other one is you also talked about the relationship between the larger general meetings and the smaller meetings. Was that the general method of operation, there would be weekly meetings that people would attend?

GB: I can't... It was a long time ago.

GK: Yes. [laughter]

GB: I presume there were regularly scheduled meetings whether they were weekly or not, because they had an ad in *The Mirror*, so every week or two weeks. It might have been weekly. There might have been that sense of we need to be doing something on an ongoing basis, so it might have been weekly. Because a lot of folks were in school or, I think, it was Michael Smith who did *The McGill Daily*, so queer activist on campus and off. And Tyler, who moved out from San Francisco, so he probably had a sense of ACT UP in the States, Tyler something-or-other. I can't remember his name. Kevin Kubeck and his partner Miguel. So, I met them all through ACT UP. At least Tyler would have brought a sense of ACT UP from the US. And people were familiar with ACT UP – US, especially after the Montreal AIDS Conference where they rubbed shoulders. That thing had rubbed off was, yes, regular meetings and then working meetings to actually get things done ... These were kitchen table meetings over food, pot, booze, coke, whatever was going. And I remember meeting at Bill Morris' house. Bill Morris was one of the managers at the leather bar, it was the big leather bar. He had a nice place in the Village and we'd meet there. We'd meet a lot at Michael Hendricks' house up on the Plateau. It was a great workspace. I guess we would also meet at the Community Centre in advance of demos and to do things because it was a big space where you could do placards.

AS: And get a lot of people. What working groups were you involved in?

GB: No idea. [laughter] I can't remember.

GK: Just related to that was the method, in terms of how ACT UP was put together, were there standing committees that would, for instance, a group that dealt with treatment issues, or was it there would be a general meeting and people would say, "We really want to do this. Let's set up a

working group to do that.” Or, “Let's have a meeting in a couple of days time and people who can come, we'll pull it together.”

GB: I think it was more the latter. Like, identifying issues and then... People became polymaths. Like, in contradistinction to nowadays, everybody knew about treatment. Everybody knew the basics about treatment because *that was the game*. And that's what people were clamoring for, and there was this discrimination in the media, and responding to all those types of things, and pushing the government to do things that they wouldn't do, but I think treatment was the focus, and services, making services and treatment accessible.

AS: And this is sometimes one of the ways that we think about the way that we're focusing, that organizations and groups that centered people living with AIDS, focusing on treatment and the possibility that they could stay alive and not just die, that's one of the key differences between people who are just focusing on prevention and only worrying about HIV-negative people, basically. At some point I want to start talking about the drug access activism part.

GB: Yes, it was about the treatment and should we be drinking urine or not? Really, people were following the most recent thing in times before the Internet. And so I think it was mostly printed materials that we were sharing around and looking at and reading. And maybe... I'm not sure how those were distributed or where we got them. I think maybe L'Androgyne, the bookstore on Saint-Laurent might have played a part... I know like, we'd get issues of *Disease Pariah News* and the more 'zine-y type stuff up from the US, but they might have also been distributed the more treatment focused stuff.

GK: Another question somewhat related to this is it sounds from what we've heard already from other people, that the major connections were south in the States. The major inspirations were ACT UP groups in New York City or San Francisco.

GB: Yes, that's where...

GK: I mean it's interesting because at the same time there's AIDS ACTION NOW! in Toronto organizing around some similar issues and it just seems like there was almost no interaction. Do you remember any?

GB: Distinct society in Quebec, that sort of Quebec, Vermont, New York corridor down to Boston. It's like; Quebecers didn't used to travel west. And so small town Ontario folks would be equally as likely to come to Montreal because gay life was a lot better in Montreal than it was in Toronto. So, if you really wanted a community and a vibrant sexual community where you could just be, you would probably come to Montreal, was my impression. There were people with some connections to Toronto, but they didn't seem super strong. It was some of the sex-working folks who might have had those sort of connections more, but people would come to Montreal because they wanted to be in Montreal. And there's the Montreal/Toronto dynamic, which may still be alive, but during my formative years into university, you know, there was Toronto/Montreal. It would have been much more likely to be in contact with people in Ottawa through personal connections than Toronto, because of proximity and Hull and borders. But, yeah, it was very south looking. It was easier to learn about of what was going on in the States because they were documenting it. They were good at documenting and publicizing what they were doing and it had a national scope.

GK: And the other side of that is that AIDS ACTION NOW! basically had no, from what we can figure out, no knowledge of really what was going on in Montreal. Even though people like, at least early on, Bernard Courte, who came from the francophone queer gay men's scene in Montreal, was quite involved with AIDS ACTION NOW!, was translating lots of material into French. I mean *AIDS Action News!* if you actually look at it, has far more French maybe than a lot of the stuff that ACT UP Montreal produced, although I know there was material in French.

GB: I think you're absolutely right. So, it would be much more a displaced francophone or chosen to go to Toronto person who would be okay with the language politics, would be okay with being a minority...

GK: Right.

GB: ...and doing what they could for their community there, but it was a very interesting dynamic. And the perception, I think it's fair to say, that what some of us held was that the quiet revolution and reverberations of that were still going on. We had a passive populace of people who were withdrawn from institutions and it was like, "What? Just be quiet about this. Don't draw attention to it. This is gay; this is bad. Don't draw attention to it." With exceptions obviously, and strong exceptions, but because language was an obvious wedge – there was culture, language, and history – so it's not surprising that the people who tried to stir shit up are not of the culture they were stirring the shit in, necessarily. Because the ramifications weren't as serious, I think, for those of us who weren't of that culture.

GK: Was there ever a proposal that you remember to actually change the working language to French from English? Because this would have common practice in many groups at that point and time in Montreal.

GB: Yes, I don't actually remember. I mean people spoke French, and we had Luc Desaulniers, who worked at a number of the bars and restaurants and he was very active, had a beautiful place in the Village. He was clearly francophone, but not a linguistic separatist, right? In that bar scene there was a lot of mixing of French and English in some of the, less the Sainte Catherine Street local watering taverns, but in more of the glitzier upscale bars and restaurants, like the Saloon and things like that. People's perspectives were a little broader, and who would travel to New York, who loved to go to New York. And so their world was a bit more open.

GK: Right, for sure.

GB: So yeah, linguistic politics were always there and at a certain point you're just like, "Fuck it! We've got to do the work." And we had Michael and René. I mean René is francophone and Michael's adopted language is French and, you know, he butchers it, or did. [laughter] You know, we all did, but Paul spoke French and David Shannon grew up in Westmount and spoke French. And he was an interpreter/translator so his French was impeccable. So, we could do what we needed to do in terms of the communications, but the cultural divide was between gay men and women and activists on the ground. It was still pretty profound, but there were bridges between individuals I think. And rightly or wrongly, I think we perceived people in the Francophone gay community overall not to be militating to the extent you would see in New York, you know, if you looked at the population. It might just be that

the Montreal population was smaller, so in any given population only so many people are going to do this type of, put themselves on the line, out there. And there was Douglas Buckley-Couvrette, who ran for office. He was bilingual, an army brat. He had grown up on bases and stuff. I guess his mother was French. Buckley would be his father.

AS: His mother was Couvrette?

GB: I presume. So yeah, there were enough people who could do both sides.

GK: So, maybe we can move into focusing more specifically on treatments for a little bit?

GB: Yes.

GK: So, there's a whole bunch of stuff around treatments. There's just basic information around treatments, there's trying to get access for people to treatments in terms of having to pay for it. What do you remember ACT UP doing around access to treatments and information around treatments?

GB: So, I remember we had a demo... We were not averse to vilifying the politicians and the Ministers, so a lot of wheat pasted posters and neat graphics. And we had a demo at the Ministry of Health and Social Services across from Montreal Chest Institute on St-Urbain where we dug up the lawn and planted crosses. I don't know if you'd seen it. René has lots of pictures of that. And that was, I think, clearly targeting the Ministry for access to medications and services. I mean reading over the questions, I don't know that at that point in time I was as enamored of understanding the frustrating bureaucratic processes as I am now. I think I had a basic understanding, but because the Quebec bureaucracy all happened in French, it wasn't on French/English Internet, I don't think I did a lot of the thinking around that. I understood what was going on. I knew why we were asking for what we were asking, but I don't know that I was participating in the strategy formulation as much as some other folks that had a greater familiarity with the issues and bureaucracy and what was needed. Like, we could all pretty much talk to the issues to passersby at demos, and we made a point of doing that to bridge that... Like, try to get the population interested, we'd always have flyers and were handing them out. And another part was the Catholic School Board and their stance on safer sex education and condoms. So, that was another target that was a lot less technical and easier to grasp.

GK: So, one of the things that Michael suggested to us, this was actually an email correspondence before we actually talked to him, was that ACT UP was really involved in, I think the way he described it, was trying to get some of the drugs that people needed categorized in particular ways – maybe it's experimental treatments that actually meant that they would be covered even if people weren't on social assistance. It wasn't a question of the drug formulary that would cover them, but it was some other way, that ACT UP was actually successful in getting more access to treatments that obviously were quite expensive if you didn't have coverage for them. Do you have any...?

GB: I don't have a good sense of that, honestly. I know that was the game. That was the life or death issue for some people, but I don't... I mean I remember wheat pasting the posters, but not the mechanics of it in the actual change.

AS: So, there were drugs that people could have accessed if they could afford them. I mean I've learned a lot about how it happened in Ontario, that there was this move to create Trillium. And you don't have to remember anything about this, but I am really interested in these. And we've learned a bit about how it happened in Nova Scotia, which was also bad. I'm really just so fascinated by the difference between nominally universal federal health care administered through these extremely different provincial contexts.

GB: Collective French bureaucratic system, like French from France, versus, I think, add-ons. Like, Quebec has universal pharmacare. It has a common formulary whether you're a public or private insurer. All private insurers have to cover at least the formulary, so that's as close to universal wraparound healthcare. You get the medical services and you get the drugs. So, it's always been different.

AS: But, there wasn't that universal formulary before ACT UP, right?

GB: I don't think so. I'm not sure what programmatic change they were able to leverage. I'm honestly not sure. There was a certain point at which I returned to school and was just trying... It was very challenging to reconcile the world of ACT UP with the world of privileged law school. And so I just had to shut it out, not shut down, but some aspects of my life I couldn't continue participating in because I had this huge challenge, like cultural challenge, of just trying to fit into that environment, as somebody who went there knowing what they wanted to do, but it wasn't what most people wanted to do.
[laughter]

AS: Also, really a moment, it sounds like, in AIDS activism where things were pretty hard, so I can imagine that the contrast was really sharp between the activist and...

GB: Yes, and it took a lot of my psychic energy to survive the law school environment, a lot of my fight. I mean ironically, and I've learned this later in life, the engagement was something you believe in can sustain you in environments that were difficult. But, my natural impulse was to shut down and put my head down and focus on what was right in front of me, so I didn't appreciate the balance of those things. It just seemed like more work and more emotional and intellectual energy, so I sort of withdrew.

AS: Yeah.

GK: So, in terms of coming back to ACT UP for a bit, there are other things that we're aware of that ACT UP was involved in. I'll just ask this one question really quickly, I don't think you're going to actually be able to tell us much about it...

GB: I'll try.

GK: Well, you do know about what happened in Quebec, and according to what Michael told us, it was after the PQ in '95 was elected that this national pharmacare program was put in place. And he at least suggest that there was a campaign prior to that to have people living with AIDS and HIV funded in the same way that people with cancer and the elderly were being funded.

GB: I recollect that as one of the goals. That makes sense even from the time of... We did do a demo down by the conference centre in Montreal. I can't remember exactly when that was, but I think that was the push of that demo. I don't know who was meeting in the conference centre, maybe it was the Liberal Party, but we were down there at the Palais des Congrès, where the International AIDS Conference had been. And I remember a demo across from... In Chinatown there's the YMCA and here's the Palais des Congrès and there's a patio here [indicating on a paper], so it happened in that area. I believe we were protesting whatever was going on inside and bringing it to whomever, and I presume it was probably the government or the Liberal Party or some sort of colloquium or something that had relevance and resonance, so that sounds really familiar, that kind of goal. But, by the time it happened in '95 I was sitting in my living room in Toronto watching the referendum in '95 as an engaged observer who just left Quebec. And so through all my years in law school I wasn't as involved with that. You know, I was still looking at issues of HIV and AIDS, but more at a law and policy level. So, I was not involved with the Quebec activism per se.

GK: So, when you were involved in ACT UP do you have any memories of the AIDS Park?

GB: Yes, I do have memories. I have a memory of either Jamie on my shoulders or me on Jamie's shoulders taking down the sign or putting up our own sign, because in Montreal they have their signposts, and then the Montreal sign hangs down, and we were wheat pasting it or putting it up or taking it down, and we tied red ribbons in all the trees.

GK: Yes, I forgot about that.

GB: Yes, and a big ACT UP banner along the wall of the building. And we had a landscape architect Normand, or was it his partner Mark? One of them was a landscape architect and they did the design for the park, which eventually came to pass. So, there was a lot of *pression* [pressure] put on the municipal administration. Like, there's so many other parks named after people and we can't name it after a disease, there was that sort of thing. "Go find the park that was named after the survivors of whatever plague." So, that back and forth and push, push, push. And I think that's probably what got Douglas really involved or focused on municipal politics. It was that engagement with the municipal bureaucracy to try to get that memorial. And it wasn't intended, in true ACT UP fashion, it wasn't intended to be a memorial garden or like a cemetery, but it was a place of gathering, of anger, of activism, a whole range of things. It wasn't just a pretty monument. And it had traditionally been a park where guys had hung out and cruised and spent time watching the people go by on that busy stretch in the Village. So, I remember that activism and the campaign around that. I think we had a sign with, I think John Doré was the mayor at that point; I see a picture with his face on something, wheatpasting.

AS: Demanding that he pay attention in a different way.

GB: And just tying red ribbons in the trees. Those were heady moments, feeling very engaged, empowered, way beyond your comfort zone. You know, drugs were not needed. There was enough adrenaline, psychotropic drugs. HIV drugs were always needed, but psychotropic drugs... [laughter]

GK: No, we know. [laughter]

GB: Yes. Like, it was the natural high of doing something and feeling powerful.

AS: And sometimes winning.

GB: Yes, sometimes winning, but taking the good fight to them.

GK: So, you mentioned before that women were also involved in ACT UP and that was crucial to it, but I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit more about that. Also, maybe tell us whether you have any memories of ACT UP doing specific things around women and AIDS, women and HIV?

GB: Yes. I don't know if you've seen the picture of the women and HIV demo down Sainte Catherine Street with the masks? I probably got it when I started working here...

AS: You have it? Cool!

[looking for photo]

GB: Maybe it wasn't that. This was not the masked one, but to draw attention to the number of women who were reported dead at that point, and the suspicion was that there were many more who weren't reported to have died from HIV on their death certificate...

AS: Do you remember any of the people?

GB: Yes, that's Jo-Anne Pickel. She's Vice Chair at the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario. I think it's HRTO.

GK: Okay.

GB: So, she went on to do her Master's in Social Work either at McGill or at U of T, and then do her law degree at McGill, her graduate law at U of T and got her PhD in Law, and worked at a law firm in Toronto called Cavalluzzo Hayes Shilton McIntyre. It was labour and human rights. And she's at the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario now. That's Catherine Polk. She and my boyfriend Jamie, they were very good friends. And she was younger because he had gone back to do his second undergrad in Science, so she was a very good friend and study partner from Ghana. It was very interesting because her mother was extremely religious, Ghanian family, but very welcoming even to her gay friend who was the AIDS activist. [looking through photos] Oh, Leslie. She was Douglas Buckley's roommate and a real fighter and, I think, they'd known each other from the Ottawa Valley area. She was a very strong activist. She worked in bars and did temp work and liked to drink. She liked a good drink, as we all did. She was around a lot.

GK: Photos are always so wonderful.

GB: René took many, many.

GK: We have some of them now.

AS: And then they had given them to the archives there. But I love having the descriptions of people. So, were you at that demo?

GB: Yes.

GK: Do you think that René took that picture?

GB: Probably. If I have it odds are that he took it and I got it from René and Michael. So, when Jamie died, Michael and René put together a package of stuff and sent it to me.

AS: Were you together that whole time?

GB: No. We reconciled after six years of not being together.

AS: Right before he died.

GB: Yes, we reconciled. So, I don't really recognize anybody else...

AS: It sounds like it would be good to interview Jo-Anne Pickel.

GB: Yeah, and she was involved in AIDS Awareness Week at McGill. She was at the McGill radio station, CKUT[?]

GK: Right.

GB: And knew a lot of the Communications dykes from Concordia.

AS: I love that category, the Communications dykes from Concordia. [laughter]

GB: They were a thing, right? They were the vanguard of using media in social ways. Yes, I mean 1991, it's time for... I guess, I was probably calling for the prescription drug coverage.

AS: Yeah, there's an AZT [azidothymidine] sign there. [in photo]

GB: We did another demo – and you probably have pictures of this one – with funerary masks on sticks. We made white Plaster of Paris masks. And so it was the World AIDS Day demo, so instead of the raucous cries, we never asked for permission to do the demo or got the permits or anything like that. We basically took over Sainte Catherine Street. There was a silent funeral procession from the downtown core all the way to the Village, and it was very powerful.

AS: There was a lot of people too.

GB: But, that was a time when there were a lot of demos. There's still people who go out to demos in Montreal. I remember going to the pro-choice demos of Montreal, anti-apartheid demos, you know, Montreal was... Like, people got out on the streets. And then there was sort of cultural activism around the bars in Montreal because... So, the leather bar let dykes in, or women in, one night a year.

AS: One night a year!

GB: Yeah, Kox, K-O-X, was the bar where Bill worked, and had line ups around the block... So, one night a year. It's ironic, I always found this ironic and hypocritical. I got kicked out of that bar for having sex in the washroom in a bar that was a leather bar and had this hypersexual reputation, and god knows what happened there, but actually I just found it so ironic. It was liquor licensing I guess and whatever. So, I don't know if we actually protested there, but there was a bar up the street. There's a Starbucks there now and right across there was a bar, and they wouldn't let drag queens in. So, we all got dolled up and went and demanded to be let into the bar. This was the type of spin off LGBT rights cultural activism stuff. I mean Michael had actually come from an anti-racist background of organizing and activism in Montreal, and I think that influenced our worldview, it was fairly broad; and the folks from *The McGill Daily* struggle, so it was a pretty broad perspective. And then people like Paula Sypnowich were brilliant, theoretically brilliant, practically astute. There's an understanding that Quebec was a very liberal place in many ways, but backward in some ways too, in terms of gender and what it was to be male and male identification, but it also had great queens and scenes and performative drag, which was very different from what I came to know as drag elsewhere. I thought, "Oh, it's not super interesting elsewhere," or not as interesting. So, there was that kind of element, of a cultural political engagement that spun off.

AS: You said that you weren't so into the bar scene, but was Sex Garage part of your...?

GB: Oh yeah, I was arrested.

GK: Oh, you were arrested. Can you tell us a little more about that?

GB: Sure. I wasn't a big party guy. I was just didn't think I fit in. I thought I fit in with the skinnier people who liked to talk about politics and books and other stuff. And I had grown up at drinking bars on Saint-Laurent. That's where I learned to drink, get drunk and have fun. So, that was sort of pre-gay life or coming out time, so the gay bars were not... I liked dance music, but I felt more comfortable drinking with friends and falling in love with straight guys. And so...

AS: That queer comfort. [laughter]

GB: Internalized homophobia, it's a nice place to live. And so these parties happened and Blane was involved. And Leslie would always work at the parties, and Alex - tall, Black guy who was in *Lilies*... Alexander Chapman, who was fabulous in *Lilies*, he would always work. It was people from the bar scene, but on the edge. This was a time when Old Montreal was still full of lofts, and even though this was on the edge of Old Montreal there were still lots of lofts. So, we heard about it one morning. I think it was by phone, because that's the way we used to hear about things. And there was a protest scheduled for that afternoon, not sure if we went to the Community Centre and then went over, or just went to site of the protest ... So, it happened at night. I guess in the really early hours of the morning there was a protest ... I think we went to Community Centre, sharing a lot of stories of what had actually happened. And then I think there was a protest near the Sex Garage lofts and then the next day downtown by the police station that was responsible. Like, the police station was here and then the Concordia Metro, the far west entrance was here [indicating on a paper], so we took over that intersection.

AS: Was the demo to protest the treatment of people at Sex Garage by the cops?

GB: Yes. They took off their badges so they couldn't be identified. I mean Montreal police are a piece of work. They were white guys, like brutish white guys. And so we sat in until they removed us forcefully.

GK: And you got arrested as part of that.

GB: Yes, and I was taken inside a cell, documented. So, there's a huge overlap between the people who were doing organizing around this and ACT UP folks. They were organized to organize. It brought in other people; it brought in politicized party people. People who were in that Plateau gay scene, as much as people in the Village because the Sex Garage parties cut across those two worlds, the Les Arts up on the Plateau and down in the Village.

AS: Was that the first time you were arrested?

GB: Yes, it was.

AS: It must have been really not a great first arrest.

GB: It was brutal. There was a lot of screaming and linking arms. You know, they were prying people apart and dragging people. And then as you went in through the doors there was cops on either side and they'd kick you and take digs. One guy, Edward, got his testicles ruptured! I remember being up at the hospital that day too. I don't know if we were checked out of the hospital or if we just went out to be there and see what's happening to him once we got out. Because I think he was locked up and then they finally took him out because it was clear that he was injured ... And they interviewed us individually upstairs, not nice. Not nice at all. And that went on for a while, so that siphoned off energy in organizing because those of us who were arrested had meetings with lawyers as a group, and how we were going to fight this or not ... I don't think we were tapped into the Montreal legal scene in a way that maybe folks here would have been tapped into the Toronto legal scene. So, the players at the Quebec bar were not stepping up for these partiers, who just happened to be LBGT people, in the same way that it might have happened here. It seemed kind of scattered and that we were getting community minded lawyers ... These weren't leading civil libertarians at the bar.

AS: And it's a lot of energy and work to figure out what to do with legal charges.

GB: Yes, the appearance ... You had to appear, because they had given us a summons to appear before a court and plead. And then there was the decision about how this was going to go and eventually we ended up pleading guilty to a number of municipal charges and criminal charges were dropped. I think we were charged with three criminal offenses and three offences under the municipal bylaws. So, it was painfully unfair, but for most people it was as good as we could do because there was a whole bunch of us, and people didn't want to go through the trials. You know, the system had already brutalized people and we didn't really feel terribly empowered to go back into the system. Yeah, so that also was activism and energy...

AS:…siphoned off.

GB: Well, yes, siphoned off or injected into, or…

AS: Oh, I see. Yeah.

GB: Yes. I mean it was all the same core of people. And then Michael and René took it in an equal marriage direction, like their energy and activism. But Michael stayed involved in Stella [sex worker organizing group] and CPAVIH [Comité des Personnes Atteintes du VIH du Québec], so there was a lineage there.

GK: So, just around ACT UP, do you remember ACT UP doing any work around prisoners?

GB: I do. When I came to Toronto, the summer before I went to law school I applied to a number of law schools and I fully hoped to go to York, until I actually went there and saw how far it was. [laughter] No, I fully hoped to go to York. So, I applied to York, U of T, Ottawa, and McGill, I think. The day I got here mail forwarding said, “You’ve been accepted to McGill,” so I thought I would summer here and then back to Montreal, because I didn’t get into U of T or York. We were working on, I think as a result of prison work we’d done in Montreal – Jane Doe had a friend who was a long time drug user and a super bright guy. And so he was on the inside and… Michael worked at the National Film Board, so he interacted with a lot of the arts community. And so he knew what was going on inside in terms of sharing and how people living with HIV were treated, and so there was a discussion and dialogue about that. And I can’t point to specific actions, but the summer when I moved here he hooked me up with this woman named Gay from CKLN, who did a prison justice show there at CKLN and so I worked with her on a Prisoner’s Justice Day broadcast.

GK: It was Gay Bell?

GB: Yes, exactly! I remember going to her house in Bain Co-op over on the other side and sitting around a kitchen table with Julia Barnett when PASAN [Prisoners with HIV/AIDS Support Action Network] was formed. I think it’s their twenty-fifth anniversary this Thursday. And so I remember being around that table, so prisons in my mind is more about getting hooked into Ontario, but it happened, the connection was from Quebec. Michael hooked me up with Gay to do the radio show for Prisoners’ Justice Day that year. But I presume, because of that connection… He had an eastern European or Slavic name, the guy… So, we knew what was going on inside, so there was a consciousness of that. I’m not exactly sure what activism per se was done, but I think we were attuned to some of the issues.

GK: I guess another ACT UP Montreal related question was, there’s a Queer Nation that also gets formed in Montreal. What was the relationship between ACT UP and the Queer Nation group?

GB: Overlap, would be the big thing. [laughter] I think it was about creating space, safety, and survival, and I think the HIV activism was the wedge that permitted the activism on LGBT issues. It was empowering, a lot of activism was built off of HIV activism. And it was more radically about queer stuff, although you couldn’t pull out HIV because so many people were HIV-positive. It wasn’t like the equal marriage thing. It wasn’t a nice easy hiving off because of identities and people. Yes, T-shirts… I’m trying to think of… Did we do a kiss in? I think we did kiss ins. But it was definitely something that

this small group brought in other people who were more interested in that aspect. But, I don't really remember a lot of the activity around that.

GK: So, the last specifically ACT UP related question is what is your sense of how ACT UP Montreal began to dissipate and fade away?

GB: My sense is from afar watching it was that the energy went to Queer Nation and into institutional processes of informing the Quebec Human Rights Commission, and the big push for equal rights for LGBT people. And, I think, they leveraged the Sex Garage/Queer Nation energy and actually leveraged that into a bit of a broad agenda. And the Human Rights Commission, while an arms length body from the government, is part of the institutions of the government. So, that was a huge opening and opportunity ... And I believe that creating hearings was an opportunity for you to say things in your own words, as opposed to going through a predetermined process of, you know, here's your fifteen minutes, "Thank you, Madam Chair." So, I think, a lot of energy went towards that, is my impression from afar. The agenda broadened and I presume as the agenda was broadening it was also because medications were starting to be covered and coming out of the AIDS conference in '96 in Vancouver, we had the cocktail, the combination therapy, which had the Lazarus effect for many people. And people were tired, and I think at a certain point institutions had formed, and the institutions were aware there were resources, you know, paid positions. Some sense of stability and doing the fight on a full time or part time paid basis emerged.

AS: So those things together changed how the activist ecosystem is happening.

GB: Yes, I think so. CATIE [Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange] here was... The activism went into treatment and the institutionalization of CATIE and getting treatment information out. A link between Montreal and Toronto was we would get treatment info from CATIE. I remember that as one of the sources, of our information, high quality. That's my impression, but in the later years I wasn't that involved and moved to Toronto, but that's my impression of the factors that came to influence how things were done. And governments had started to pay attention to the extent that there was funding for things like CPAVIH, even though they churned and churned. But there was funding for a stand-alone organization in Montreal and some in other places too.

GK: Right. So, I think we're moving towards the end in terms of questions. One of the questions that we ask people is, because we want what we're doing to not only embody the reflections and memories of people who are still around, but also as much as possible people who passed during this period of time. So, you did mention Kalpesh at one point, so I wanted to ask you about memories of Kalpesh given that we want to construct a memories section about him. And he bridges Montreal and Toronto too. Also, other people who might of have died during those years who you think should be remembered as part of the work that we're doing.

GB: Yes. I mean Kalpesh didn't probably perceive it at the time, but as somebody who was precarious in terms of immigration status here, on a visa, as South Asian, effeminate, rail thin male in Montreal, but he had so much fight in him, and so much passion. And he was a pure scientist, he was a basic bench scientist and I'm sure he would scream at his principle investigators too. Like, he just had so much passion; he knew the science inside out. He was incredibly warm and generous and caring at the same time. So, he was amazing. Bill was amazing. Bill Morris was an amazing character too. He was a big

guy, no nonsense, told it like it is, didn't have a lot of truck for language politics. They worked it out in the bar scene.

AS: Yes, he was the bartender at Kox?

GB: Yes, bartender or manager. So, you know, in the social world they'd figured out the language. Like, leather was the language, or whatever. So, he didn't have a lot of time for language politics because he was quite sick. He had health problems that came and went. I remember seeing these huge ddI horse pills when we were there in his kitchen having dinner...

GK: Can you describe what you mean by ddI horse pills? I have a general idea, but I'm not sure.

GB: So, ddI was one of the first medications and it's related to ddT, Agent Orange. [laughter]

GK: Yes, I was arrested trying to get access to it, so I'm familiar with the drug.

GB: Yes, so they were horse pills. They were *huge*, these things that people had to swallow. Like, it was literally the size of a pill that you would give a horse, these massive pills that people would have to swallow many of. In retrospect, they were giving people doses so many times what the effective clinical dose we now know is, but with monotherapy like, go hit hard! And so they were toxic and there were huge side effects.

AS: Did people talk about that this was a version of Agent Orange?

GB: I don't know. Well, it's a chemical. Like, dd – ddT, ddI, there was ddC – basically, all the same root, a highly destructive chemical. So, I just remember... Because people had a lot of thrush in those days too, so swallowing wasn't always easy. You had to four times a day, or what have you, take these massive pills and it was ugly. Hugh was amazing too, Hugh Ballem.

GK: You're remembering that that was his last name?

GB: Yes, it fits together now.

GK: He was quite involved in the radical left before this.

GB: Oh, okay. He had a beautiful voice. Like, a beautiful deep, rich, booming voice in both French and English. And his French was impeccable and his English was impeccable too. Like, his was the most beautiful apartment I'd ever been too, you know, computer monitors and books and dictionaries and thesauruses. It was like, wow! It brought me into... I interacted with people who I had not interacted with... Like, these were intellectuals of the Anglo/Franco, especially Franco intellectuals. Like, I grew up in the suburbs with a TV with maybe five books in the house. These were people who had walls of books, and ... hard wood floors were not a sign of poverty. [laughter] I was a lower middle class kid, so it just opened up the world in a way to see these people who were incredibly articulate. And he was also beautiful and probably a little vain, and dressed really well.

GK: Oh yes.

GB: You know, he swam; he was a swimmer too and really took care of himself. And to see the disfiguring effect of shingles, let alone the pain on his face. He had it down his ribs too because it was common, it lives in the nerve endings, so he had it down his ribs and on the one side of his face. And you were just constantly presented with these visual reminders. It was never far. And Kalpesh was always rail thin on account of his... I mean, that was his morphology, but he was also not well a lot of the time. And Bill, I remember him being not well. Yeah, having people who were not well around. And Douglas passed away from apparently undiagnosed HIV. Here is an activist who, despite what he fought for and preached, probably knew deep down that he was positive, and chose his path for whatever reason. So, that was kind of stunning to hear when he died, it was kind of shocking. And Paula Sypnowich had a roommate... I think it was Chris, Carl ... Anyway, he was very sick and subsequently died, but I know they were very close and it was devastating.

AS: And you talked about Jamie who was involved...

GB: Yeah, Jamie actually died of, never found the primary tumors, but the presentation was lung cancer. So, he had feared AIDS and made it his life to work in public health. And he thought at first he'd got TB [tuberculosis] because he worked at Seaton House, the shelter, as part of his work and there'd been a TB outbreak that summer, so he thought he just had TB. And it quickly turned out, "Oh, you've got metastasized cancer in your bones and your organs," so he lived about six months from diagnosis. And it was... I mean, my parents died when I was a teenager, but still the idea of your contemporaries dying is something different. And it puts things in perspective when HIV is your frame of reference for death, disease, destruction, but then this sort of comes at you out of left field. And it was devastating in a different way. Because it was unexpected, and the patent unfairness that he'd survived HIV and, you know, left a really extremely abusive home at the age of 14, and had been in a parental role to his mother on and off since that time, and had done all of this. And he was in psychoanalysis four or five times a week to deal with some of the issues that came up with living with a father who was an abusive cop ... Not that there's ever a lot of justice in family violence, but there was no recourse. And a brother who was a neo-Nazi, so, you know. I remember when we first got together, around the time I joined ACT UP, he'd wake up with night terrors. It was a strange road for me, to see that sense of how deeply it affected him.

AS: And it's amazing that people can come out of that and continue to fight.

GB: Yes. And I think he would have continued to fight. Obviously, being a physician comes with a certain comfort, once he paid down his hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt, I mean he would have appreciated the money to travel or whatever, but he still would have picked the fights. Like, taken on the fights. He was there for a purpose.

GK: So, the last two questions are simply whether anything has arisen for you as we've been talking that you haven't had the chance to talk about? So, this is your chance to say whatever you want to.

GB: I think that ACT UP was a particular way of understanding volunteering or giving of oneself ... It fit with my personality, my nascent personality, it allowed it to come out, this environment of intellectual-free for-all with respect for the people and their ideas. I've had to learn to pay attention to

being strategic in the way one communicates in groups, because around the table there was always the understanding that we would arrive at a position, and that was our position, but they were hard fought. And so that's the experience I've had working in legal clinics and other HIV groups ... Like, in my paid work as well, but it hasn't always served me well in more institutional settings and organizations. So, that was really interesting and something I brought with me. Because, there were incredibly bright articulate passionate people, and also people who were very strong who didn't bring a university education to the table, but brought some really firmly held beliefs and wisdom, and that was super interesting. It also compressed class, because you had someone like Hugh, you had Earl Pinchuk was another guy, from the Jewish community in Montreal, or Toronto I'm not sure which. He was gay. Neil was another one. Neil... I forget his name, but I think from a Jewish family in Toronto. And so it sort of compressed class, all these people who were working, not working, *giving* of themselves in a cause they believed in, which is really not my experience with volunteering necessarily in other settings. People of a certain class sat on the Board, and you sort of go on down. And I've sat on Boards and I still serve beer and collect empty beer bottles out of the park at Pride and what have you. So, it's that idea that I don't see as much. So two things, saying yes and not being scared. We took care of each other, but not in a hand holding way. We created a community of peers, but we didn't... You know, there was not a lot of intentional or conscious mentoring. It was just a way of doing as opposed to this HR [Human Resources] driven world.

AS: I liked how you said that about saying yes created the community...

GB: It always has been and it always will be, but people nowadays are much more, I think, reticent to just say yes and jump in. I see it in my work ... You know, Harper was incredibly destructive of people's attention to politics in their work, as opposed to politics that structured what they could do in their work. And so there's, at the same time, been almost a fetishization or a nostalgia around AIDS activism. We trained a generation at least of service providers and stayed away from advocacy and politics. If you look across the country, I think, you'll see very few organizations... Positive Living BC, with an entirely positive board and a very politically astute Executive Director, still engages in advocacy and politics. I think ACT [AIDS Committee of Toronto] is coming back that way under John Maxwell, but with the ascendance of communications we don't see policy as a function. If you only know the politics of funding and not the politics of the environment you're working in, I don't know that you're, in my view, you're not meeting the needs of everybody you're serving, especially the most marginalized folks often, in a systemic way. And so it's a shame that that's not there, because one of the issues I'm working on now is access to Truvada for PrEP [Pre-exposure prophylaxis] and people don't really have a sense – the docs do – about public funding for drugs. And some of the clinical pharmacists in big institutional settings do, but a lot of people don't understand drug approval processes and the minutia, and the bureaucracy, and who's making the decision about needs and implications, and really don't understand activism.

So, there's a lot of calls for activism these days, and activism is something that somebody else does, or something. The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, a lot of them look to be activists, but they had to focus their issues, so they don't do a lot of domestic treatment stuff. So, something like PrEP, everybody's looking at other people. And I perceive that people don't feel comfortable looking into or inquiring into institutions and institutional dynamics and the interplay between politics, the civil service, community... So I think that's a shame just because it's a particular way of thinking. And I don't know, people do become activists and take on causes. I think we see a lot of women in particular, who lose

children to X, Y, or Z and teach themselves and just do it by saying yes. But I think we've lost a bit of that in HIV over all. And the capacity to do it is really diminished, let alone the funding. And the battles under the Harper years were, "Well, we're not moving unless we go to court, and when we do go to court they'll regulate sex work in another way, or put up huge barriers to supervised injection." And in my work around HIV criminalization, because the legal policy folks often dominate that discussion, other people have felt excluded. Because once again it's people who are cultured into free flowing respect for ideas, and there's an expectation that people come to the table with a fair amount of knowledge and ability. So, even though there are non-lawyers around the table, they tend to be people like Eric Mykhalovskiy, who is involved in HIV politics, or Tim McCaskell. So, folks who have a sense of a particular politic and ... but for the more service provider types of people, and the more programme-delivery people it's been a very alienated experience, given the power structure. And it's not about funding or service provision. It's about legal regulation, so it's interesting.

I'm encouraged to see collectives in the HIV world. It's not so much HIV, but gay men's health – the collectives of gay, bi, trans, pan guys pop up in different cities trying to do things a bit differently, so that's certainly interesting to me. And HIV continues to be heavily stigmatized...

AS: ...and criminalized.

GB: ...and criminalized. And so maybe what's needed is to work on health in a more holistic way as opposed to, "It's a condom." [laughter]

AS: Right.

GB: "You bad, he good." It's a little more complicated. I was writing my application for law school at the time I was in ACT UP, so ACT UP clearly affected my trajectory in life in a profound way ... I've been in and out of HIV a number of times both in terms of personal commitment, and you know, paid and volunteer work. I've only recently seen the wisdom in fighting for something over the long term and there not be a lot of material change in people's circumstances. And these fights are long-term fights. And I don't know that ACT UP prepared me for that because there was so much to do in those days and so much action and activity, it was just on the next. You didn't have to sit with the...

AS: It was the immediate needs.

GB: Yes, you didn't have to sit with the lack of progress or perceived failure or sense of not being empowered ... Like, not feeling empowered over the long term, like during the Harper years. There's only so much you can go for on anger. So, those would be my reflections.

GK: That's great.

AS: Good. Thank you.

GK: So, we're at the very last question. You've already given us lots of names of people to possibly talk to, but is there anyone who you haven't mentioned who you think we definitely must speak to?

GB: Has anyone talked to you about José Sousa in Montreal?

GK: I think someone did.

GB: Yes.

GK: I'm sure someone did, but I can't remember who it was.

GB: Jose was, I think, roommates with a couple of folks and was part of the movement. And being an allophone – non-Francophone, non-Anglophone – he bridged some of the communities and organizations. Puelo Deir ... Interesting guy. He went on post-Sex Garage to plan Montreal Pride Divers/Cité, became a force behind that. [...] And Kevin Kubeck, who's now in Vancouver. And I believe he works at UBC and was studying botany there.

GK: And was he involved in ACT UP?

GB: He was involved in ACT UP. He was a punk kid who grew up outside of Montreal, so he was equally at home in French and English, into punk and cats and was like, an early Mac adopter. [laughter] When they still had that handle. The first time I'd seen them I was like "Woah!" They were blue, they were like, coloured. Yeah, so Kevin. And Luke Desaulniers, I don't know if he's around in Montreal. He had amazing social skills, and was an amazing community organizer, and talented. Like, service industry guy, party planning, he was extremely generous and warm.

AS: Cool.

GK: Well, this has been really wonderful so we want to thank you.

AS: Yes, thank you.

GB: Thank you.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]