

AAHP
AIDS Activist History Project

Interview Transcript 29

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Interviewee:	Karen Herland
Interviewers:	Gary Kinsman & Chris Hurl
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Persons present: Karen Herland – KH
Gary Kinsman – GK
Chris Hurl – CH

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

GK: It is March 23, 2015 and we're interviewing Karen Herland in Montreal. We start off with some questions that we ask everyone just to establish some common reference points. The first one we start off with is: when did you first hear about AIDS?

KH: I've been trying to remember and I can't honestly remember when I first heard about AIDS. I know – unlike a lot of my students now who grew up in and with AIDS – there was a point at which there was no AIDS and then there was a point at which there was AIDS, but I've lost where that line is. There was always in my mind this issue that needed to be addressed, this community that wasn't being heard. I mean that's how it was always framed in my head – this conversation that had to happen and I can't remember when that wasn't the case.

GK: Do you remember some of the first things you might have read about AIDS, or some of the publications that might have been reference points for you?

KH: At the time – and I hadn't remembered to the degree this was true until I started re-watching the footage of the Mark S King collection of video recorded here in Montreal at the 1989 conference – but at the time, my political background... Well, there was a lot of women's movement feminism, but at the time that the HIV conference came to Montreal and around that period of time, I was mostly involved in anarchist organizing and anarchist communities; and so I was involved in the anarchist bookstore. I was part of that collective and part of the café collective, so a lot of what I saw and read came to us through the publications that we would see there. So, on the one hand, the really extreme, strange stuff from Earth First!, which in their bio- kind of referencing saw AIDS as an equalizer to take humans off the planet and create more space for the natural world. And so there was that sort of very strange, extreme framing of HIV. And then things in Mother Jones and also the gay and queer journals and magazines like Rites that I would look at. So, there were all of these different voices and different ways of framing it that I was exposed to early on that were my prime reference I guess, besides mainstream news.

And I had been involved from the early days with Comité sida aide Montréal in the mid-80s. I had my work career. After studying journalism and women's studies, I did a lot of community work, basically make-work type projects through Unemployment Insurance at the time. And so I would do all these different projects. I had done projects with Head and Hands, which was a health centre for young people, not unlike the Hassle Free Clinic in Toronto. And I had worked with DES (diethylstilbestrol) Action Canada, which was a group sensitizing young people to possible

repercussions of their mothers having taken certain medications during their pregnancies before these children were born. So, I had this kind of health background and this community background that sent me to do AIDS education work through CSAM (Comité sida aide Montréal) in the mid-80s, right when they formed.

GK: Do you have any memories of what you would have done with CSAM?

KH: Oh yeah. They were the first umbrella AIDS organization, and I was involved in a number of areas. I was responsible for training volunteers for the Info Santé Health Line, which was an emergency line for people with questions about HIV/AIDS. I was the assistant director or assistant coordinator of education/communication, so that had me helping to produce pamphlets and materials like that. At one point, I worked specifically with a group of Latino lesbians and gays in Montreal, doing sensitization work with them and helping them develop tools to bring back to their community centres around HIV/AIDS. So, that was also what I was doing at the time... Volunteer-training more generally, and I was responsible for the bank of people who would do témoignages (testimonials) – first-person kind of speeches in other community groups or workplaces or elsewhere where people would want to meet someone living with HIV/AIDS and have some sort of one-on-one or small group or presentation/discussions of what it was like. And what was very, very current in the mid- to late-80s was people wanting to meet someone or wanting to get a first hand experience. So, I was responsible for doing that booking, which was sometimes fraught because we'd get very strange requests. You know, "We don't want a gay man. We want some..." [laughter] You know, "We want someone young. We specifically want a woman." And so sometimes it was a bit of a scenario.

GK: Given that involvement, this is actually going to lead to two other questions. One is: we're actually quite interested, because this has come up in a number of locations where we've done interviews, with those moments of rupture between the AIDS Service Organizations as they're developing and people living with AIDS and HIV. I mean they take different forms in different places. Do you have any memories of that happening here?

KH: Well, I mean definitely. CSAM was a very particular scenario. There had been from within the gay community, MARC/ARMS (Montreal AIDS Resource Committee/Association des Ressources Montréalaises contre le Sida) was the sort of acronym of the earliest organization, which was very much a kind of meet-around-the-living-room buddy-system – very frontline, very community built and organized. CSAM I think probably marked in Montreal the beginning of what many people have now called the 'professionalization' of AIDS. And so this large umbrella organization had a particular committee of and by people living with HIV, CPAVIH (Comité des personnes atteintes du VIH du Québec) – People Living with HIV Committee, which formed within that group and eventually I think split off on its own. There was a project specifically for gay men focusing on sort of the bars and bathhouses and the community centres, called Action Séro Zéro, which years later, evolved into what's now Rézo. There was the English component, ACCM (AIDS Community Care Montreal), which eventually splintered off into its own group. CSAM was sort of supposed to be the main clearinghouse. So, things like the health line and counseling services were built into that. There was I think growing dissatisfaction or conflict between the various specific groups that

began to develop. GAP-VIES (Le Groupe d'Action pour la Prévention de la Transmission du VIH et l'Éradication du Sida) – that's a group specifically for the Haitian community – I don't know if it started in CSAM; I can't recall or if it started apart. But, certainly CSAM in its attempts to be everything, in some ways, it could be argued that it wasn't very inclusive at all; it was trying to do too much in too many directions. And so any of the smaller groups that developed within and through it became frustrated with it at different points for different reasons: That it wasn't prioritizing people living with HIV. That it wasn't properly bilingual. That it didn't deal with other cultural communities. So, all of those tensions for sure existed.

I actually was re-reading some material about this at the time, and something that I don't recall from my time there – I was fairly young when I worked there but some people felt that it was too focused on dying and not on living with HIV. That was a critique I read. I don't remember that specifically, but I do believe it.

The Executive Director had started in her job claiming that her brother had recently died of AIDS - giving her first-hand experience on the front lines. In addition, he had life insurance that, although currently tied up in wrangling with the insurance company which didn't want to pay out, claiming his status had been a pre-existing condition when he got the policy [a very common problem we dealt with regularly at CSAM] it would eventually be donated to CSAM.

A lot of money was borrowed against this policy – which turned out not to exist (I'm not even sure the brother had ever existed).

I believe she was eventually convicted of fraud....

This rupture was important also because it closed down CSAM. The criticisms of the group lacking community focus, being spread too thin, being too 'professional' etc... all became justifications for other groups with limited resources coming to take over projects and dismantle CSAM – a situation that I found very difficult at the time. I mean I wasn't particularly high up in the organization but I think even my bosses were unaware of what had been going on until it all came out and literally within a week... I was in the circumstance of having found out something was up and having the Centre close and being out of a job.

GK: Do you remember what year that would have been?

KH: I know it was October because it happened when I went away for Thanksgiving to Boston. It would have been '87.

GK: Okay. The other question... You already mentioned that there was a group formed for the Haitian community?

KH: GAP-VIES.

GK: Do you remember anything about issues that Haitian community representatives might have raised around racism, or any of their particular concerns and how CSAM was either addressing them or not?

KH: I mean there was a large question of cultural sensitivity. I think that was the big issue was whether you were inside or outside of the community. Racism was adjacent to or integrated into those differences, but I think there was just a larger question of knowing and understanding and being part of the community. I am pretty sure racism did have a large part to play in this. AIDS was a catalyst to bring certain people together, but it also foregrounded some serious differences, and I think that this would have been one. I only recently heard statistics about how hard the Haitian Community in Montreal was hit in the early years – unlike almost anywhere else in North America – Montreal’s early statistics demonstrate that 70% of cases of HIV infection were among Haitians. The fact that I did not know that then speaks volumes. At the time, there was a public health doctor – Doctor Alix Adrien, who was Haitian and he was very high up in the public health hierarchy, who I think was very much a kind of go-between between the community and more official bodies and programs and policy-making.

GK: So, you were actually involved in one of the developing ASOs (AIDS Service Organizations). When does it sort of begin to occur to you or how does it begin to occur to you that AIDS is not simply a medical health problem, but also raises really important political or activist questions.

KH: Well, actually, I would say that that was backwards for me. I saw it as a social justice issue almost before or parallel to understanding it as a health issue. It was always for me a question of: Where does the stigma come from? How is this constructed socially? How is this dealt with as quote-unquote “other”? And something that now I guess has been talked about in terms of AIDS exceptionalism – why contact-tracing doesn't make sense in the context of HIV/AIDS. Why the questions of anonymity and confidentiality and how those lines get sort of balanced... All of those things for me were probably almost prior to my specific understanding of certain elements of transmission or information-sharing. I mean they were very, very critical to how I understood the issue and how I addressed it – the contexts I was in.

GK: So, you had said before that one of the major things you were involved in before the Montreal AIDS conference were anarchist involvements. One of the questions we always ask people is what type of political experiences and perspectives they brought with them into AIDS activism, so you might just want to talk a little bit more about that.

KH: Well, the anarchist community was where my primary affiliation was when things first started. But I had come with a background in feminism as well from my school years, especially my undergrad school years. I studied Women’s Studies at the Simone de Beauvoir Institute, and I also studied at Concordia in the School of Community and Public Affairs. So, that college within the university was really key at demonstrating how an interdisciplinary approach to understanding politics – how history, political science, economics, sociology all impact and inform each other in terms of framing questions of public interest. And then those two kinds of pieces... I did a lot of

community work as I suggested, and then eventually kind of fell in with the anarchist crowd. [laughter] As I said, I was involved in the bookstore collective. I did regular shifts there. I was doing community radio as well with the Women's Collective. So, I did a lot of political organizing through that as well. I was involved in an anarchist café that existed in the Milton Parc collective commune, which was a space in Montreal that had developed as an anti-gentrification project in the McGill ghetto. I was involved with that as well. And all of these different pieces had led to a long history of working in community and in community organizations, with varying degrees of success [laughter] and capability. I hadn't done any major thinking about a lot of these issues, but I was constantly being exposed to a fairly critical perspective on policy and government and decision-making and power in very broad terms. And so I took that healthy skepticism with me in whatever organizing I did.

GK: We are moving into the period in which Réaction SIDA gets formed. So, I do know that the context for Réaction SIDA being formed was actually the murder of Joe Rose. Maybe you could tell us a little bit about who he was, and what people did around that.

KH: It's actually funny ... It was simultaneous. Because what happened was with this background I had in community organizing and recognizing the need to organize... literally, it was the situation where one day in March I woke up and said, "Oh my goodness, the AIDS conference is going to be here in three months and we have done nothing." Like, suddenly I was responsible for doing something. [laughter] Who knows? So, "We have done nothing. We have to get organized." And it was very amorphous in my head what that meant. I think – I don't know – we would have some billets and some poster paper made available and that would be all we needed. That would be great! [laughter] But I also was like, "Okay." And I'm this young woman with... I believe I had green hair at the time. I don't know how credible I'm going to be in all of this, especially as a woman. So, the first thing I did was... "Okay. I need a gay man to work with. Who am I going to call?" And I called Eric Smith because he was a friend of mine from my student journalist days. He had been at the McGill Daily when I was at the Concordia student paper, and we'd known each other for years. We got along well. So, I was like, "Eric, we have to do something." And he was like, "Okay, let us have a meeting." Like, "Okay. Well, I'm part of the anarchist bookstore collective. We have an empty space in the building. We can hold our meeting there." That was literally the community organizing equivalent of Mickey Rooney's, "We've got a barn and a cause, and let's put on a show," right. That was pretty much it. So, I called this meeting, you know, back in the olden pre-internet days. That was phone trees and word of mouth and talking about it in the bars – blah, blah, blah. I guess about 35-40 people came. And our basic context was, "What are we going to do about this conference coming up?" And it was at the meeting that Joe Rose became the issue. A lot of people who attended the meeting were very upset by the fact that Joe Rose had been murdered on a bus coming home, on March 19, 1989.

Joe Rose had been a young, gay man – everyone remembers his pink hair. I didn't actually know him personally, but he was a young gay man in his twenties who was living with HIV, I think actually had AIDS at that point – though in '89 that distinction was not that important. Most of the time, if you were diagnosed, you already had AIDS. So, he was ill and he was coming home one night with a friend on the bus heading towards I believe Frontenac Metro, or maybe he took the

Metro and was getting on a bus at Frontenac. Either way, a group of various reports of skinheads, or young men, started harassing them because they looked different, because they were obviously, what we would now say, gender queer, but at the time they just looked different. They were weird. And so there was a sort of altercation and Joe got stabbed and died that night, or soon after. And so that happened just at the time when we were starting to organize. So, when we all met... My intention was to meet to talk about the conference. A lot of people who were there were like we need to have a candlelight vigil. We need to do something about Joe Rose, because this has just happened and this is important. And I remember a couple of things about that meeting. I remember there was a journalist from the Gazette who was there – Irwin Block – and it took a lot of energy to get him out of the room. He didn't understand why we didn't want coverage and we didn't particularly think the very first time we were all laying eyes on each other was the appropriate moment to start setting up the media PR strategy. So, there was a bit of frustration around that. And then I also remember being a little flummoxed by everyone wanting to talk about Joe Rose ... I was like, "No. We have this conference to think about. Why are we talking about Joe Rose?" And then on the other hand also realizing, it's a good, concrete way for us to begin to work together and get to know each other and have a short term goal that we can realize that will help bind us together for organizing to come. And so we did have a vigil early on and then started to meet about the conference. And as far as organizing to set up for the conference, I give huge credit to Eric. Like I said, my concept of being ready would be to have some markers [laughter] and snacks available. And Eric brilliantly – like, brilliantly – through, again, that same Milton Parc Housing Coop, through connections he had there, got us this space up at Park and Pine. Not super-close to the conference, but a short bus ride and a reasonable walk away, which he equipped with the cutting edge technology of the time which was a TV, FAX machine, some crappy old computers and printers, and the much-vaunted poster paper that was my key element [laughter]. And that sort of became our think-tank headquarters for the period of the conference, and that's all him. He set all of that up.

GK: We're going to have to talk to him.

KH: Oh, you will have to talk to him. [laughter] He's awesome.

GK: For sure. We'll come back to the Action Centre for the conference. So, how did Réaction SIDA try to organize itself or make decisions or any of those things that first meeting which... Was that first meeting in March?

KH: Yeah, it was in March.

GK: ...and June, was when the conference happened.

KH: We met regularly. We had little sub-committees. There was a group of people who were responsible for doing outreach with ACT UP New York and with AIDS ACTION NOW! – let them know who we were, where we were, how to find us, find out from those groups what was needed and how, you know... So, how we could be useful, but also how we could coordinate. And so there was all of that happening. It was the actual planning for the conference, publicity, getting more

people involved. It was really... just a set of meetings. It was such a telescoped period of time really, like, it was no time at all between our first meeting and when the conference was. The fact that we managed anything is a bit shocking, and I think it also explains why we didn't really exist beyond that.

GK: Great. I guess just one question that might help to come back to things later regarding the activist tensions at the conference. While AIDS ACTION NOW! develops into a Steering Committee-based group with working groups, ACT UP New York City has almost a General Assembly model of how it makes decisions. How did decisions get made in Réaction SIDA?

KH: We worked pretty much around consensus for the most part. There weren't that many of us and it wasn't that complex. So, we set tasks and then either a smaller committee or, you know, collectively we would manage them. But, neither of those decision-making models totally speak to us because it was such a very small group. It was a couple of dozen people who were mostly involved and we were in fairly regular touch and we were very focused specifically on the conference. It wasn't like we had other subtasks or other things that we were doing simultaneously or beyond for that matter. So, it was pretty much what needs to get done and who's going to do it, was how we operated.

GK: Were there HIV-positive people involved in Réaction SIDA, or where did people come from on that question?

KH: I'm hesitating because I don't know how much we even talked about that. I feel like very much in Montreal at the time... This was a question you didn't ask. You just assumed people might be or might not be, and you didn't really want to know. It was partly a respect around anonymity and confidentiality, and it was partly kind of that blanket of "we are all living with AIDS" sentiment of – it shouldn't matter whether or not you're directly infected; everyone is affected and everyone has a stake in making this better. So, around that I hesitate to say yes or no. I'm quite sure that there were people who were and I'm quite sure that probably most of us weren't ... Because we were so focused on the one conference and that one issue, it never became an issue in terms of how we represented ourselves more broadly or in different ways. Had we continued a long time after as an organization, it probably would have become an issue, but it wasn't at that time.

GK: That certainly makes sense. So, the focus is on organizing for the World AIDS Conference. Was there much contact or tension with the ASOs or other groups in Montreal during that period of time? Because, I do know that AIDS ACTION NOW! tried to get other groups in Montreal involved. Tim McCaskell of AIDS ACTION NOW! came here I think it was a week before the meeting that you described. So, at that point in time, there was actually nothing he could connect with. In fact, he came back to Toronto and said, "You know, none of the groups in Montreal want to do anything," in terms of activist stuff around the conference. Do you remember any of that?

KH: I suspect we probably wouldn't even have bothered. Like, we were just, you know, [laughter] a merry little gang of impassioned activists. I don't know how much we even tried to get formal

organizations involved. I do have this vague memory and it seems to me that just before the actual conference, there was a kind of community conference that happened here, just in tandem with, in conjunction with, but not officially a part of the main conference. It was like a two or three day event specific to community leaders. And I remember a week or so before, someone calling me up and inviting me to be one of the seven facilitators for that event. And I said, yes. I had zero training; I had zero context. It was just like, “Run these meetings and be present.” And I did. But it was very haphazard and kind of piecemeal, and the connections with a broader community here, not huge.

GK: So, was that a Quebec-based conference or was it the Canadian AIDS Society?

KH: It must've been Canadian AIDS Society now that I think about it, but I honestly don't remember a lot about it.

GK: It must've occurred before I was in Montreal, because I don't have any memory of that conference.

KH: It was very much like in the days... Like, a couple of days before the conference.

GK: ...which would make sense. Because people were going to be at the conference, so people would want to organize something. Maybe we could come back to the Action Centre then.

KH: Right.

GK: One question would be that it was through the café and the organizing around it that the space was secured?

KH: Well, it was... Eric... The café was part of basically, the Milton Parc Co-op, which is a set of housing coops all through the Milton Parc ghetto; partly through Dimitri Roussopoulos, who runs Black Rose. It was basically him, because he is very much part of that co-op network; one of the early instigators of the movement that led to the creation of the co-ops. I mean there's many, many apartments involved in the co-ops, and they have been there since the seventies or eighties. But he at the time, I think, was one of the founding members who was still active and a part of it. Other people had moved away and other people had moved in and – you know, as can be expected. I think Eric got in touch with Dimitri and he had access to this space that later became a Taekwondo centre or something. [laughter] But at the time it was empty and between organizations, and so we were able... It was somehow owned or partially owned by the co-ops. So, they had it available. Or they had access to it somehow.

GK: Yeah. It was a great and absolutely necessary space for what was going on then. So, you were mentioning how Eric got all this equipment. Do you know how he did that?

KH: I think he probably finagled it I think partly through McGill – connections he had there – maybe connections with the alternative press.

GK: Yeah, because it was great. I mean it had a lot of good resources at it.

KH: It was brilliant.

GK: Telephones that must've been installed or maybe they already existed?

KH: No, I think the phones were installed. And I think actually... I think the co-op might've paid for some of the costs associated with that, like, the phone bill for the month or so we had it set up.

GK: Great. So, we're moving more to the conference. I'm pretty sure the answer is Réaction SIDA did not have much of a role to play in this – but in the development of the Montreal Manifesto.

KH: No, we didn't.

GK: It sounds like the writing of it, I think, was just done between ACT UP New York and AIDS ACTION NOW! Do you remember any impact or role the Montreal Manifesto might've had with people in Réaction SIDA? You apparently read part of it.

KH: Yeah. I read part of it. It's funny. Apparently, there's a word or a tense of verb in Turkish for things that you participated in but you don't remember directly ... often it's used in relation to children, right. So, it's like you were at this event but the child has no memory of having been at this event. I've always been fascinated by this concept, especially in relations to things like the Montreal Manifesto. Because I teach a class on HIV/AIDS now, you know; I'm constantly preparing for my various lectures and I was reading about the creation of a HIV-positive identity community. I was reading James Gillett and some other people and they were talking about the impact and the importance of the Montreal Manifesto in terms of the Denver Principles – like, as a link between the Denver Principles and the greater involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS, and how this was such an important moment. And it was like, "Oh right, I was part of that!" [laughter] I don't think I understood how important that was... One of the things I read was it was read at the opening ceremonies of the 1989 conference, and I remembered reading it at a demonstration later. But I didn't remember it having been read there.

GK: I think it was.

KH: It was.

GK: It was because we needed to have something to do.

KH: Well, I remember swarming in and I remember going up the escalators, and I remember getting up on the stage, and I remember making a whole lot of noise. And I remember – I think the

person we had wanted to open the conference wasn't well enough to have come; there was someone who was supposed to be there who wasn't. And so it ended up being Tim, who opened the conference on behalf of people living with HIV/AIDS. And I remembered all of that really clearly and the interaction with the people there. And I mean I can talk about that for a really long time. But what I only realized after recently looking at footage was that the Manifesto was read that day after all of that. But I hadn't retained that bit of what had happened that day.

GK: Do you remember more things about the action that happened at the opening ceremonies?

KH: Oh my goodness. Yeah. I mean that for me is really clear. It was amazing. I remember we were picketing downstairs and then... I don't know if this had been planned or if it just happened. I think it might have been planned...

GK: Oh, it was planned by ACT UP New York City.

KH: But either way people just got up on the escalators, right. And I remember a lot... My friend Sally – one of my dearest friends, who's five-foot eleven and had long blonde dreads at the time, and was on roller skates – she got up on the escalator on her roller skates and – five foot eleven, with the skates, she's a tall woman. [laughter] So, I remember her towering going up, and me being, "Oh, I better get up there," right, following after her, but just the space she took up getting up there. And then we all came in and took over the stage and made so much noise for so long. And I remember that really clearly – unfurling banners and just taking space – really just taking space. And I remember so many of the people, like the doctors and officials and politicians and diplomats and the crowd looking, you know, variously surly and stern and put out and offended and frustrated and confused. But then at one point, we started chanting, "Join us." And although no one – as I recall – came from the audience up on the stage, hundreds of people got up on their feet and applauded at that point. And that was just amazing. That was wonderful. So, I remember that really clearly. And I remember Tim, and I remember how important it was to actually name that conference on behalf of people living with HIV and how that really was a huge shift. And that's probably the biggest legacy of '89 was the insertion of a growing HIV-positive community and identity being recognized at the table.

At the time, I was part of a small collective of women who were putting out a zine called BOA: Bevy of Anarchist Feminists. It's funny when I think about it now, I don't know how the hell we did it, but we had all gotten press passes through our affiliation with BOA [laughter], which was the most non-event event. It just speaks to how different security and access was then. Like, there was a lot of frustration from ACT UP not being about to get in at different points during the conference, but on the other hand, it's laughable to me that our nasty little hand-coloured, hand-stapled zine got three of us access to the conference. One of us – Zoe Leonard – actually ended up moving to New York after the conference and becoming a key part of ACT UP there, and continuing an art practice that had HIV/AIDS as part of her focus.

GK: Oh, I didn't know that.

KH: Yeah, she was one of the members of our collective. But yeah, it was hilarious. So, we had our little press kits and little press passes and yeah, that day was amazing.

GK: Well, somehow Bernard Courte from AIDS ACTION NOW! was actually one of the people working in the media room there. But I also know people just photocopied the...

KH: Well, yeah, that was the other thing was that we were... At that point, having figured out how to photocopy and colour in the existing bus passes, so that we could all trade bus passes with each other [laughter] at school. We were quite expert at figuring out how to construct press passes for those who wanted them as well.

GK: Do you remember any other activist events at the conference?

KH: Oh lots. I mean I remember the whole rhythm of activism ... I guess one of the first days of the conference I remember meeting Andrew Hunter who was part of the Prostitutes Collective of Australia – Victoria, I guess. He was one of the first people I met from away ... One of us somehow had been roped into helping to set up microphones and tape down wires in one of the rooms – how this happened, that's gone. [laughter] But one of us was kind of doing that and the other one walked in and pitched in to help. It must've been in the Canadian AIDS Society thing beforehand because I can't imagine us wandering into the Conference Centre and doing this, or why we would, but somehow we were. And so we started talking and then we got to know each other. And then I think I was at the centre. It was the first day, and Andrew called and asked to speak to me. And I was like "What's up?" And he was like, "Oh, there's a sex worker here and she's totally lost and she doesn't know where to find other people who she can organize with and feel safe with, and she's looking for kind of community." And I was like, "Okay, I'm on my way." So, then I went and rescued Carol Leigh – that's who it was [laughter] – and so, you know, brought her up and introduced her to other people, all the Cathedral B people from Toronto who were our anarchist kindred spirits from Toronto. And that would've been Karen Pearlston and George Stamos and Tracy Tief.

GK: Now, I just remembered who George is. Anyways, okay.

KH: Yeah. George and Andrew got together at the conference. [laughter]

GK: It might've been Kenn Quayle and Michael Smith too. I don't know if they were around. They were at the conference.

KH: I remember... Everyday was just this sort of: we'd wake up, tumble down – like, literally – we'd tumble down to the centre, figure out what was going on for the day, spend all day in the conference space, at demos, sharing information, doing all sorts of stuff. We would be making posters for the next day that night, or something. And then at eleven o'clock every night we'd be in the centre watching the eleven o'clock news, figuring out how we made the national news, what made the national news, where we were, and go and have some drinks, and you know stumble home and do it all again the next day. That was pretty much it everyday. And like, I remember that

getting together at the end of every day and watching the news. And then that's where the differences between the different sort of groups and their different frameworks became most apparent. I remember the ACT UP people being furious if we weren't the lead story every night. And this is when Tiananmen Square was happening. There was all of this major stuff going on and they were just like, "No. It's about us. It's just about us." And I remember that so clearly. And even having just recently re-watched these recordings from DIVA TV (Damned Interfering Video Activists, an affinity group of ACT UP) of the conference interspersed with coverage of particular panels, or coverage of question periods, or coverage of particular actions, often whoever had the camera would just sort of approach people – delegates having lunch or sunning themselves or heading from Point A to Point B – and just, "Who are you? Where are you from?" But the third question after "Who are you?" and "Where are you from?" was "What do you think about the activist presence?" It was like, "What do you think about us?" [laughter] "Were you there on Sunday? What did you think?" It was like this absolute, we-are-the-centre-of-the-worldness that I understood to be American ACT UP, how they managed that event was so absolute to me. And I don't think I realized who was there, like I didn't realize Vito Russo was there. I didn't realize Larry Kramer was there. I don't think I would've necessarily known who these people were then. Now, I see the footage and like, "Oh my God! Okay. Whatever."

GK: Yeah, there were lots of people.

KH: I remember Maria Maggenti. I remember Maxine Wolf...

GK: Yes, I do too.

KH: ...very clearly. I mean besides the kind of everyday element of it, as far as the specific actions go I remember the big controversial one, which was going to be an event on the Thursday, a demonstration around prostitutes. Because as I remember the conference, you know, the book of abstracts was this big [indicates the size with her hands] and there were all sorts of papers and posters and panels, and I remember the number of things that addressed women was infinitesimal. And all those few events dealt with were women as mothers and their capacity to transmit HIV to their unborn children and women as prostitutes and the assumption that they would transfer HIV to the quote-unquote "general population" – that unidirectional framework in which prostitutes were somehow always ever contagious and infecting as opposed to patients in need of care or treatment or, as many of the sex workers at the conference pointed out, safe sex experts who have an investment in staying healthy and in educating people about condoms. In fact, I remember Cheryl Overs, who's also from Australia, one of the first things she showed us how to do was how to cut off the end of a condom if you were lacking a way to put your hair up. It was a really good elastic to just use the rolled end of a condom to keep your hair out of your eyes – very important. [laughter] ... I remember that on the Thursday there was going to be a demonstration specifically around how sex workers were being framed as vectors of transmission and scapegoated in large part around HIV transmission, this was coming up. And I remember we spent a lot of time the night before doing all of these posters and having some sort of... You know, we were always writing press releases and position papers and whatever. So, we produced all this material and then we went off to, it must've been, Fougounes Électriques to drink before we called

it a day. And the women from ACT UP – Maria, Maxine and a bunch of others were still there when we left. And they had all decided that this wasn't just going to be about prostitution; this was also going to be about lesbians. And they talked about that a little bit beforehand, and we were just like, "Let's just make this about sex workers." This is what's important here. And we got there the next day and all the material we produced had been re-written and reworked and changed and in addition to the posters we had about sex work, there was a whole other set about lesbian invisibility... I was furious about how what we'd done had been undone. I was furious about how the decisions we'd made had been retaken. I was furious by what I saw as American imperialism taking over our planning and input.

But I also remember feeling frustrated by this. It sort of for me pointed to another difference between American and Canadian organizing. I think, I've often felt – and I feel like this underscored it for me – that American discourse around safer sex and risk and HIV/AIDS was very framed around this kind of "Just Say No" zero risk approach. And so they were very invested in lesbians practicing safer sex, whether or not there was much evidence of transmission, whether or not there was much possibility of transmission, which isn't to say that lesbians don't get HIV, which isn't to say that lesbians are IV drug users or have experiences with men, etcetera, but they were very invested in this notion of lesbian sex as risk, which I don't think carried the same weight in Canada in terms of guidelines for transmission and all of those things. I remember... It brings to mind other things too, like I remember them talking about the risk for transmission in oral sex and they would keep saying things like, "If you have any opening, tear or laceration between your mouth and your stomach that's a possibility of transmission," right. Whether it be because you brushed your teeth or because you had an ulcer or because I don't know you ate something scratchy; they would go on, like chips, right. And I remember feeling like, "I don't know. It seems to me that you're overstating something because prevalence rates and incidence rates would be much higher based on the framework you're presenting here." And so I felt to a degree like the event was railroaded, the decision-making was a bit, kind of, inappropriate, but also I wasn't totally convinced that this was a valid issue to raise. And again just recently, when I was watching this video footage, it was very funny because there was a point at which Garance, who was one of the ACT UP New York women who came, who is now I think one of the senior editors of Atlantic Online in the U.S.

GK: Really?

KH: Yeah. Garance Franke-Ruta is her name – was with Gerry Rogers. And they're walking together and the person with the camera's like, "So, what do you have to tell us about the lesbian event today?" And Garance was like, "This is a super-important thing that we have to you know underscore how important the risks of lesbian transmission are, etcetera." And Gerry, who's local – though I think she's since moved to Newfoundland – her insistence on including lesbians had a different political motivation. Her argument was lesbians always care for other people and their issues and we need to take care of ourselves. We shouldn't always be the ones worrying about abortion... I mean, I'm not paraphrasing her directly, but it was like "We've been involved in fighting for and in arguing about and in representing so many other people's issues. And our participation in HIV/AIDS support work and care work is part and parcel of that, but we should

also not let our own personal investment in this take a backseat to other more important issues.” That was her rationale for including lesbians. So, that was one of the points on which there was frustration. Another was when there was the demonstration about Tiananmen Square in Chinatown ... The conference location was pretty much in or on the edge of Chinatown. And as I said, Tiananmen Square was happening at the same time and the Chinese community in Chinatown decided to have a demonstration about Tiananmen Square during the time we were there at the conference. And many of the ACT UP New York people really wanted to participate in that, which I thought was great – like, solidarity, support, important issues, certainly social justice issues that bring all of this together absolutely. But I was really horrified when I went down there and saw all of these AIDS posters, specifically AIDS posters at the Tiananmen Square event. Like, being there in solidarity, being there as bodies in support made complete sense to me, but I very much felt like ACT UP New York was trying to, again, hijack or appropriate attention around one event for their own interests, and that frustrated me a lot. So, I remember those things. I remember the International demo, when I helped read the Manifesto. I didn’t go but there was a baseball game during the conference, where ACT UP New York – I think taking a model they’d used in New York – decided to leaflet safe sex information and distribute condoms at a local baseball game. Again, assuming that the importance baseball has in the US is similar to what it has in Montreal. [laughter] I think the team lasted another year after that. But I didn’t go to that. That wasn’t that important to me.

GK: I didn’t go either. That was great. There were also meetings at the Action Centre. Do you have any memories of those that would’ve involved people from ACT UP New York, AIDS ACTION NOW!, Réaction SIDA, and other assorted activists who came to the event?

KH: Right. I don’t remember them specifically. I do remember meetings around this one action that became contorted in the translation. I don’t remember the specifics of meetings. I mean I think that in many ways we were kind of... I don’t want to say out of our league. That’s not how I mean to say it, but it’s like, we didn’t have a history of working as a group. We didn’t have a history of organizing. We didn’t have a history of planning events and strategizing around meetings. ACT UP New York came with tons of experience, and expectations around that. And AIDS ACTION NOW! did as well. And we just didn’t have that. We were much younger on average. We were way less politically experienced. We had some knowledge in terms of information sharing and getting attention, but we didn’t have the same sort of level of organizing experience or sophistication. And so we were regularly, I think, not shot down but just kind of dismissed. I mean I felt like a lot of the time I was just dismissed as this young, green-haired thing. [laughter] And that’s, you know, at the time it was hugely frustrating and infuriating, but it’s not that inexplicable, I guess. So, I remember that.

GK: One of the ways in which, I think, some of the organizing took place was there would be a Réaction SIDA person involved in reading the Montreal Manifesto, along with people from ACT UP and maybe AIDS ACTION NOW! I do know that Eric spoke at the Anonymous Testing event. Was that the general model? My memory is that each day was devoted to a particular issue or topic.

KH: Right.

GK: Anonymous testing was one day, so Eric was the Réaction SIDA speaker. Was that usually the process, was to try to have Réaction SIDA speak at all of the events?

KH: Yeah, I mean we were definitely acknowledged as part and parcel and it's funny because even now people don't... even locally, people don't really remember Réaction SIDA. It was very short-lived. It was we helped to organize and plan things. And we, I guess, were the impetus for things that happened later in many ways, and many of us were involved in other events later on outside of this conference, but there are very few people that even say "Réaction SIDA" now. [laughter] But yeah, I mean people don't remember us. Like, they'll even talk about ACT UP Montreal as being there or as something that existed and never really think about Réaction SIDA. We were just like this little blip in the history of organizing, but I feel like we did set the stage, and the scene, for a lot of things that came after. But it's funny because reading things from the actual time, there's more reference to us than I've seen ever since. We did exist for this moment, but that was kind of it.

GK: I think you already told me you don't remember anything about the specific Quebec action, but I remember that being posed as like, "Réaction SIDA's asking for your support" – like ACT UP New York and AIDS ACTION NOW! – because we needed to do something specific around the Quebec government.

KH: I'm sure it was, because I think that we just felt like we need to do something local, and that made sense. I remember different things. I remember being really surprised at how ACT UP New York just assumed everyone would speak and know English, and integrating French and then ultimately Spanish as well at what we saw was an International event, which brought people from all over the world. It wasn't an automatic, right. And it was the big discussion of how their "Silence égale mort" buttons were not correct French, and what that meant in terms of who and what we were representing. So, I remember that kind of thing more than the specific demos. It was those ways that solidarity could or should have been represented. And there were even... It's funny... I mean even watching some of the footage of some of the panels, like there was a big panel that had Larry Kramer and Vito Russo and, I think, Peter Staley – like, a lot of people directly involved in New York – and they were at a panel at the conference, and the whole time they're like, "In this country, we do this... We don't do this..." It was like, they hadn't crossed a border, right. And it was like, "No, Canada isn't this country that you're talking about (A), and (B) what your framework is isn't necessarily what's happening or what the priorities or what the issues are locally." I remember feeling like we had to keep reminding them of that. It was more in those terms that I remember it.

GK: Yeah. I mean one of the other things that ACT UP New York City did was they launched a treatment agenda...

KH: Right. I think that panel that I'm speaking of is where that was launched.

GK: Okay. I mean they did all this more direct action stuff, but you could already see some of the tensions within ACT UP, because for other people it was... for Mark Harrington and for other people, it was “We need to launch our Treatment Agenda,” which was really smart. It was actually quite well done.

KH: Yeah. No, that was definitely there. That was absolutely there. I mean if you talk about bringing people living with HIV to the table – which is what that conference, I think, is mostly remembered for – that was very much part of it. I mean the Opening Ceremony and the Manifesto were within that framework, but the Treatment Agenda was also very much part of that.

GK: Right. So, you’ve already talked a little bit about some of the problems and whether you want to talk about them a bit more. You’ve talked a little bit about age. I think there’s some things around gender too, or maybe feminism...

KH: Always. [laughter] Ever always.

GK: ...like, you know, different nation, language matters, all those things. I know you don’t remember it, but Réaction SIDA must have at least met to have some sort of collective evaluation of the conference because of the document that gets sent to AIDS ACTION NOW! and to ACT UP New York City. Do you have any memories of that?

KH: I remember we were frustrated. By the end of it, we were really frustrated. We felt like we’d been a little bit steamrolled in various ways, at various points, some of which I’ve described and, you know, some of which were more personal or individual. But I think in many ways we felt steamrolled and not acknowledged, and we were frustrated by that. I mean I don’t know what we really expected out of saying, “Wait a minute... Hello? We did this. Acknowledge us.” It’s not like you can have a do-over or something, you know. [laughter] It’s not like any official apology would mean anything anyway. And I mean in a sense, I’m being a little bit guilty of this too. I keep on talking about ACT UP New York, but there was ACT UP from all over the US, and there were Texans and there were other people, and they didn’t have wildly different agendas or perspectives. It wasn’t all about New York, for sure. But, I’m not sure what our expectation was. I just remember that when it was all over, we were super-burnt-out. We were just exhausted and we just all wanted to take some time to regroup and breathe. And I think we kind of thought we’d start something up again in the future. I suspect I was probably pretty decided that I just had had enough. But others may have wanted to keep something going. But nothing ever really happened again as far as where Réaction SIDA’s concerned. ACT UP Montreal started up six months later, I guess, the January of the next year.

GK: Maybe just before getting into that, you mention a number of critiques of ACT UP New York City and other ACT UP people. Do you have any reflections or memories about AIDS ACTION NOW! and working with them ... Because I do remember there were tensions there too.

KH: But I think, like I said, there was the age stuff and, you know, it was that kind of... I mean there were huge tensions, yes, but in retrospect, it seems to me a lot of that had to do with our lack of experience and sophistication as community organizers, up against people who had much more experience and probably not a lot of patience [laughter], which I think is part and parcel of the issue too. So, I think we were dismissed as much in different ways by AIDS ACTION NOW! as we were by ACT UP. But in retrospect I understand why or how that happened. It's not something that I'm going to be like, "They were bad, bad people." It was just, you know, the way that the different groups came together in many ways.

GK: Is there anything more that you remember or wanted to say about Réaction SIDA before moving on...

KH: I feel that we were also connected to SIDART- that was going on as well, the AIDS art show that was happening kind of across the way. I remember that being a really important part of what was happening, and there was a really good book that came out of that. I don't know if you've seen it.

GK: Was that the *A Leap in the Dark* one?

KH: Yeah.

GK: Yes.

KH: So, yeah, I kind of remember that. I remember a lot of... Like I said, we'd gone to drink at Foufounes Électriques that one time, but I also remember towards the end of the conference showing a lot of safe sex videos that had been produced by ACT UP New York at Foufounes. I don't know how we managed to make that happen ... I remember there was one called *Midnight Snack*, that Blane was in [laughter] and a couple of others that we managed to get shown in this bar late at night. No idea how we engineered that, but it was fun.

GK: The Blane you are referring to is?

KH: Blane Mosley. He was one of the people from ACT UP New York who came up for the conference – couldn't miss him – very, very tall black man with his hair shaved as a pink triangle.

GK: Oh, I remember him.

KH: ...also an alter-ego – I think Mochasheena was his drag alter ego. And he ended up moving to Montreal in the months after the conference. He became a major member of ACT UP Montreal as well.

GK: So, unless there's more about Réaction SIDA, maybe this is a good segue into ACT UP Montreal and what you can tell us about that.

KH: To be honest... I have been involved in many political projects and activities in my time, but I also tend to be fairly hardline and piss people off. So, I wasn't a major member of ACT UP Montreal. I think a lot of the ACT UP Montreal people were just like, "Don't invite her to this party." So, I wasn't part of the organizing group of ACT UP Montreal, and I didn't particularly want to be either. But I did participate in a lot of their activities and campaigns over the years. It was a different group that set up ACT UP Montreal. Blane was one of them. Michael Hendricks was also very much involved, a fellow named Tyler... He moved away to San Francisco, but then he came back. I'm not really sure where he is now, but he was very active as well. And yeah, they were very focused on local issues as opposed to the international thing that was happening around Réaction SIDA. So, they were interested in support work for prisoners. They were interested in... Something that I was very involved in with them was claiming the park at the corner of Panet and Sainte-Catherine Est on behalf of people living with HIV/AIDS, and as a sort of memorial. And so there were several demonstrations over the years ... At one point we had a number of ribbons representing all of the people in Quebec who had died of HIV/AIDS, and we all went and tied these ribbons in trees – like, the number of ribbons representing all of the people who were lost as an effort to demonstrate the importance of having the park. And eventually the park was renamed Le Parc de l'Espoir – the Park of Hope – and dedicated to people who were lost to the HIV/AIDS complications, with these two big black massive sort of coffin-like benches constructed at the front. And that still exists now. What were we involved in as ACT UP? It feels like I'm missing something ... It'll come. [laughter]

GK: Yeah. So, you're saying that there's also a time period between the conference and when ACT UP Montreal forms ...

KH: Like, six months... I mean it wasn't very long.

GK: And you said you weren't involved in the organizing of ACT UP Montreal, but do you have any sense of how it was organized or what it was trying to do in terms of its project?

KH: I think it saw itself much more in the model of ACT UP New York. They had regular weekly meetings and I think it was partly Blane that kind of encouraged that. But there was definitely an interest in having affinity groups and ongoing different projects and programs, similar to what was happening in other ACT UP models. So, that was very much what was going on there.

GK: Do you know if they engaged in very many direct actions?

KH: I remember them having die-ins outside of the prison. I remember poster campaigns; I think they had a few. At some point, Gran Fury did do a Quebec poster that was... That's a really interesting thing. They did a specific Quebec poster with the Quebec flag that said "Je me souviens" – that raised a lot of ire amongst Quebecois people here, the re-appropriation of that symbol within this context. It was a huge kind of drama. Avram Finkelstein of Gran Fury was here last year and talked about it a little bit. They were like, "We didn't know." [laughter]

GK: How long is ACT UP Montreal around for?

KH: I honestly couldn't tell you. I don't feel like it was super-long, certainly a few years, but I'm not sure.

GK: It was certainly around when there were demonstrations around Sex Garage, because at least in some of the pictures you can see their banner; there was someone holding their banner.

KH: Definitely, at least... So, '89 – June '89 is the conference. January '90 I would say is around when... Or maybe even before is when ACT UP Montreal starts; Sex Garage is July '90, right. So, it's not a huge period of time. In between there is also the Polytechnique [the anti-feminist 'Montreal massacre' of women at École Polytechnique], in that December, right.

GK: And there was the Oka crisis too.

KH: Well, the Oka crisis is parallel to Sex Garage. And also that summer there was a lot of concern in the black community around racial profiling and the police having shot or detained young black men in suspicious, not terribly clear, circumstances.

GK: David Austin was actually talking a bit about that at his workshop this past weekend. Do you know him by the way?

KH: That name's very familiar to me...

GK: One of the things that would be interesting to hear you talk a little bit more about is that Réaction SIDA itself ends, but clearly people in Réaction SIDA continue being involved in activism. In that period of time you were just describing from the end of the AIDS conference through to the next summer, there's a whole series of things that happen. It's not that Réaction SIDA people would've collectively been involved in these, but individuals would've been.

KH: So, if I were to think about the affiliations that brought me to Réaction SIDA. On the one hand, it was the anarchist community – Karl and Mike and Dale... Those people were very involved in the conference. So, all of that anarchist group were very involved – to a degree were involved in the Sex Garage actions; and probably were more involved in the Oka things that summer. And then on the other side, was the women I'd known from women's organizing through Concordia – people like Jen DT and Charlene Nero, who were certainly present during Réaction SIDA – very present in the response to the Polytechnique and the organizing and demonstrations around that later, and to a degree Sex Garage as well. There were people I knew from community radio at CKUT, who were at Réaction SIDA – Ian Pringle, Lisa Vinebaum – and they were very involved in Sex Garage. Lisa ended up actually living behind the barricades with the warriors through most of the summer at Oka. So, different affiliations that went in different directions, but yeah, definitely a lot of cross-over and interconnectedness.

GK: The specific actions around Sex Garage is probably a little bit beyond what we're trying to do, but it might be worth just talking a little bit about that experience because it is clearly central to who you are and your involvement in activism.

KH: Yeah, well, so it was the next summer after the Conference, after the Polytechnique, and I think in some ways it was precisely those experiences. Like I said, we weren't particularly politically sophisticated going into the Conference – the experience of that Conference; of watching AIDS ACTION NOW! and ACT UP; the experience of responding to the Polytechnique. By the time Sex Garage happened, we had a framework for dealing with stuff that was fairly solid. I mean when I think back on that period of time now, what I find really shocking to me is how much we took for granted media attention and media interaction, and how much media attention we actually had. Like, I don't think organizing operates on the same scale now, perhaps because it's fragmented through social media and different ways of reporting and news and what local news is and all of those things, but we all kind of... When I think about it now, we just took it for granted that we would be organizing press conferences we would have major coverage; that we would have the ear of all of these sort of levels of government and levels of public access that I can't imagine most 25 year olds now... I mean certainly during the Maple Spring here, there was that same level of attention, but there was also nightly demonstrations for months and months, right. We weren't doing anything like that, but we had similar levels of attention and accessibility, and similar platforms through which Douglas Buckley-Couvrette, who was very much part of the Sex Garage organizing ended up running for city council a few years later, right – the way a lot of the student protestors from 2012 ended up sort of running for elected office after, but yeah, it's rare the kind of attention and the kind of focus we got.

So, Sex Garage itself was basically a late-night warehouse party that I wasn't even at. I was asleep in bed when it was happening. [laughter] I'd been to many of the others, but that night I was just like, "Ugh, I'm tired, going to bed, whatever," and I literally was awoken at four in the morning by someone saying, "The cops have come. People are in jail. We need lawyers. Who can you recommend?" type call, which you know led to us meeting the next day in a bar at four in the afternoon. Many of the same people who in one way or another had been involved in Réaction SIDA, meeting in this bar and starting to figure out how are we going to respond to this issue and the fact that the police went in, took off their nametags, donned rubber gloves because they were dealing with "the gays" [laughter] and the contagion, and, you know, proceeded to beat up, arrest and – at the time we didn't know about kettling – but they did that night was our first experience of kettling, those who were there. When they tried to go one way to get their bikes and were all herded in a different direction as per police strategies. And then over several days, there were a series of demonstrations and attempts to negotiate with the police around charges that were laid that first night, which that was the overnight Saturday to Sunday. By the Monday afternoon there was a kiss-in, where at that point another 48 people were arrested, including myself. And so the subsequent organizing around all of that took up a lot of the summer. So, yeah, that was Sex Garage – the short version.

GK: That's good... I mean I was going to ask you, "Could you briefly describe it?" And I think that's captured enough of it. Anything else in terms of reflections on that type of organizing

experience around Sex Garage, because I mean there obviously is a direct connection with AIDS and HIV when the cops are donning the rubber gloves.

KH: Absolutely. Again, we didn't have that same New York versus Montreal, or Toronto versus Montreal difference, but the fault lines in that organizing I would say were the fact that there were a bunch of us who – through women's organizing, through anarchist organizing, through other experiences – had much more at that point experience in organizing and were interested in creating solidarity. Who were interested in figuring out how to make links with what was happening in Oka and what was happening within the black community, and talk about a larger question of police brutality and power versus a lot of the gay men who... This was the first time that their sort of white maleness had not just given them a free pass, and they were stymied by the fact that they were treated as less than, like less than valid if you will, right. David Shannon, another really important figure in both of those sets of events, and in ACT UP Montreal...

GK: And he would've been one of those types of people?

KH: No. [laughter] Sorry David! To a degree... No, no, no... That's a good call. Yeah.

GK: Okay. I just wanted to make sure, because otherwise I would have interpreted it that way.

KH: No, not as much as some of the others. He may be to a degree, but not as much as some of the others. ... I mean certainly I remember really clearly one of the first meetings. I actually wasn't there because I was one of the last people to be released from jail, so I missed the first organizing meeting and only heard about it after, missed most of it. But all of us who had come through Concordia's Women's Centre and women organizing stuff were speaking at this first demonstration, or the first meeting, and I remember one of the guys who had been first arrested... It was all of these male partiers who had been at this party and who suddenly were criminalized versus, you know, other people who had been activists and demonstrators and were used to being on the other side of the fence of the cops. And so one of the first people who have been arrested, or the first person to have been arrested, at Sex Garage had no experience as ever having been arrested or you know outside of the law, and was very dismissive of the things that the women in the room were saying about police and organizing and was very like, "You know, I don't want to hear from these baby dykes anymore. What are we going to do?" And that was par for the course of the kinds of lines... And so many of us were trying to create connections outside of Sex Garage. And then there was very much that, you know, "They're never at our demonstrations. Why should we be at theirs? They won't support us. Why should we support..." like that, very much that sort of... And yeah, just a level of expectation that I found staggering. I remember one of the first articles about what had happened, one of the men complaining that we'd been in cells for six hours and we hadn't been given any sandwiches. And I was like, "You're usually, like... You expect to have catering in jail? There should be a cheese platter for you? What are you talking about? You were under arrest, dude. They don't bring you snacks when you're under arrest." [laughter] So yeah, it was that really different take. Like, the guy's just assuming that the police were supposed

to protect you and the women all just never having imagined that would be something that would happen. So, why would you expect that? Really different frameworks. Very different frameworks.

GK: Right. I think we're starting to move towards the end of the interview. This moves back to your involvement around AIDS and HIV-related issues. Did that continue?

KH: As I said, I was involved in some of the specific campaigns that came through ACT UP Montreal. In my work-work, I worked as a journalist at the Montreal Mirror after those years. Then, I also had a contract with the CLSC (Local Community Services Centre) doing a specific project – workshop development and evaluation – for frontline workers on the connections between violence against women and HIV infection, and how to assess needs amongst presenting-women around those issues. And all of that various bit of stuff, like, you know, meeting Andrew Hunter and Carol Leigh and the Prostitutes Collective and all of that gang and my work with women and HIV had a lot to do with me being the founding coordinator of Stella, which was a drop-in centre for sex workers in Montreal. It opened in '95, I guess, 94-95. And I bring it up because I think the only reason, the main reason that we were able to set that program up in the first place was that funds were made available through Public Health for HIV prevention among sex workers. So, it was this weird kind of full-circle. The thing that I protested against in '89 became to a degree my job, but at the same time Stella understood that much of its funding came through Public Health and HIV prevention, and as an organization we also took great pains to not pathologize sex workers or make HIV our sole reason for communicating with them. And to recognize any issues related to HIV as part of a larger harm reduction community development building framework that put HIV within a larger context of access to social services, access to support services, access to resources, “Bad Trick” lists, all of those things.

GK: So, another question that arises for us – and part of this is because we don't know very much about the Montreal context – is what is your take on how the more mainstream AIDS Service Organizations develop in the 1990s, like leading up to 1996 in the Montreal context?

KH: Well, I mean part of it was when CSAM shut down because of misappropriation of funds and all of this stuff, it kind of led to a splintering. A lot of different groups picked up the slack in different ways. So, there was ACCM and GAP-VIES and CPAVIH and Rézo, and eventually Stella, and COCQ-SIDA (Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le sida), which was the provincial umbrella organization – all took a different place within the community. And then, more recently there have been frontline testing type things. I don't know that there's a single face of ASO-type coordinating in Montreal now. There's been a variety of different things, some things that mystify me. Like, a real turn backwards towards scare advertising in PSAs in the early 2000s that just completely stymied me – people having sex in coffins as a PSA, and tombstones with women injecting drugs or men having sex as part of the marble monument on a poster, really weird stuff. And, you know, there's an annual AIDS Walk. There are all of these regular things.

It's interesting. Teaching the class I teach on HIV/AIDS, part of what the students are expected to do is do an internship in a community organization, and we set up the placements for them and support them in that, and they have to report back, and it feels really different. Like, I haven't followed it closely enough to understand, but it feels really different and it seems like there's less and less organizations specific to HIV/AIDS in Montreal. It feels like it's kind of integrated into existing youth programs, or existing health programs, or existing programs directed at, you know, First Nations' people etc. It's not so much specific ASOs anymore. And it's kind of hard to know with that, what that means. If that's specifically around cutbacks – the Harper government, no funding left for certain groups and groups are amalgamating – or whether it's a kind of internal decision within communities of people affected to not isolate and set apart, and to integrate more into existing resources and reach other people that way, than being off to the side. So, I'm never really sure how that stuff plays out, or why that stuff happens. I see both sides of those issues.

GK: 'Integration' is a number one guiding funding principle now.

KH: Exactly.

GK: The first stage of that was Hep C, and bringing that together. And there are groups like Jer's Vision [now renamed the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity (CCGSD)] that actually get funding for blood-borne disease organizing, which is an even broader set of ways of organizing. So, I think some of that is coming from the top down. On the question of integration?

KH: I mean that ongoing question of gay men, right. On the one hand, it's like it's affecting us primarily. We need to speak. We need to have a voice. We need to be recognized. And on the other hand, we don't want to be constantly associated with HIV. So, how do you address that ... that has been the discussion since day one, right. And I remember going back to the '80s and even the '90s, all of these gay men working in these organizations going, "Well, of course we want to involve women and deal with women's issues but we don't really understand what those issues are." And it was like, "Okay, that was a point you could make for five months and then you would educate yourself about women's issues and you would know," because Lord knows, I can discuss sex involving penises for hours, and I don't do it. But I talk about it and I can give you all sorts of information about it. And it's because I educated myself. So, it's not that hard, right. But yeah, that's a constant back-and-forth, and then of course the current issues around criminalization, which are a whole other set of problems that need to be addressed differently.

GK: And we've done some work with AIDS ACTION NOW! funding some research to recover earlier historical material that can be useful, but then also we've co-sponsored a forum with them around public health measures and criminalization, and hopefully we will do more.

One of the other dimensions of what we're doing is trying to remember people who passed away, and often this is people who were activists who passed away because of HIV infection, but it can also include activists who were involved in this period of time who have since

passed away. We don't want to just have the record of AIDS activism be of people who are still around, but also to include people who passed away. Is there anyone who you remember?

KH: Well, I mentioned earlier Douglas Buckley-Couvrette. He was quite involved. Kalpesh Oza, was also very important. Jamie... It's awful when you can't remember people's names. Glenn Betteridge. His partner, Jamie [Marois], who passed away years ago, very involved. Who else? It's funny, you know, sometimes I watch old footage of things, right, because we all had video cameras. We were all recording stuff. And I watch old footage and it's so weird. It just becomes this sea of people who are no longer around. And sometimes it's not clear if they've moved away. It's very much a Montreal-thing, I think, because people just move away and move in and out of Montreal. So, it's just sometimes not clear if they've passed away or moved away. And you miss them just the same, but it's kind of not clear what happened. They just kind of faded away.

GK: Kalpesh is actually a cross-over person for us in terms of interviews, because he also moved to Toronto and was part of AIDS ACTION NOW! So, we've actually got some interesting reflections of him. Is there anything you specifically remember about Kalpesh?

KH: He was lovely. He always just made me feel great every time I saw him.

GK: That in and of itself is wonderful.

KH: Yeah.

GK: Basically, this is the opportunity for anything that you wanted to say, that you haven't had a chance to say.

KH: I guess another thing that I remember is... At one point ACT UP Montreal, and I can't remember – this must've been World AIDS Day '90 – did a specific World AIDS Day march around women and HIV, and started it by having the exact number of people in masks at the front representing the women who had died, 71 or something. I remember being part of that.

GK: And the final question is, you've already mentioned many people who we should talk to, but anyone else who you can think of?

[discussion of possible other interviewees]

GK: Thanks so much.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]