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Interviewee:	Cynthia Brooke
Interviewers:	Alexis Shotwell & Gary Kinsman
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Persons present: Cynthia Brooke– CB
Alexis Shotwell – AS
Gary Kinsman – GK

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

AS: It's September 16th, 2016, and we are talking with Cynthia Brooke in Vancouver about Vancouver.

GK: So, where we start all of our interviews – just so there is a common starting point – is with when people remember first hearing about AIDS, and what they heard.

CB: Okay. Wow. Well, for me there were little bits and pieces of stuff on the news that I heard here in Canada. But it wasn't actually until I went to San Francisco that I heard about it. Actually, just before I was going to San Francisco, I ended up getting a ride from—I can't remember his last name—Ernie. He was the pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church, here, in Vancouver. So, he was the first person that I knew in Vancouver that had really started talking about it. That was in '83. And it was in San Francisco that there was already people starting to put the pieces together, right, and starting to organize. Because of course, in San Francisco they were shutting down the bathhouses. They had a real crisis on their hands, and they were really, really, reacting. And overreacting, as well. And putting a lot of people at risk. And, so, pretty much right from the beginning for me it was politicized.

GK: So, there wasn't really a distinction between, "Oh, that's a medical or health issue and this is sort of, like, a political activist issue." They were all sort of brought together?

CB: They were all brought together. It was just so very clear. Yeah, very clear right from the beginning that my brothers were under attack.

GK: Right.

CB: And very specifically. Then it was within about—I would say about a year to a year and a half, to then start realizing that, "Wait a second, it's not just my brothers that are under attack, but there are a lot of other vulnerable people here: IV [intravenous] drug users, right? Anybody that's working in the sex trade industry is also vulnerable." And then, as that revealed itself, it more solidified politically that there was a larger picture. And that it just seemed like another way to attack us. Another way to attack, you know, queerness, marginality, diaspora, all of that stuff.

GK: Maybe before drawing more clearly into AIDS activism; you clearly had experience in terms of other areas of activism, whether it's feminism or other areas of social justice, so I don't know when you got involved in the labour movement, but what would you have

brought with you—things that were important to you—when you got involved in AIDS activism?

CB: My parents were Diggers. So, I don't know, are you familiar with what Diggers are? Diggers were essentially a support social justice movement supporting other social justice groups. And, so, I'm actually from San Francisco. We came to Canada when I was eight. The reason that we came to Canada was because everything was going to shit in San Francisco. The movement—the Black Liberation Movement—had been completely coopted and infiltrated by FBI, CIA, everybody. And, so, coming from a place of incredible privilege, my parents uprooted us and brought us to Canada. So, that's my framework. I don't have any other choice, I bring a framework of strong social justice, anti-oppression, very strong Black liberation, with me. My parents were specifically allied with the Black Panther Movement in San Francisco, in Oakland. And, so, they were also very strongly involved with the labour movement. My father very much supported a labour movement grounded in the history of the Communist Party in Canada. Not really my area of interest at all. That's where we diverged. And then certainly feminism. They didn't talk about feminism, but there was more of walking the walk. My mother was very disengaged for most of her time with actively identifying with being a feminist, but certainly espoused those values. So that's what I brought with me, there was already a way of looking at these things.

So, to put things in context, I was born in '65. I came out at the age of 15 in 1980. And, so, by 1984, which is when things really started breaking open around AIDS, I'd already had that bit of time where I had been out. I'd been identifying as a dyke, finding my place and my role, as well. I had already done my time living in a lesbian separatist collective household, only to realize that I'm not a lesbian separatist—not at all. I love my brothers and I always will, right?

AS: And you got done with all that by the age of 17?

CB: [laughter] I was all done. Yeah. So that was really neat. But I came out at a fantastic time. I had been living in Nanaimo. I had actually been running a soup kitchen. And I was involved in the 1982 On to Ottawa Trek, where we did a reenactment from Campbell River to Victoria. And, so, I actually met—sorry it wasn't 1982, it was 1980—a group of lesbians who came over from Vancouver to Nanaimo to participate in the sort of last leg of that march. And, so, I was just like, "Oh my god, I just don't even know what to do with this." [laughter] And, so, by that fall they came, I guess it was in July or something like that, but by that fall I had actually come to Vancouver. I had met up with them. And they were part of a group of people who were hosting an international lesbian conference. And that's where I came out. It gave me the incredible opportunity of knowing a lot of people. Like, I knew Bet Cecill at that time. She's not really on the table, she's just levitating [referring to cat] She's like, "Yeah, I want your lap, I want your belly, I want your love." [laughter]

GK: So maybe you could sort of walk us through the various groups you were involved in, in the '80s. Obviously it includes specifically AIDS groups, but other groups as well. So, how did that sort of happen for you?

CB: Okay, so. That's interesting, because you know how these things are, they're all loose affiliations, right?

AS: Or you could go into it from thinking about coming back from San Francisco.

CB: Well I'm—so, yeah, coming back from San Francisco, my first thing to do was to maintain a connection with San Francisco. And maintain contact with the people that I had met there. They were very, very, politically active. And very engaged in a way that Vancouver wasn't quite yet. But that caught up really, really, quickly. And, if I recall correctly, I believe it was PWA [Persons with AIDS] that—I'm trying to remember—it's very first incarnation had a different name.

GK: PWA Coalition.

CB: PWA Coalition. Yeah, it was the Coalition. But for, I think like five months or something, there was some sort of ad hoc group. And so I was a bit involved with that. But there was a weird—there was always this weird discomfort. And less so with the Coalition, but much, much more so with AIDS Vancouver, because there were some men that took the position of, "It's not a lesbian issue." Right? "So, you shouldn't actually be involved in it." And so that was difficult. That was very, very difficult to navigate. But for myself it didn't matter. I continued doing that work. Susan Craigie was also somebody else. She continued doing the work. And for the longest time we would be sort of the only two women that refused to get rebuffed. And we were just like, "No. Our brothers are dying." And we'd see this in a larger context, in a larger picture, because all of that stuff that I'd talk about; about revolving and realizing that it was effecting far more than just gay men, that it was IV drug users... At first it was just gay men and hemophiliacs, right? Hemophiliacs were, you know, the "innocent victims of God," and gay men were the demonized, right?

But yeah, so we kept on coming back at it, and then AIDS Vancouver formed. I actually started volunteering for them because they hit the ground running with, "Let's get out and start educating people." In a lot of ways, the Coalition always appealed to me more, because it was about direct action and about being very politically active. But AIDS Vancouver, the whole thing about educating people, was just absolutely tantamount. And so that's where I got involved, I volunteered with AIDS Vancouver for a long time. Like I said, even with AIDS Vancouver, there was always this constant feeling of sort of having to prove yourself as a woman. And to say, "No, actually, I belong here. My voice is valuable." And, so, it wasn't until stuff actually started happening around ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power] that there became more of that inclusion of voice and more of a coalition between men and women. And it's very interesting, because part of my perception is that in some ways the strength of ACT UP, for the short period of time that it was very strong in Vancouver, was reactionary not only to what was happening from outside, but what was happening inside. And that it also, because of that, spawned a lot of other stuff that was happening. So, all of these stickers that we were looking at, like, Dykes for Dykedom, Lesbian Avengers, LABIA, all of that—

GB: And LABIA stood for?

CB: Lesbians Against Boys Invading Anywhere. [laughter]

CB: And, yeah, it was all about, you know, finally it was like the cork coming out of the bottle. And,

so, all of those groups that I just mentioned weren't specifically just looking at dyke activism. They were doing ACT UP work, they were doing Queer Nation work, which was an extension of ACT UP work. And it was very much about, "We're doing this on a larger community," right? And there was a lot of bridge building that happened at that time. And, so, John Kozachenko, Ken Walker, a whole bunch of them then started working with one another, and really working on community building skills.

And those connections lasted a long time. A long time.

AS: And that's so important because sometimes we look at how long a group lasted for, as a group, and don't track all that capillary action, and all the ways that it nourishes that ecology of broader movements.

CB: It became really important because—this is one of the things that I forgot to mention earlier—one of the really important things in Vancouver that I noted was that there wasn't only that division between the dyke community and the fag community in Vancouver, there was also a deep divide along the leather line. I find that doesn't get talked about a lot, but when you sit down and you start talking with people... it's interesting, because I can occasionally now be at a social gathering where, you know, thirty years ago those same people wouldn't have sat at the table with one another, right? They're who's still standing. But they wouldn't have sat at the table together, strictly because of the leather line. There was a lot of that happening as well. So, you know, part of that tension from within and without, wasn't just about gender, it was about how sexuality was expressed, as well, and how people were vilified for how their sexuality was expressed. And that certainly was happening in San Francisco, and I certainly noted it in Vancouver. And in the feminist movement—the lesbian feminist movement—women were really directly attacked, right?

AS: If they were a part of leather communities?

CB: If they were part of the leather community. A big part of the Lesbian Connection and the Lesbian Centre coming apart at the seams was that lines were drawn along the leather line.

AS: That's so sad.

CB: Yeah, it is. It's really sad.

AS: And do you have a sort of thumbnail or an articulation of what the politics were on either side of that line as they were playing out then? I think people don't remember.

CB: Yeah, there was a lot of stuff. There was the whole Andrea Dworkin crowd. [laughter] Right? And so that sort of type of pre-TERF [Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism], you know? Very, very, lesbian separatist fundamentalist, with some very specific ideas about how sexuality should be expressed, and how misogyny expressed itself in the world, and how women could be coopted.

AS: And eroticize their own domination...

CB: Exactly, yeah. And, then, on the other side of that, was an explosion of... I would say a more dignity-based politic. It was certainly more fresh and exciting, but it was also more difficult to capture. It was more allusive because a lot of the ideas and the ideals were being formed, and they were still foundational. And so, even though you could have drawn a history, like all the way back to, say, the history of the labour movement, and gone, “This is where the fundamentals of that sort of social justice place came from, about self-determination and dignity and integrity.” But certainly nobody was actually making those connections at that time. So, it was really open to attack from a fundamentalist point of view. And, for myself personally, one of the lines that I draw is that when I look at that whole crowd of, you know, sort of second wave separatist feminist position is that it was really a mirror of what was actually happening in larger society. That’s the way that I really see it. It really was a mirror, but wrapped in the cloak of radicalism in a very dangerous way.

AS: Do you have any thoughts about how that played out in Vancouver in terms of the approach that people took to AIDS struggles?

CB: Well, it took a lot of energy. It took an incredible amount of energy away. I’m sure if you were to have talked to Bet about it, and to talk about what was happening at the Vancouver Lesbian Connection, it completely denigrated in tearing apart the whole organization, which meant that energy that had been going towards doing coalition building within the gay men’s community and trying... Because VLC [Vancouver Lesbian Connection] had, at a time, we had really been wanting to create a coalition here in east Vancouver, because everything was centered and centric around the west end. And especially for somebody who is really gravely ill, just that travel is a long way. And, so, if you could actually have something in your own community, that would have been hugely beneficial. And that whole argument took away from that and started tearing apart.

AS: Yeah.

GK: So can could just tell us a little bit more about what Lesbian Connection was, and how it was put together?

CB: So Lesbian Connection started with the Lesbian Information Line. There are so many more people that can speak about—Bet can speak much, much better on this than I can. So the Lesbian Information Line, I believe, predates me coming out. I think it goes back to ’78, ’79. And I believe it was much more rurally based, and that there was a coalition of women—who were actually a lot more ad hoc than that—that were living in the city, and then also living out in the country. Some of them lived very rurally, we’re talking about up in Prince George area, but most of the women were up around Mission, and they had Amazon Acres. So, there’s like, Nym Hughes and Susanne Prall, who also lives on the Sunshine Coast by the way, and so does Sage DuBell, right? You could hook up with all those people while you’re there. [laughter] And so, it was to have this Lesbian Information Line, and that it would be provincial. That was the dream of it. And so they did. They actually established a line and did get some funding, some official funding for it. And, so, they started with an information line, but the whole idea was to create a centre. And, so, the information line and the Connection were all sort of around the same time. Lesbian Connection, we also had a newsletter that was put out, and then that newsletter was distributed throughout

the province, as well. And then eventually the Lesbian Centre was opened in, I think, '82, if I recall correctly. And, so, they were all part and parcel.

GK: So, it survived for how many years?

CB: I just can't remember. It was not a long time. It might have been '90, that it survived to.

AS: That's a long time.

CB: Yeah. Well, it's significant, considering.

AS: Yeah.

GK: Yeah, for sure.

CB: Yeah.

AS: Some years that were not very hospitable to...

CB: Yeah. Exactly.

GK: So, in terms of trying to move this a little bit more back towards AIDS stuff, do you remember the quarantine legislation and the responses to it?

CB: Yeah.

GK: Because I know that the Lesbian Connection and Bet were involved in the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation.

CB: Exactly. For me, that was pivotal. That was a pivotal point where everybody all of a sudden were like, "Wait a second, here." Right? There had been multiple battles, like access to health, access to contact was a huge one, and it was one that the Coalition had taken up and one that AIDS Vancouver also took up. That was really important because then there was already some organizational stuff and some really good knowledge base around actually having physical contact with people. And, so, when the quarantine legislation potential hit, we mobilized massively into action. You'll find that with the Lesbian Centre, the information was also spread through the Connection, as well. That's one thing I forgot to mention about the Connection, was that the Connection became really important also for men that were also living rurally. I don't know if it has ever been officially recorded, but I do know that there was alliances and connections made between gay men and lesbian women that were living rurally. And that connection, because was already there, and that line, because it was already there, opened up lines of communication and made the communication of information available to people. Which was really important, especially when the quarantine bill was introduced, REAL [Realistic, Equal, Active for Life] Women were highly mobilized. The right was really highly mobilized, and REAL Women of Canada was one of the main groups. They went on tour.

AS: And can you talk about what REAL Women were?

CB: The acronym actually stands for something, I can't remember exactly...

GK: REAL...

CB: I think that the L was actually ladies... Terrifying. Anyway, they were actually an ultra-right conservative branch of the Women's Caucus of the Conservative Party of Canada. They packaged themselves as being very accessible, which was a brilliant strategy. And they actually went on tour and had a whole bunch of different things that they would talk about. One of the ways that I personally perceived them as being very dangerous, is that when they went on tour, the AIDS quarantine and AIDS period was not their banner head. Their banner head was family values. Right? Then AIDS would always be brought up and that's where it would be and they had some amazing talking points. You knew they practiced. I actually had to go up against them in an interview on CBC Television. I think in '87.

AS: They were polished? ...

CB: They were so polished. They were really polished. But I scored a good one against them because they had this whole thing about, once they got going they'd starting talking about divine retribution and stuff like that. I was able to say to them, "Well, if this is true, then lesbians must be the chosen people." [laughter] Yeah. Cut to commercial! [laughter]

GK: It's true.

CB: Yeah. Because at that point nobody was taking about lesbians having AIDS.

AS: Right.

GK: Right.

CB: For any reason at all. So, to get back to it, yeah, there was really high mobilization.

GK: Can you remember any sort of actions or anything else?

AS: I mean, even, I feel like we heard that ACT UP met at the Lesbian Connection space? Is that...?

CB: Yeah.

AS: So, that's cool.

CB: Yeah. It was way cool. [laughter] It was really cool. Which was also really weird. I think we had like, one or two meetings at the Coalition. And then none. If I recall correctly, I think the reason

was at that point the Coalition was starting to get legitimized with funding and stuff like that, and didn't want to have the political stuff happening there.

GK: That's when it got incorporated as the PWA Society?

CB: Yes. That's right. Thank you. And, so, there was this whole thing of yeah, no. Because right at that time, the whole quarantine stuff, and ACT UP was just like one step behind the whole quarantine stuff. But we kept on with the quarantine stuff long after. Right? Because it was so terrifying and we felt like it was going to pass. That's the way...

GK: It did pass.

CB: Yeah. It did. But truncated from what it was, but the feeling was, "They're going to fucking start shipping us off to islands."

AS: And they even had islands picked out, right? Was there...?

CB: They did.

AS: Can you remember which?

CB: I can't even remember.

AS: I can't remember, either. I think we had it somewhere, but...

CB: It was greatly truncated. And that also connected to the stuff around contact. One of the beautiful things that we did through ACT UP—because ACT UP and then Queer Nation, that all sort of morphed and happened in Vancouver very closely together. My perception is that in places like New York there was a lot more space between ACT UP and then sort of like, "Okay, what do we do now? We're going to do Queer Nation." But in Vancouver it all sort of tumbled into one another much more quickly. Because it took a long time for it ACT UP to get here. And for people to get really that mobilized and, like I said, it was quarantine that did it. But the beautiful thing—the really beautiful thing—is that we committed to doing very specific acts of resistance. And you could use a lot of your own imagination around what you would do for acts of resistance. But there was a group of us that our specific act of resistance was around contact. It was around going and being with our brothers that were in hospital, many of whom were incarcerated in the hospital because of the quarantine. Because, like I said it was truncated, but you couldn't go out and were incredibly limited about who could come and see you. And when you went, you weren't actually supposed to touch. You weren't supposed to actually have skin on skin contact. So, my personal act of resistance was to insist on having skin on skin contact and to be able to touch and hold and hug. If that's what he wanted. So it was really, yeah.

AS: Yeah.

GK: Maybe we could move into how ACT UP gets formed, or how you get connected with it. If

you have any memories of that.

CB: Wow. It just seemed to morph out of—so, like I said, I was doing stuff around coalition and stuff with AIDS Vancouver. And then, my bookstore also started at the same time.

AS: What was your bookstore called?

CB: It was called The Book Mantel. Nothing hugely spectacular. And that—I'm trying to remember the year that was—so, definitely my first contact was through the Coalition.

AS: Did you go to the—there was the first meeting in someone's backyard.

GK: Ken Burnaby. Did you go to that meeting?

CB: No, it was later.

AS: Were you meeting weekly? Were you meeting as needed? Do you remember?

CB: We were meeting as needed. It felt like, emergent and emergency. So, there was, like I said, quarantine stuff and all of that was all happening at the same time. The other thing that was also happening was, there was a thing going before the federal government around people's insurance coverage. And that was also happening at the same time. I think that it's easy to forget that because it seems pretty banal, right? But it was huge! It was hugely important. And, yeah, the federal government was involved, Sun Life was involved, and it was a really, really big case. That was actually a part of our ACT UP action, to bring that to the forefront. So, we have a lot of actions that were really sort of happening one after the other. We were often having really rapid meetings. We would go in and be like we are meeting, we are mobilizing, we are going. We could end up, you know, during one month having like two or three meetings a week, right? And then we could go for like two or three months without much happening. But we tried to have regular structured meetings at the Centre. And then there were also meetings that happened at The Book Mantle, as well. And then there were also a lot of meetings that happened just sort of walking along the beach, so that no one would be able to record what we were saying, right? Because there was lots of periods of paranoia as well with a lot of the actions we were doing.

AS: Because the social context here was really conservative?

CB: Yes. It was really, really, conservative.

GK: So how did ACT UP organize itself? You've talked to us about having different types of meetings, but did people elect a general assembly decision-making? Was it affinity groups?

CB: So, there were affinity groups, absolutely. There were times where we were quite small. I don't ever personally recall when everybody would all meet together at the same time. Part of what also happened here in Vancouver was that there was a group of us that would meet at the VLC and meet at the Book Mantel. There were also people that would meet in people's back yards, or at

people's houses. We were all affiliated with one another. And we would come together to do actions together. As far as meeting as affinity groups, it would often be that you would have one or two people that would come from that group, and one or two people that would come from this group, right? And then the VLC was—we never considered ourselves to be the core in any way. That's just not the way that ACT UP organized, right? It just wasn't. Like, my perception of, you know, when Ken brought the information about, and started talking to me about ACT UP, just shortly before everything started at the Coalition was that it doesn't work unless everybody has some form of autonomy. The reason it works is that, you know, it was essentially like what I knew from as a kid. Like Black Panther cells. You know, you knock one out and there's still all these other people left. Right?

The one thing that was really beautiful that we had for a while that was trying to be transplanted from New York was people bringing information. And certainly, when I go through my files I will see if I can find some of those for you, because when people would come as a representative from a group, it would be to bring like, "This is how we are talking about things, this is how we are organizing things, this is what works for us, this is what doesn't work for us." People would bring that, and we would all just sort of put it together. And then you would have like this incredible tool of, "Oh, this is what works and this is what's going, and this is what this group found out about what's going on for them, and they're taking care of this so we'll just let them take care of that. Or, we have an idea of what might help because we have also been thinking about that." That was brilliant. That was absolutely brilliant. But it didn't last very long.

GK: Do you have any memories of any of the actions that ACT UP would have generally put together?

CB: Yeah. So, then there would be the times where we would all meet up. And when we'd all meet up is when we were having actions. So, we did a whole bunch of numbers of actions at Sun Life and Zurich was also another one. Zurich, I don't even think exists anymore, they've been eaten up, actually, by Sun Life. We did a lot of stuff at the Robson Square at the law courts.

GK: I think at Robson Square—was that where they had one of the first actions with the three dummies hanging? We have a picture of it.

CB: Yeah. And we had paint with that. I have pictures of that somewhere. I remember because I have pictures of the red paint being sprayed.

AS: That would be amazing to get.

CB: Absolutely. Even if I just have photos, I can scan them and send them to you.

GK: That would be wonderful. So, what would your sense be of the impact of ACT UP? And what it did here?

CB: Oh, wow. It changed everything in Vancouver. It really did. I mean, we can't give that all to ACT UP. It's really the HIV/AIDS crisis changed everything. And, so, our response to it did. And it

formed incredible coalitions between people that still exist to this day. It completely destroyed communities as well. Devastated communities. Like I said, that's HIV/AIDS, but that's also our response to it. Like I said, that stuff on leather lines and stuff, right? You know, the leather community in Vancouver is still recovering from that place of division. And that place of being silenced. And that place of sexualities being policed. But, like you said, the capillaries actually are a really beautiful way of stating it, because that's what happened. There were all these little ripples here and there. But certainly, I think, we in Vancouver experienced what so many other communities experienced—a lot of grief and burn out. There are a lot of people that you would anticipate would still be quite heavily involved and active that aren't, because of the experience of that. And, then again there are people who are still, who are touch stones, and who are still actively involved. I think it changed the conversation.

You know, Vancouver, when I came out, the Vancouver I encountered when I came to Canada from San Francisco, was an incredibly, incredibly, conservative place. And certainly, even within the gay and lesbian community, like, ideologies were ideas that people talked about. And what ACT UP and Queer Nation did was said we could actually take those and put those into action. It forced the body politic into its body. Right? It was like, "Oh, wake up. You actually do have a body. You have something to do here. You have a responsibility. That body's under attack. We can actually breathe. We can actually respond. We can actually do things and work with one another together."

AS: That's a really beautiful way to put that. Thank you.

GK: So, we still have time, but I was just wondering... We've talk a little bit about the relationship between ACT UP and Queer Nation, but maybe you could tell us a little more about what Queer Nation did that was sort of distinctive and different from ACT UP?

CB: Well, I mentioned that whole thing with the information sharing and stuff like that. That was more Queer Nation. Like I said, ACT UP came and, because everything happening so quickly, ACT UP was organized and *not* at the same time.

GK: Right.

CB: A lot of the time it was actually quite a bit of a train wreck. [laughter] And Queer Nation was much more organized. So, it was also about embodying that and going, "Okay, we were a train wreck, but we've figured that out, and we can do this. And so, let's embrace some larger ideas here." In my opinion, in Vancouver's experience of ACT UP, ACT UP was very much a catalyst, and then Queer Nation came. I remember one of the first things besides sharing all that information, we actually had an AIDS conference at Britannia High School. That came out of Queer Nation. That was all us Queer Nation folks putting that together. So, Queer Nation was much more organized, but it was still acting up. It was continuing to act up, just more organization, right? "Hey, we've got this now. We figured this out." So, that's connection. And same with Lesbian Avengers. LABIA was more just fun, right? There wasn't really any connection. [laughter] Lesbian Avengers, though, is where we did things.

AS: Do you remember any of those?

CB: So, Lesbian Avengers, like ACT UP, were a response. Right? So, there was Sheree Shigehiro and Luna Nordin, who got kicked out of Joe's Café for kissing. And the Lesbian Avengers came in and did the whole kiss in, and all of that.

AS: That was primarily a Lesbian Avengers action?

CB: Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

GK: Janis talks about that.

AS: For some reason I thought it was a Queer Nation one. So, that's cool.

CB: Lesbian Avengers and Queer Nation. Like, Vancouver is all connected and tied together. The Dyke Marches were Lesbian Avengers. I mean, it had already been sort of a VLC crowd and everything. But the Dyke Marches, they happened every year, but they had been pretty small. And then Queer Nation, Lesbian Avengers, happened and then they became *a thing*. They really became a thing. They became much more politicized. And they remained that way for years. Because of Lesbian Avengers involvement there were certain things. The Dyke March kept getting bigger and bigger. And then at a certain point it was like, "Well, maybe we should be getting permits, maybe we should be trying that." Because there were so many people that wanted that legitimacy. Right? We were all like, "Fuck that. No way. We don't want that." Right? "We want to be able to be in your face. We want to be the dykes on the street," and that sort of thing.

It's funny to go to the Dyke March. I was at the Dyke March this year telling a bunch of young dykes that we would have never have thought about getting a permit. [laughter] Not a chance.

AS: It's always really puzzling. [laughter]

CB: Pride™ [laughter]

GK: Is it trademarked? The Dyke March here?

CB: Oh, no. It's not.

GK: But the Pride Committee of Toronto did try to. I can't remember if they did it.

CB: I'm not sure if they were successful or not.

GK: And for the Trans March, too.

CB: The Trans March here is not permitted. The Dyke March here, I think is.

GK: It is in Toronto.

AS: In Ottawa it still isn't permitted. So, we're a fourteen-minute walk from our next spot. And we have a few more minutes.

GK: One of my last questions was going to be, so clearly ACT UP and Queer Nation and all of the other stuff was happening at that time, and had a big impact on things, but both ACT UP, which you've described as both organized and unorganized, but, also, Queer Nation eventually wither away. Do you have any sense of how or why that happens?

CB: Well, like I said, that gets into the discussion of the leather line. That gets into the discussion of separatist politics. My perception of why Queer Nation withered away is because of that. Because we eat ourselves. Right? When we're trying to figure it out, we eat ourselves. And, so, the demise of the Vancouver Lesbian Connection, that energy that was taken away... when I'm talking about energy taking away, I'm not talking about little sideline dialogues here. I'm talking about public meetings that were called. Like, not at the Lesbian Connection, but they used the Native Friendship Centre. The last meeting of it was so ugly at the Native Friendship Centre that the Native Friendship Centre said, "We don't want that energy in here. We don't want that here." Because it was really, really, really ugly.

There was also, besides leather line stuff that was coming up, the other thing that came up is also about the politics of inclusion. And I think that that's really important to talk about. ACT UP and Queer Nation by nature were inclusive. The people who were political got involved. What that looked for me at that time was a broad section of people. So, there were people of colour. We were mostly all working class. A lot of different political ideologies. At the beginning of both of those movements, because they were so closely interrelated and in the same time zone, there was room for that, there was inclusion of that. Then as things started moving on and Queer Nation became more organized. Of course, when that happens, when you put on something like an AIDS conference, the first one was really great. There was a lot of room. There was a huge amount of inclusion. There was inclusion at that conference of voices from sex trade workers, voices from people of colour, lesser so from IV drug users, but there certainly was room for that. And, then, it started shifting, right? It started getting legitimized. As soon as that started happening, the face of who was welcome at the table started changing. The same thing was happening at the Vancouver Lesbian Connection. A lot of the attacks against the Vancouver Lesbian Connection were about who's sitting at the table. Some of that stuff was really unfounded, because the Lesbian Connection had always been everybody was not just included at the table, but there was a lot of "step back and move up" to make sure that that was happening. Nonetheless, those discussions were happening. They were happening globally in the lesbian community, in the gay men's community, and the ally bridging communities. They were discussions that needed to be happening. I don't think any of us handled them particularly well. And we imploded.

AS: Also, it's not like there's a lot of support. You know, it's in the interest of...

Sophie the cat: [enters purring]

CB: Sophie, you are so taking liberties. And you know it.

AS: How are they going to transcribe purring? [laughter]

CB: Exactly. [laughter]

AS: You know, I mean, it serves the state. It serves conservatizing as well, that we aren't able to do those things well. It's not a conspiracy and it's not an accident. Right?

CB: Well, that's the whole thing. It's like I said, as soon as we become legitimized in any way, then we start looking at if we can get funding for this. And what do we do, right, to change our clothes to get that funding? Right? And then, who's welcomed at the table? And who's dealt with their stuff? And we had started doing some really, really, incredible stuff. Not just through the VLC, but through the GLC, as it was known then in the community. Mary Brookes, she also lives up on the Sunshine coast, you absolutely have to talk with her. You absolutely have to talk with her. But you can talk with Bet about this as well, because we had started doing—and it was through Queer Nation—stuff, but we didn't name it specifically that. Sort of taking on the road consciousness raising. So, we had created a thing to go in and we did a five-week thing where we addressed internalized homophobia, addressing sexism, addressing classism, bodyism. And we would take it down to the West End. So, you would be having these white, middle class gay men showing up and signing up for this, and actually doing it, and it was really starting to change the dialogue. It was pretty amazing work, right? It was really amazing work.

AS: And then it gets cut off. Sad.

CB: Very sad.

GK: So, we have two questions that we usually end off with. One is, do you have any memories of people living with AIDS or AIDS activists who would have died during this period? Part of what we are trying to do is to construct a memory section. And the last one is other people to talk to, but I think you've already given us some of that info. And, also, you don't have talk about any of this.

CB: Yeah. Oh, it's okay, I mean it's just, yeah. That's the other part of the conversation that we don't often talk about, when we talk how our community changed. Our community fucking died. I can't even fill up a whole hand with the men who are actually left from that time in my life. All three of them that are from that time—those gay men that are actually from that time—are an absolute gift. But when they walk around, they're as wounded as the rest of us. It was devastating. So, I do remember lots of people who died. I remember being with lots of people who died, as they died. Like I said, that was part of my act of resistance.

GK: For sure.

CB: To be there.

GK: That's really important.

AS: Thanks.

CB: Thank you.

GK: So, thank you very much for this. And, as we said, we'll get back to you with the transcript, and you can add things in or take things out, or whatever you want to do with it.

AS: I hope you don't take anything out, because it's been really wonderful.

CB: Okay. Thank you. It's been, like I said, it's kismet. And I will do my best to try and track down pictures.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]