

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

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<b>Interviewee:</b>	Jamie Lee Hamilton
<b>Interviewers:</b>	Alexis Shotwell & Gary Kinsman
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Persons present: Jamie Lee Hamilton – JLH  
Alexis Shotwell – AS  
Gary Kinsman – GK

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

**AS: It's September 13<sup>th</sup> and we're talking to Jamie Lee Hamilton, in Vancouver.**

**GK: So we start all of our interviews, just so that there's sort of a common baseline, with: "When did you first hear about AIDS and what did you hear?"**

JLH: Early 80s, I'm going to say about '84. A friend of mine that lived here; he had just started a nursing program, David. He was doing a research paper on gay doctors, related to HIV/AIDS—well, back then I think it was even called ARC, AIDS-related complex. So that's basically it. You heard about the cancer, "the gay cancer," previous to that. But AIDS I'd say about '84.

**AS: More as a medical situation, he was writing about it from...**

JLH: Yes, he was doing a nursing degree and was writing about it. I said, "We have gay doctors?" He said, "Yes. I've been able to track seven that are okay about going on the record."

**AS: That's really interesting, because it's been one of the things that I've been a little bit surprised by, learning about what happened—the numbers of AIDS organizing groups that included doctors. At that point, did it feel political or did it feel medical? Did you have a sense of it as something that could be something that people organized around?**

JLH: It was scary, right? Obviously. Because you didn't know exactly what was going on. And I worked with someone in the early, early '80s, Bob Tivey, who founded AIDS Vancouver. So, I knew him on a personal level.

**AS: Do you want to say something about what he was doing or what you were working on?**

JLH: Yes, so he, I would say, is an early pioneer in building social awareness around AIDS. And I really admired him.

**GK: We might come back to Bob Tivey a little bit later on, because he does play a part in the organizing around the quarantine legislation. So, there's other things going on in your life though, at this point in time, in the early '80s.**

JLH: [laughter] Well, the sex trade in the West End. And you know, we were battling there. And you know, I was an active sex worker in the West End. But I wasn't fearful of what we called "the gay cancer." But obviously, as a sex worker, you know, myself and many others always used condoms, because we knew that we didn't want to catch it. You know, like gonorrhea, because that would put us out of commission for a few days, and then you couldn't make money, right? Sometimes we had to do what we called car dates, and so you didn't have the ability to do a lot of cleaning of the men's penis. So, condoms were an integral part of it. And that was before AIDS.

**AS: Yes. Do you remember if the anti-AIDS stuff pretty quickly started ... Like, in Ottawa still, some of what sex workers I know deal with is a whole lot of panic and stigma around AIDS, and around Hep-C now, more. Do you remember if AIDS was part of the anti-sex work rhetoric or practices that were in those early days?**

JLH: From customers?

**AS: Yes, maybe from customers, but I was also thinking about from the state or from the city.**

JLH: To me it seemed more prevalent about gonorrhea or syphilis compared to AIDS or hepatitis. I didn't really encounter any stigma. But I knew, as it comes to be '84, that gay men who I was in solidarity with, and I could see the stigma coming, or being reflected onto them.

**GK: I was wondering if you might tell us a little bit about how sex work got organized around Davie Street and in the West End.**

JLH: I think it certainly started before I arrived, and I arrived pretty early in the 70's. So, it was already active. And certainly, many transsexual sex workers were there, because that was the area that we lived in. And even at that time there were not any gay bars on Davie, which is interesting. So, I always like to say that we started the creation of the village—of the gay village. Then the gay clubs came in during that time. And of course, we frequented them and supported them.

**GK: So, there's a growing opposition to sex workers being in the West End. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that?**

JLH: Oh yes. So, basically, in The Penthouse, when it was closed down...

**GK: Maybe you could just tell us about The Penthouse.**

JLH: The Penthouse nightclub – if you look out the window it's right here – is the incredible establishment that's been in existence for, god, fifty years or so. It was operated by these

three Italian brothers. They had dancers, strippers, but they also allowed sex workers in there. So, sex workers would often get their clients from The Penthouse. But then the vice squad here in Vancouver was unhappy about this sex trade happening from within The Penthouse. They clamped down, and then charged them, and shuttered their club. And so, the women, of course, who were working inside, wound up out on the street.

Then it seemed fine in the '70s, there wasn't any earth-shattering opposition. But then early '80s comes along, and you can see it starting to happen. There's a couple of residents' groups, Shame the Johns, which I always call Shame the Prostitutes, and CROWE – Concerned Residents of the West End – they're starting to mobilize. Some of them are homeowners in the West End, and they saw us as a nuisance to the neighbourhood, and targeted us. It was interesting, because just down from where we were, was a very, very active gay male sex scene. We called it the Fruit Loop. [laughter] There was tons of outdoor sex happening there, and these groups never targeted them, but we were targeted. It became a kind of conflicting time. I'm trying to recall if they tried to portray us as vectors of disease. I think it was more they were portraying us as a nuisance, and they were wanting to have their neighbourhood and their ideal of what the West End should be. But the West End has always been predominantly renters, predominantly very bohemian. You know, there were all these rooming houses out of the old mansions that used to be down there, affordable rentals were there...

**GK: So, there were some gay men involved in the opposition to sex workers?**

JLH: Oh yes, because we had different strolls. We had Hustler Row. We had the Tranny Stroll. We had the Fish Stroll, which referred to the women that were born women. And we used the term "fish" not in maybe the sense that you're thinking of, but it was a very beautiful term that the Trans used: "Girl! You're looking really fish tonight." Meaning you're looking very "real." It was very complimentary, and it should never be taken in a derogatory sense. So, we all had our different blocks and we were a tight knit community. We'd take down license plate numbers. We would hang out together for safety. We created our own harm reduction strategies. And we kept it pimp-free. If a pimp came down, we'd say "Sorry you don't belong here. Unless you go home, throw on a dress and some lipstick, and come and suck cock like the rest of us." [laughter] So we really kept it a safe environment.

**GK: That's great.**

JLH: And I refer to it as the Golden Age of Prostitution in Vancouver. It was an outdoor brothel, if you will, brothel culture.

**GK: Right.**

JLH: We supported four national banks in a four-block area. [laughter] Today there's none! None! [laughter] And so, we contributed socially to the city, economically, and culturally.

We supported a lot of businesses, gay and straight. I just ran into Bruce Smith, the co-owner of Little Sister's – well, he just sold it – today on the bus, and we were talking about it and how we used to go in there and get our sex toys and condoms. And he said, "You guys kept us going in those early years, when we first opened."

**GK: That's neat. So, there were people though, like Gordon Price, and other people in CROWE...**

JLH: Who did you say? [laughter]

**GK: The unmentionable name? [laughter]**

JLH: Well, Gordon, it's interesting. I still don't understand to this day why... You know, as a gay male, he should have been supportive. Because there's a lot of gay people involved in the sex trade, a lot of lesbians, a lot of trans people. We're part of the same community. Yet he targeted us with venom. It made it very difficult for us. I think what I resent the most was that, at this time, an NDP mayor gets elected, Michael Harcourt. And he doesn't announce that he's going to do this during the lead up to the election, and he then brings in, as soon as he's elected, The Street Activities By-Law, which began fining us up to \$2,000.

**AS: Wow!**

JLH: Yes. It was pretty awful. And then he gave Gordon Price a \$15,000 untendered six-month contract to study us! Study urban prostitution. Well, he had already made up his mind that we were a nuisance, and that we had to be gotten rid of. So he, I think, was very misguided. I had a recent stint in the hospital in May this year and he came to visit me – I know, it was surprising – and he had just gotten over a bout himself of really serious cancer. It was interesting, we talked about the old days. He talked about his time, that he was pretty wild himself, which I assume to be code that he was going down to The Fruit Loop, and Stanley Park, and the rest of the places, and having sexual encounters as well. Maybe not paying for it, or maybe he did pay for it, who knows?

**GK: Right.**

JLH: So, I found it interesting. I've forgiven him over time. But I'm never going to forget.

**GK: Right. For sure.**

JLH: Especially because he was involved in the early AIDS Vancouver organization as well.

**GK: So, sex workers, at least the sex workers that you were hanging out with, largely got pushed out of the West End?**

JLH: Yes. And I remember I had a penthouse, just a small little penthouse, a block away from where I worked, at Jervis and Pendrell. I remember, my boyfriend at the time was working a block down on Broughton. So, I was up on Jervis and I was going down to say hi to him. He said “Oh, there’s no one around. Can you spot some license plates for me?” And I said “Yes, until some others come out. I gotta make money too.” So, I did that and an undercover officer comes along – I didn’t know it was an undercover officer – but our scene at that time was, we’d always get the customer to first mention a price and the service. We were using the term donation. “Oh, that’s a donation you want to give me?” [Laughs] I don’t know, somehow we thought that was going to protect us. But there was something about him I didn’t know. I wanted to get license plate numbers for David. So, I said “I’ll think about it.” Then he said, “Well if you decide meet me in twenty minutes down at The Sands Hotel, down at the bottom of Davie [Street].” I said “Sure.” I didn’t go, and a half hour later, David gets a trick and he’s off. And I’m just starting to walk away, and undercover officers come up to me and arrest me.

**AS: What?!**

JLH: Yes. Three of them, in a car. I didn’t even—I was quite frightened, you know? Because they’re police, and they flash their badge at you. I was fearful, because I think I was only 19 at the time, I had just turned 19. So they said, “Get in the car,” and so I did because I knew they were police from their badges. Then they start driving away, and I got very frightened. I thought “Oh no.” But anyways, as they’re driving they said, “You’re under arrest for prostitution, blah-blah-blah.” They took me into the police holding tank. It was close to Halloween time. It was an awful experience, I call it Motel Hell. And they didn’t recognize that they’d put us – other sex workers were being arrested the same night, they were obviously doing a sting – and so we were able to mobilize in our cells, right, politically. They didn’t probably count on that. But it was interesting, I had to appear the next morning before a judge, and my mother is there. You know, I had called my mother. So anyways, he’s saying awful things like, “We have to keep people like you off the street,” and gave me an area restriction. And I said, “But, Your Honour, I live right at Comox and Jervis. You’ve given me an area restriction where I live.” And he said, “Well, too bad. You’re just going to have to move.” So, even without a trial or anything, that was the condition to get released, that I had to agree not to be in that area. And then eventually the charges were dropped, because it was a clear case of entrapment.

**AS: Entrapment. And you hadn’t even gone.**

JLH: And I hadn’t even gone. [Laughs] So, it was a pretty traumatic experience, because back in that day they were doing strip searches. They were throwing out fire crackers, making you jump. It was just a really awful, awful experience. So, I didn’t have a lot of respect for them.

**GK: Understandable.**

JLH: Yes.

**GK: So, did you have to start doing sex work elsewhere?**

JLH: I did while the area restriction was on, right? So, I moved to an apartment, which was just East of Thurlow. Then I started working closer down to The Penthouse. But once my charges were dropped I went back. By then they were really targeting us. They're taking photos of us without our permission. They're driving up in their police car and these big, huge flashes go off – we're blinded – without our permission. I think that was the lead up to Expo and they were...

**AS: They were trying to push everyone out.**

JLH: Clean up, yes.

**GK: So, there's an injunction that's often referred to against sex workers...**

JLH: Yes. In 1984, the Attorney General of the province applied for this injunction, and it was granted by a judge named Allan McEachern. Which then mass evicted us from the areas we were in in the West End. And it was interesting, because the first injunction we had to move east of Burrard. And then what happened, coupled with the women being knocked out of The Penthouse, the women wound up on Hornby and Howe Street and Georgia, outside the highest-class hotels: [laughter] The Hotel Vancouver, The Georgia Hotel, The Devonshire. Then the judge freaked out. So then, the second injunction comes, because he's got to get us and them away. So, he then makes it east of Granville.

**AS: So, there was first the by-law with these incredible fines, and then after that these injunctions. And all through it, that kind of police harassment?**

JLH: Yes, the injunction happened July 1994.

**AS: And so, people started organizing then, collectively?**

JLH: Oh yes. We had been organizing in the early '80s under the Alliance for the Safety of Prostitutes, ASP. We were holding our meetings in... it's on Davie Street, and it was called The Columbia Inn. That's where a lot of the scenes from *Hookers on Davie* (1984) are filmed. So, we were organizing there. It was a place we hung out, too, and took our breaks together, and had our dinners, that sort of thing. Then we produced a newsletter called *The Whoreganizer*, so that was interesting. And marched up to City Hall. We wore masks so we wouldn't be arrested. Some of our signs read "Harcourt is our pimp," because the city was collecting these fines [laughter]. Plus, they're licensing escorts. So, you know, that's why the "Harcourt is our pimp."

**AS: Were people coming into that organizing with political backgrounds? Were they like, “I am a Marxist and now I’m organizing as a sex worker” or was it more...**

JLH: Well, two of the women were Marie Arrington and Sally deQuadros. And I think Marie might have come out of that second wave feminist movement, which we didn’t have a lot of support from. We did from Marie, but not the second wave feminists. And Sally deQuadros was a former sex worker, and she was partnered up with John Turvey, who had founded the first needle exchange program. So, they were sort of our mothers, if you will. Because they didn’t work the street, but they were very involved. And that’s how the first bad date sheet got produced.

**AS: And would that have been published on a piece of paper?**

JLH: Yes, it was just on an old typewriter, and it would have a list of the bad dates.

**AS: The bad dates with license plates or just names?**

JLH: Yes, with the license plates. They didn’t do the whole thing because they didn’t want to get sued, right. But it would have the description of the car, the partial plate number, and a description of the client.

**AS: Amazing.**

**GK: So ASP becomes POWER at some point during that time?**

JLH: Yes. Sally, you know, she’s in the relationship with John and she just... I don’t know if it was a power struggle or what happened. But then WISH, Women’s Information Safe House, comes into existence out of First United Church, and Marie founds POWER, Prostitutes and Other Women for Equal Rights. I think Marie was working at a fish market or something. She was always bringing meat and stuff for the WISH program, which was in the Downtown Eastside. So ASP sort of, after we were expelled we were all broken up, so it was bound that ASP would fall apart, which it did.

**GK: Was POWER more centered in the Downtown Eastside?**

JLH: Yes.

**GK: So, you get involved in some forms of AIDS-related organizing, which you obviously bring experience to that.**

JLH: Absolutely.

**GK: Including sex work organizing, trans organizing. Is there anything you want to talk to about that?**

JLH: Sure. It was quite interesting, because the gender clinic here in Vancouver sort of started up around '84-'85. That's the time, too, that AIDS organizing was happening. And, of course, those of us in the sex trade had already been through our initial battles, right? [laughter] So, I heard of a meeting. The Royal Dogwood Court, which was the Emperor and Empress. They were doing fundraising, and they were a long-standing organization, from 1972, a lot of drag. There was a meeting held at St. Paul's Anglican Church. It was regarding the quarantine proposal, quarantine law. And then, many of us that were involved in the sex trade, and the drag queens and that, we all came to this meeting at the church hall, in the basement there. And then connected and started up the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation. Basically, our message, which was very clear, "No quarantine." We would go out, and at this time, Vancouver had about fourteen gay bars. We would go out on the weekends to the bars and do awareness campaigns, and just mobilize, and do some fundraising, too. Through that there was, certainly from my perspective, there wasn't much in the way of support – when men, predominantly, were getting sick, gay men – it was awful, because there didn't seem to be much support. And I thought, "This isn't right that they can be locked up and quarantined." I remembered our own battle. And so, there was this amazing connection of solidarity. Like, we're not going to allow our brothers, and then later women as well, to be treated in this manner. Because we remembered how we were treated, as well. Then I connected with—it was always known as The Lotus Hotel, it's on the edge of the Downtown Eastside in Chinatown. And then two gay men bought it and they changed it to The Heritage House Hotel. I became friends with them, I was doing some shows for them. They opened – I consider it the first AIDS hospice – one entire floor dedicated to gay men with AIDS.

**AS: What kind of shows were you doing?**

JLH: Drag shows.

**AS: So they would have drag shows for fundraising?**

JLH: No, professionally. I was working at a club called BJs Show Bar. It was down at West Pender. That was in the 70s. I started there and worked right through to '85, or '84, around that time.

**AS: And so, when they started the floor, how did it... people would just hear about it?**

JLH: Well, the owners—you know, they were obviously quite wealthy. And it was good. If you didn't have any income you could just stay there. And they brought food in. And it was just compassionate care, right? It was a community as well, The Lotus. It had the lesbian bar downstairs in the basement. It had what was called Chuck's Pub, and then Charlie's Lounge. And one of the owners was a psychiatrist, a gay psychiatrist. It was quite the community, plus the AIDS hospice. And shows. It was an interesting space. A lot of our

political movements were born from the bars, too, because that's where we congregated. That's where we connected.

**AS: Yes. And the joyfulness of bars, right?**

JLH: Yes. And then, of course, I'm doing fundraising for AIDS. And it was during the early 90s, especially '90 and '91. I was Miss Gay Vancouver, and I was working for Walk for Life, which was the AIDS walk-a-thon, I was a volunteer coordinator there. And so, I got to host the New York cast of *A Chorus Line*.

**GK: Wow.**

JLH: Yes! And they said, "We want to do a fundraiser after the show. You are the Miss Gay Vancouver of the city, can you host?" You know, I'm talking to their people. I say "Yes." There's this lesbian bar down in the Downtown Eastside a few blocks from The Lotus, called The Talk of the Town, and I put together also an all-female cast version doing *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. So anyways, we do that late-night after their show fundraiser. We raised I think like \$4,000, which was quite good. And they asked me to decide which organization I wanted it to go to. And women had been sort of invisible in the AIDS movement, but yet women were also catching AIDS. Positive Women's Network had just formed, so I asked that the money raised go to Positive Women's Network. Stuff like that that I was involved with. Then at one point our trans community were – and I don't know why this happened – they were being placed at, you know if they had AIDS, they were being placed at this private hospital way out in the West side on Arbutus Street called the Normandy Hospital. And it was awful ... you know, I'd visit a friend or two in there, and it was just very alien for them, you know.

**AS: And probably hard for people to get to visit them.**

JLH: Hard to get to. Bus service was not good. They weren't treated that well. So, I started doing some awareness around trans issues and AIDS, as well.

**AS: Do you know why would they have been sending trans AIDS patients to that place?**

JLH: It makes you wonder, right? Still to this day I don't understand why. I realize there wasn't much, but we could have worked together, put our heads together. And why Normandy Private Hospital was chosen as a rest home? It didn't make sense. It was way out of the downtown core where our community is.

**GK: What would have been some of the educational work you would have done with trans people, then?**

JLH: Oh! You know, mainly for community first. You know, that you need to use condoms, because these guys that are pretending that they've never been with a transsexual before are sleeping with every transsexual, and probably every bisexual guy going, right? [laughter] So, don't believe them! At this time, too, I'm on the board of the Gay Lesbian Centre, at Bute and Davie. And so, the clinic starts up there. I was able to mobilize and get our girls going there to get the condoms, free testing, all that.

**AS: I want to go back a little bit to the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation. I just wondered if you could just talk a little bit about how it became clear that the province was advocating for quarantine and how that... if you could just say more about how all that happened, and what it was like.**

JLH: I think, you know, a very religious man had been elected leader of the Social Credit Party, the right-wing government, Bill Vander Zalm. And he brought into the position, as the Premier, a very religious, fundamental religious doctrine. And so, based out of ignorance, or hatred they, you know, "These people are immoral. They're spreading this disease around," instead of treating the issue as a health issue. And so, that's when the talk of the quarantine – of quarantining the gay men – came into play in the 80s there. It was frightening because, you know, we knew government can just create policies. They did it with the judge to mass evict us. So, we knew that was a very real threat. And so we needed to do work and be quite vigilant about that. That was slightly before ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power] started. It was great when ACT UP started because that took off. I think some of the actions that ACT UP engaged in were great. In my opinion, The Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation, we accomplished our goal of ensuring no quarantine. Some of our members got involved with ACT UP, and I was still involved with my trans organizing and my sex work organizing. So it was, I think, a good little group. It lasted for the period in time it needed to last for, to accomplish the goal of stopping the quarantining.

**GK: Can you give a sense of who was involved in The Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation?**

JLH: Like I said, there were sex workers – remember that first meeting as coming together at the church – sex workers, transsexuals, gay guys, the club guys. You know, people that were probably considered to be quite on the margins of the "respectable" gay movement that Gordon Price wanted. And, you know, AIDS Vancouver was sort of that type of organization. We were, I would say, more radical. Certainly, by the time ACT UP came along, they were really radical.

**AS: Do you remember how AIDS Vancouver responded to the quarantine legislation?**

JLH: I don't think they ever did.

**AS: Wow.**

**GK: My memory is that Bob Tivey got in trouble, because he actually spoke out against the quarantine legislation. And that's related to their work. There were some disagreements between different groups about whether to call for abolishing Bill-34, which was the quarantine legislation, or calling for reforming it. I know Stan Persky, for instance, supported reforming it and the BC Civil Liberties Association, and I think most of AIDS Vancouver. But I think Bob Tivey got in trouble for speaking out.**

**AS: For opposing it.**

**GK: Yes. That's my sense, from what I remember.**

JLH: I think you're right. I recall that. And then he just got fed up. That's surprising that Stan Persky would have been for reforming it. You know, when you think back, he was pretty radical.

**GK: I think he was connected with the BC Civil Liberties Association then, so it may have had something to do with that. But he did write an article in *This Magazine* basically putting forward that position. So, in The Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation, my understanding from talking to some of the gay men who were involved in it is that there was actually some expression of solidarity from the gay men involved for sex workers.**

JLH: Absolutely. Yes. You know, he goes by the name Ken Hancock now, he was very involved with The Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation, later on he became staff at *Xtra! West*. But in the earlier times he worked at an escort agency. This escort agency, although it was a straight escort agency, all they wanted to do was hire the gay men, because they knew the gay men wouldn't bother the female escorts. And it was a long-standing escort service down on Denman Street, in the West End. Bob was involved, I know he was coming to some of the original meetings. I think Rob Joyce was involved. He later became a realtor. But he was involved in youth issues in the early days. God, I can't remember everyone now. Mama Karen, who was transsexual, she was involved in the sex worker community.

**AS: Is she still around?**

JLH: No. She died, sadly. A lot have died.

**GK: So, you were also talking about being at least a little bit connected with ACT UP when it emerges.**

JLH: Well, through John Kozachenko.

**GK: Okay. We talked to him.**

JLH: I admired their actions, and I knew they were coming under fire, too, from the “respectable” AIDS organizations. And of course, I’m loving it, because as a person myself that believes in civil disobedience, and I think that there’s a way theatrically that you can just make powerful points or drawing attention to the issue. Certainly, I have a lot of great admiration for John Kozachenko.

**AS: When they started doing some of those actions, how did it feel in the context of Vancouver? Was it rare to have that kind of confrontational action? How did it feel?**

JLH: Yes, I thought it was. I was scared for them, because I knew the police would manhandle them. I still didn’t have a lot of confidence in the police. So, I worried about them. And I knew they didn’t have the support. They were on the fringe and didn’t have the support of – well there were only a couple of mainstream AIDS organizations in Vancouver – I knew they didn’t have their support. But I admired them, like I said. And certainly, if anyone talked poorly about them, saying they’re too radical, I’d say, “No. This is what needs to happen, because there are seriously wrong things happening here.” Medication is not good, if you could *get* medication. There’s not enough funding for research. Plus, people’s lives were being destroyed.

**AS: So, when they came on the scene there’s this sort of quality of trying to really raise all of those issues and make it something that...**

JLH: Oh yes, and targeting the government. That’s why The Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation, we could sit back a bit too, because ACT UP was really going after, you know, the Premier Vander Zalm.

**AS: Really directly?**

JLH: Oh yes, really directly.

**AS: Interventions, yes. And that would that have been stuff the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation didn’t feel like it could do ...**

JLH: We didn’t need to. We just needed to support ACT UP doing it.

**AS: Because they were bringing that energy to it.**

**GK: So, we’re probably moving more towards the end of our questions, but is there more you wanted to say about your involvement with AIDS work of any sort?**

JLH: You know, I enjoyed working on the Walk for Life. We took it from raising \$50,000 to \$250,000. That was in ’91 and now it’s way up there. And that was all grassroots, there wasn’t a corporate involvement. So, you know, I’m proud of that, because the funds raised

went to client care, members care – to help them with alternative vitamins, food, and so forth. I was able to use my status as an entertainer to draw attention to the issue. I did another fundraiser—you know, I’m a creative person, so I did another fundraiser. The Castel Hotel had moved down to The Royal and I managed to get these doctors, gay doctors, and dentists, and politicians – Svend Robinson and some others – and do a big afternoon fundraiser. We were auctioning off these celebrities in the gay community [laughter]. And that afternoon, too, we raised a lot of money, I think around \$4,000 for Easter’s Sundays, which was an organization founded by Easter Armas-Mikulik, a woman of color who had come up here from San Francisco. So you know, things like that I feel good about. I would help volunteer at some of the Easter’s Sundays meals that they did, at the god-awful Normandy Hospice. And my friends were dying, so I was trying to also help out there. Then the May’s Hospice started up on Powell Street in Japan Town, so I was involved there, visiting and taking care of friends as much as I could. And I had my own life to lead. And I was involved at that time, too, I went with a United Church Minister, Reverend Barry Morris... I had been out of the sex trade for a while, and I was working for this community organization in the Downtown Eastside called The Downtown Eastside Residents Association. And Barry Morris, on Friday nights, used to go out and serve coffee or hot apple cider to the working women, who by this time are north of Hastings, in the industrial area. So, I’m going out with him on Fridays and doing that volunteer work. I’m reconnecting with some of my old friends that are still alive, but not many. They’re in this horrible area, and I see the danger. So, I get involved again, and get a worker cooperative up, and we start doing a meal program out at First United Church, and a food bank for trans sex workers. We open a boutique called Rainbow’s End, it functions on East Hastings. And then from there, what was happening, I was involved in that from ’93 to ’97. But so many of the working girls – by this time drugs have crept in – and they’re coming in and they’re shoplifting. I’m going, “I don’t want to be the shopkeeper, but they need obviously the stuff they’re shoplifting, and I don’t want to be calling the police or anything.” But I had an area, it had couches and that, and some of the girls would come and sit and hang out. It was interesting, because from there, by this time ’97, I’m ready to pack it in. But I recognize that the women really need support. You know, there’s The Women’s Information Safe House, WISH, but it operates out of First United Church. But I thought, “I’m going to found Grandma’s House,” which was a safe drop-in centre for women and we would open from 9 at night to 5 in the morning. So, we’re out there with the women, and when violent predators are out, we’re there, and we’re trying to be some life links. Then I’m learning about the disappearing women and raising issues around that. Dumping the sixty-seven pairs of stiletto shoes on the steps of City Hall. That’s one of my proudest...

**AS: Can you say a little bit? Can you talk about that?**

JLH: Oh, okay. What it was, we were writing letters to the mayor and council, and not getting any further ahead. But we had uncovered that, we had the proof that there was these women going missing. I had been given documents, confidential documents. So, we cornered the city and the police. They were just going, “Well, you know, they maybe moved away.” We said, “Look. There’s a serial predator down here.” And then finally, out of

frustration, I got a friend that helped fund Grandma's House – we had no government funding – and it was a businessman who was an old client that was helping support the place financially. By this point, according to our calculations, there's sixty-seven missing and murdered sex workers in the Downtown Eastside. We had all these shoes left over from our fashion store, and we got more and just went up. Originally, I was going to be on top of one of those big trucks, you know the kind with the...

**AS: Lifts?**

JLH: Yes. [laughter] I thought, "I can't do that. They'll arrest me for sure driving up with that." So, we're lugging garbage bags of all these shoes.

**AS: That's a lot of shoes.**

JLH: A lot of shoes! And it's pouring raining out. So, we attracted a lot of attention from the media. That was really important. We followed up from that again, trying to get the mayor and council to take the issue seriously, and they still weren't. So, I upped the ante. And so, what we did was I got Viola Thomas, who is the president of the United Native Nations, because so many of the women going missing were Aboriginal women, and I wanted her to witness this. I got some other friends together and I said, "We're going to go storm the council chamber and take over the meeting because they're not putting us on the agenda." A friend of mine, who is this nudist, quirky gay, as soon as the microphone, or the lectern, comes up, he walks up and says, "First agenda item: sixty-seven missing and murdered women." And then invites me to the lectern. They're furious, the council, a lot of the councilors are furious, the mayor is not too happy. It was interesting, because a journalism class is there that day. A whole bunch of them from Langara, a college here in Vancouver. They thought they were there to witness this stodgy old council meeting! They were witnessing high drama [laughter] because I was at the lectern. I wasn't leaving. This was the showdown, right? The mayor ordered the councilors out, and I said "That's fine. I'm not going anywhere." Then the journalism class' instructor – I think it was Frances Bula – anyway, all of a sudden there's lots of mainstream media coming in [laughter] because they know something is going on, they'd been tipped off, so they come. It was interesting, two hours waiting there, but there's no way I was leaving. It had to be done. I thought, "They're going to lock me up, they're going to arrest me, but I'm not budging." Eventually the city manager, the top bureaucrat of the city comes back in. He says "Okay, you're going to get your meeting." I said, "You're telling me this? You're not the politician. You get that mayor back in his chair with the rest of council, and you get him to tell me, while the cameras are on, that we've got this meeting." Sure enough we got the meeting. You know, to this day, I was able to really work that mayor over a bit – Mayor Phillip Owen – and he came on side. I know sometimes I have the power of persuasion, and I appeal to people's humanity. I know it's in everybody. I said, "I don't know what you're being told by the police," because he's the chair of the police board, "but here's all the evidence. Please come down to our drop-in centre." He said okay, he would, and he did, to Grandma's House. And it was funny, because here's this straight-laced mayor from Shaughnessy. And someone had donated Christmas

lights, and it was around Christmas time, and they were red. [laughter] It was all red around. You know, we have all these posters of the missing women in the window and all these red whore lights, right? The mayor arrives with this beautiful tree and chocolate bars. It was wonderful. He's meeting all of the working girls from down there, which he had never had that opportunity. I talked him into the reward. I said "Look. It's going to loosen lips. Please, you've got to take this stance." He said, "But the police are saying..." I said, "I know, but they don't have it right. They're wrong." So, he broke with them and he offered a \$100,000 reward, which I think was a very courageous move on his part as well. And it did finally get people talking and it helped put Robert Pickton behind bars.

Oh! There's one other thing, it's a funny aspect to this because one of the targets I did as well, in the dead of Winter, pitched a tent on the lawn of City Hall. Again, this was right after the shoe dumping. It was funny, I had to go present an award for *Xtra!*, the gay press, and I had to leave the tent—because I was camped out there. And so, I arrived back after doing this presentation and my tent is gone. So I called Tim Lewis, the lawyer, and he says "You gotta call the police" (from City Hall there) and he said, "and when they ask you if you have a suspect, name the mayor." [laughter] And I did! So I got the tent back right away. [laughter] I think the dispatcher who took the call, when he said do you have a suspect and I said "Yes, Mayor Phillip Owen"—and silence on the phone! [laughter] Then she said, "Excuse me, I'm going to come right back. I just have to go talk to some people." And she came back within five minutes – and I'm in City Hall using their complimentary phone – and she said, "Oh yes, your tent has been recovered and it's in the security office."

**AS: [laughter] Did you go and set it back up? What happened?**

JLH: Oh yes. Definitely. And then councilors would come and talk to me. So again, we're making progress, because they probably don't want me here, and there's a lot of media attention. Eventually – it's sad that all that awful stuff happened, a lot of it could have been prevented – but it all goes back to the displacement in the West End. So, those are just some of—you asked some of the things I do, and that's what makes me tick. I like using that creative side to sometimes embarrass decision makers into taking action. Or shaming them. Sometimes you have to do it that way. Just like ACT UP had to do it the way they did it.

**AS: Yes, because it's, you know, usually people are just as happy to not do anything. Politicians are like, "Well there's no reason for us..." So, just give them an opportunity to act better.**

JLH: Do the right thing, yes. And even now, with the West End Memorial that we had got from them. The mayor agreed—we asked for a civic apology because of the money that was taken, along with supporting the memorial. And he was fine with it all along, and then about a month and a half ago decided he got targeted by the abolitionists [those who wish to prohibit sex work]. They were quite nasty to him. I've seen them in action. But that's still no reason to walk away from a commitment. But you know, I didn't force the issue too much, because I knew we were getting our memorial that would be there forever,

hopefully. And I'll have my moment on the microphone on Friday to call the mayor a coward for walking away. Because they're going to do a civic acknowledgment, but an acknowledgment is not an apology. And I hope at some point, too, how AIDS was treated here – people dying and so forth – that there's an apology given to the people, the trailblazers, in recognition of the battles on that front too.

**AS: I feel like John Kozachenko, you know, has done so much – and many others too – and no one knows.**

JLH: I know. I know. I guess there's still, maybe too, like a stigma attached to putting yourself out there with the issue.

**AS: Yes. I think also – I mean, it's kind of sweet in a certain way – people want to think that things turn around or things change just because people are like, "Oh! I was wrong about that and I see that now." And so, there's this kind of tendency to forget all the hard and confrontational work that people like you did.**

JLH: Oh, my role, I think, was very minor.

**AS: Well, but in things like the shoe action. It's a lot of work to change how the world is.**

JLH: It is. And you have to have courage. You really have to have courage. When I did the shoes, I thought, "Oh, they're going to lock me away for sure. They're going to put me in a psych ward, or something." You know? And then, even when the missing women were disappearing, and I was really focused on drawing attention to that, I thought at some point the police were really going to come after me. And they did on a number of fronts. I was scared that I could suddenly be taken somewhere and never heard from again because I was shaming them, and that they were just sweeping this under the carpet.

**GK: So, we usually do some closing questions. One is, there's people we can't talk to anymore because they died.**

JLH: Yes.

**GK: So, one of the things we ask people – and we already got a little bit of a memory section of people who did die, the memories people have of them – are there people who died of AIDS or were involved in activism around that period of time around AIDS who you would remember?**

JLH: Oh yes, absolutely.

**GK: Any particular names?**

JLH: David Watson, who was our Empress, Daisy Duck. Our Empress was the one who did the original, doing the nursing degree. And also Daisy was very involved in her year as Empress, in 1980, from every ball ticket sold for coronation – our coronations then attracted 1,500 people – so a dollar from each ticket went towards the Gay Lesbian Community Centre so it could get started. It was in a small little office down on Seymour Street or Richards. So, to get it going up there at Davie and Bute. So, someone like him I recall. Another friend of mine, Georgina, Princess White Feather, was part of the Greater Vancouver Native Cultural Society, of which I'm involved. Georgina died of AIDS, as well as David did. And Georgina did a lot of special work as well in the Aboriginal movement. Bob Tivey, of course. I'm so fortunate that I got to work with Bob at the Garden Spa.

**GK: Oh, that's how it happened?**

JLH: Yes. Yes, yes.

**GK: Did Bob pass away?**

JLH: Bob Tivey?

**GK: Yes.**

JLH: I believe so.

**GK: I just lost track of him.**

JLH: Yes, oh, he definitely did. [He died in 2011].

**GK: Okay.**

JLH: There's so many. There's just so many. Mama Karen. She was like a mentor. She was a generation before me. So again, a very brave woman who was transsexual and she was a sex worker. She taught me a lot about the sex trade, that one didn't need to feel shame, that we're smart businesswomen. Her, I remember fondly.

**AS: She was from Vancouver?**

JLH: Originally from the East Coast, from New Brunswick.

**AS: Ah! Okay.**

JLH: She came out here in the 70s, well probably late 60s, because she was a generation before me. I learned a lot from her. And she was involved with the Coalition for Responsible Health Legislation as well. Some of the transsexuals that died in Normandy Hospital. They

were abandoned in a foreign—it might as well have been in a foreign country, it was just sick.

**AS: Terrible.**

JLH: Terrible. Why would you put people there? You know, it's just... It's hard because I think we become... I've watched the younger generation, and they didn't have to go through AIDS. They've come into a society that they haven't suffered like we did in losing people. Sometimes I feel that they're not doing enough work towards—they think they know it with theory and so forth, but unless you've really been through a lot of those lived experiences, I think you need to respect the elders, and learn from the elders. So, I'd like to see more work from them. Because, you know, at any time things can change, policies can change. We could have another quarantine legislation. We could be threatened with it. You just never know who the lawmakers are going to be... [sigh]

**GK: I think you just started to talk about one of these things, but is there anything else that's cropped up that you wanted to talk about but you haven't had an opportunity to yet in this interview?**

JLH: I think the AIDS memorial here is interesting. That was quite the battle to get that. Originally it was supposed to be down in Stanley Park, but there were people really pissed off with that. I think a lot of it, the opposition, was steeped in homophobia. The compromise after long, long debates, was to have it over at Sunset Beach. Which, you know, it's nice that the Pride Parade winds up there and that. But to me, I thought Stanley Park would have been such a beautiful, beautiful spot for it. So, you know, I think we should be proud that we do have that AIDS memorial. I think the candlelight vigil still goes on that Bob Tivey's partner, James Johnstone, was very involved with for many, many years. It was down at Alexandria Park in the West End. The names of, you know, everybody that passed away would be read out year to year. I think as people now are being kept alive with the medications, but sometimes I just hear about Positive Living Society here in Vancouver, that they're in a crunch, they've lost funding. Everybody's always walking a tightrope, you know? We can't let that just slide, we've got to make sure that government keeps funding these organizations that are doing work. We've got to keep ever-vigilant. And we've got to honour people like John Kozachenko, who's there on his scooter, still I see him from time to time with these posters. He's one of our heroes as well. Certainly, I'm talking from a local perspective as well. To this day, I don't know what AIDS Vancouver does. [laughter] Sometimes I get saddened that we strip away what some organizations were about ... we've done that with our Gay and Lesbian Community Centres, now "QMUNITY." So, it takes away the name: Persons with AIDS Network is now Positive Living. So, it takes away, I think. It almost contributes to erasure. I worry about that.

So, I'm glad you guys are doing this work of documenting the history. Because I think as a community, too, we haven't recovered from the impact. We used to have so many gay bars. We used to have lots of steam baths where the gay men could go meet with partners. Even

other cities have had it where women can go to steam baths. And the hustlers used to use the steam baths as an opportunity for a cheap hotel. We've lost so much of all that history. In a way, I'm happy that I got to be around it in the heyday. I just don't want to see complete erasure.

**GK: That's one of the reasons why we're doing this, so that at least there's some record.**

JLH: Yes.

**GK: And documentation. So, I guess the final question is simply, you've mentioned a number of people we could talk to. Obviously we can't talk to everyone, but are there particular people that you would think of just thinking about your involvements over the years who you think it might be useful for us to talk to?**

JLH: Well, John, you've already talked to. I was thinking about, you know, Easter Armas-Mikulik. I don't know, she's quite reclusive. But she started up Easter's Sunday, and it became known.... It started at Vancouver Meal Society, the Easter's Sundays was a specific program of theirs. Now it's known as A Loving Spoonful. She was the founder. I don't know if she would speak. I don't even know if I have her phone number. She's certainly someone I think that needs to be spoken with. Maybe Kevin Dale McKeown, he was the first out gay writer. I don't have Easter's number, but I should have Kevin's... I have too many phone books. [laughter]

**AS: I love that you have phone books.**

JLH: Because everybody does their...

**GK: I still have phone books.**

JLH: I have one there, one there, this one, and this one. [laughter]

**GK: We can try and locate Kevin.**

JLH: He still lives in Vancouver.

**AS: He was a writer?**

JLH: Yes, for the *Georgia Straight*. He still writes for *Xtra!*, and he's very involved in the arts communities. So, he's been around a long time.

**AS: Cool.**

JLH: I wonder if John Mikulik, he owned a lot of the gay bars in the city, The Playpen Clubs. I wonder if he'd be interested in speaking. He's someone I think would be very interested, if his health can take it.

**AS: John... what's his last name?**

JLH: Mikulik, M-I-K-U-L-I-K. And he will probably have Easter Armas-Mikulik's, because they got married, even though John's gay. So, he would probably have her number. James Johnstone, have you spoken with him? He was Bob Tivey's partner.

**GK: No, we haven't.**

JLH: He was doing the... I'm looking that up. I have him on email. So much is done on email nowadays, isn't it?

**AS: And it's so much faster, too, to just call and say hello.**

JLH: I still like the phone, because I like hearing people. He lives in Strathcona. You can look him up. He's known as a house historian. He does walking tours of the Strathcona neighbourhood. You can just tell him I gave his name. Who else? Charles is still alive. Charles Dyer, who is the owner of the Heritage House Hotel, and started up the first AIDS hospice. I don't have his number. You might be able to track it down. He was involved. He's a good man, and he was a strong supporter of the Pride movement in the beginning days, helping funding it. He lives down in the West End. His partner died, the psychiatrist. Oh! Laura McDiarmid. You could talk to her, because she was the chair of the Parks Board at the time of the AIDS memorial. You could talk probably from that perspective.

**GK: Great. Excellent. This has been really, really helpful.**

JLH: Oh! I enjoyed talking to you.

**AS: Thank you so much.**

JLH: I'm glad that you contacted. It was Becki I guess you first contacted.

**GK: Yes. Well, your name actually came up in some of the interviews we did the last time we were here. When Becki mentioned you were involved with the memorial, I just thought Becki must know how to get a hold of you.**

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]