

AAHP
AIDS Activist History Project

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Interviewee:	Ross Higgins
Interviewers:	Alexis Shotwell & Gary Kinsman
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Persons present: Ross Higgins – RH
Alexis Shotwell – AS
Gary Kinsman – GK

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

AS: So, I start all the interviews with saying that we're in Montreal, we are talking to Ross Higgins, and it's October 29, 2016.

GK: So, the first question we start off with, with everyone, is when you first heard about AIDS and what you heard. Do you have any memories of that?

RH: Not really. Tom Waugh and I were in India on the fateful day of *The New York Times* article. I don't really remember particularly what or how we found out about it. When we got back, there was an article in *The Body Politic* that August, where they were, you know, saying it was a CIA conspiracy.

GK: That was the first article in *The Body Politic*, yes.

RH: Yes. It followed, maybe in October of that year, when... what's his name... Lewis?

GK: Bill Lewis.

RH: Bill Lewis, who said, "Well, maybe we need to take this more seriously."

GK: Yes, Tim actually documents that in his book, all of those articles. So, you would have first heard about or thought about AIDS as relating to medical health. Can you remember what you would have read to try and find out more information on AIDS and HIV during that period of time?

RH: *The Body Politic*—there was no other source. *The Body Politic*.

GK: And would you have had any contact with any of the more medical material?

RH: No.

AS: And *The Body Politic*, you would get it in L'Androgyne? Were you here in Montreal, then?

RH: Yes.

AS: I always ask about this because I think a lot of people who encounter this history implicitly feel like the internet existed. So, would you just talk a little bit about how things came about, how people found out about things, how they got distributed?

RH: I have to remember. I don't think I had a subscription. But...

AS: Did the store exist yet, then?

RH: Oh, yes. The store existed since '73.

AS: And were you involved in setting it up?

RH: No. No. I wasn't here until two years after. And then I joined as a way of acquiring a social life. [laughter]

AS: What was it like? What was the social life of that?

RH: Well, it was the centre of the gay world in many ways. It was the only place where men and women really worked together, except student groups. And, at that time, when I started, it was Androgyny/Alternatives [L'Androgyne]. Because they had a deal with the anarchists. And Dimitri was staffing one day a week.

AS: What was the deal?

RH: Well, the Alternatives had like, one wall of books. The rest was feminist, lesbian and gay, and non-sexist children's books. That's what we had.

AS: And Alternatives was a publisher? Or it was a...

RH: No. They were a bookstore. Black Rose was the publisher.

GK: Was Black Rose there at one point?

RH: No, not there. But I mean Dimitri was—he was all of that. We didn't really know anybody else. Well, there were some other staffers, but we kept hearing these stories of eventually people who were just on the brink of coming out, and they would unfortunately choose a Monday... [laughter]

AS: And there would be...

RH: Well, Dimitri is not the most welcoming person.

GK: He's not. [laughter]

AS: So...

RH: Other days, though, you know, it was a place where people would come and hang around.

AS: Yes.

RH: This was more in the '70s. By the late '80s I don't remember exactly when they moved to St-Laurent. But I was no longer involved. I stopped, telling them I had to finish my Master's in 1979. It took me another six years.

GK: So, when AIDS starts to emerge, you wouldn't have been involved in L'Androgyne anymore, but do you have any memories of any things happening around the bookstore? Because you must have still gone to it fairly often...

RH: Yes. That was my social world, so I knew everything that was going on. And ADGQ [l'Association pour les droits de gai(e)s du Québec] was set up, so the community was somewhat mobilized. You know, the archives were already thinking – maybe in '82 – about starting. Officially we started in the spring of '83. But we began collecting news clippings - people gave us old clippings. We quickly separated AIDS stories from general, queer-related stories. The two, month-by-month, became equal in volume, quite rapidly. And there wasn't that much of either. But, I mean, our clipping files have always had that separation.

AS: So, as you'll see one of my roles in these interviews is to ask questions that are, perfectly obvious to Gary, but that aren't perfectly obvious to others. So, I just wanted to pick up on one thing, because a lot of other people have really emphasized that there was this strong social separation between gay men and lesbians in Montreal at the time. And, that for example, they couldn't go to bars together. Would you say more about the ways that was not the case in the social world of L'Androgyne?

RH: Well, it was the case in the community.

AS: Yes. But in this...

RH: There were men-only places, there were still taverns in those days.

AS: Yes.

RH: But men and women worked together because it was—initially, Androgyne was an Anglophone, feminist, lesbian and gay bookstore. So, it had a lot of women who were studying at McGill, especially Americans, or people from outside of Montreal. So, that was initially set up that way. Then, in the latter part of my time there, we had been wanting to, and were able to finally move towards having books and other materials in French. But there was already the women's bookstore in French that changed names several times, L'Euguélonne, and things like that. So, we didn't want to compete with them. So, it made this kind of tricky.

You know, there was a huge uproar over stocking a button that said, "Castrate rapists." I understood it as a kind of rhetorical gesture, but some of the other guys were quite upset about it. Worse, there was a concert where male children were not allowed. That kind of thing. But, you know, we had very good relationships with the women. Especially people like Suzanne Downs, who was later very involved in the Sex Garage saga. She's probably somebody who could be talked to.

AS: Yes, so a place where some of those... Because, my understanding is also that there is a strong lesbian separatist current in Quebec.

RH: Francophone. Yes.

AS: Francophone, yes. And, so, a place where actually some of those conversations could be happening directly. Yes. That's really interesting.

RH: Yes. And well, also, I mean, I moved in just over here on Hotel de Ville after my first year, when I had a little apartment on my own. I moved into a collective house with my friend Danny Frankel and various other people. And Line Chamberland, who was just moving out. So, I met Line because she offered to help me get a truck. I didn't have a credit card at the time, so... She was too recently arrived from Quebec City, so they wouldn't rent to her, either. [laughter] For the move I ended up getting the help from a man I met in a park one night. [laughter]

AS: Handy.

RH: I didn't remain friends with him. But I was always friends with Line after that. Her and Nicole would come to parties at our house, which became a big centre. We did a lot of stuff there. Like, you know, when there was a demonstration. We had an enormous apartment, with empty rooms, basically. Two floors on the upper part of the house. So, we had room to spread out and make a banner—we could spread it out full length and have various people working, and things like that.

AS: Was it an explicitly political collective house?

RH: No. But there were people who were... There was a straight man that was very involved in one of the Maoist groups. And things like that. And so, they were all pretty political. And it was, you know, in the '70s. Everybody was very politicized. There were these huge things. At the same time, you know, I joined GHAP when I came here and we were organizing May 1st [May Day] contingents, and March 8th [International Women's Day].

GK: Could you tell us a little bit about GHAP?

RH: Groupe homosexuel d'action politique was – despite the name – a discussion group [laughter] with people that Gary knew. I mean, my connection was through them. The class or whatever it was, at the Marxist Institute [in Toronto]. I mean, I don't think I have anything on paper about what that was. [laughter] I don't know where it is, if I do. But, so, Mark Wilson and Gerard had come to Toronto. So, when I came to look for a place I stayed with Mark. And his place was on Berri, just around the corner from John's restaurant. He opened the first cool restaurant on Duluth. It was a vegetarian place. And you knew it was queer because it was full of little doilies, and teacups, and pictures. [laughter]

GK: Yes, I think a bunch of the GHAP people came down for a contingent in the CGRO [Coalition for Gay Rights in Ontario] demonstration around John Damien and gay rights at work. Like, maybe six or eight people. And maybe that would be '75...

RH: Yes. That would be later. Activists from Toronto and Montreal also met earlier at the Ottawa demonstration in 1971.

GK: Okay. That would be later.

RH: No. They were just visiting or something. And came to the meeting, I think. So, when I knew people, those were two of the most important people in GHAP, initially. That I had met before I got here. And I didn't really speak French at the time, but I thought I would go. And education, because we were writing a manifesto kind of thing. It was a very popular activity. [laughter]

AS: About sexuality?

RH: About making links between gay struggles, women, and union struggles. So, that's why we were organizing contingents.

AS: Yes.

RH: For May 1st and March 8th.

AS: And will you say what March 8th signified?

RH: International Women's Day. [laughter]

AS: Okay, so then in the early '80s you start setting up the archives—I was also wondering if you would tell again the story you told at our talk, about the person who was interested in having....

RH: Right. I should find it. The name of that group is on my desk. [laughter] It is very hard to remember. Because it is quite a long time ago. [...] Well, I started doing my Master's at UdeM [Université de Montréal] in '76.

AS: By which time your French was good enough to do a Master's?

RH: Well, I was able to understand the professors, but not the other students. I mean, the professors spoke in a more formal way, which is what I had been trained in. And, meanwhile, I was taking—Mark had a friend who as it turned out was crucial to the whole thing. He was a French teacher and was not working, he was on unemployment. So, I kind of hired him to give me private lessons.

AS: Yes.

RH: Which turned into—I think I only paid him twice, but then I would go because he thought it was such fun, because I was asking very good questions about language.

AS: So, you've started the Master's...

RH: I was going somewhere, but...

AS: And then I derailed you with thinking about French.

RH: Oh, yes. Well, I mean, I gradually became more and more fluent. But I was working at Androgyny at the time. You know, we did rotating staffing. It was a time where the publications were very on and off. I mean, there was a thing called *Gay Times*, and that was the last great Anglo effort. When I arrived it was just at the end of the Anglo period. Oh, that's what I was going to say: the man who taught me French turned out to have been the person who became the spokesperson—there was an anti-confederation demo in 1971. Just at the time of the FLH – the Front de libération homosexuel – which was the first gay group that really lasted. But, he had been active in it, and he was also somebody who was very interested in lowlife. So, he took me to—Montreal had ten times the number of gay places that Toronto did, at the time. A lot of them down in what later became the village, or the old red-light district. And the Lincoln Café up at the corner of Saint-Denis and Mount Royal. So, I got taken around to all these places because I was interested in the history. I wasn't thinking about a particular project. So, he was instrumental. I quickly became much better at dealing with language.

AS: Were you always interested in history? Or did that come...?

RH: Yes. I was already looking at the world very sociologically before I even came out. So, when I first went into the Parkside [in Toronto], you know, aside from fear and trembling, I was thinking, "Oh." [laughter] So, yes. And then, I guess, in '79, in January of '79, I got hired to teach English at UQAM [Université du Québec à Montréal]. And we got our first paychecks and then went out on strike. [laughter] And I spent that spring sitting on the steps of the building. We were very lucky with our posting—we were facing south on the steps of the school building on Parc La Fontaine. And chatting away. So, it was very good for my French, as well. But through that, probably, that's how I knew Jean-Gilles Godin, because he was at UQAM, also [in the 1980s]. I never really knew him well. But he called a meeting and we were in the—well, GHAP ended at the same time as the Olympics, which, you know, the setting up of ADGQ. Although we were too far left to be involved with those reformists—dirty reformists! [laughter]

GK: So, that's '76?

RH: Yes.

AS: And then by '79...

RH: Well, there's the interval where we were basically working at the bookstore, and things were quite busy. You know, because one of our members was arrested at Truax, and we were highly mobilized in the defense. Supporting the defense. There was a collective defense. And all kinds of things, a very busy period. By the early 80s – yes, I was just looking at the notes – we set up the Collectif du triangle rose [CTR]. We were sort of half Androgyny, Anglo, men – it was all men. And half [Francophones] – there was a whole group of people who had been into En Lutte! [In Struggle! A Maoist group], more or less.

GK: Right.

RH: And they had kind of missed out on the history of those years, because they had been busy with En Lutte!. And, so, we set out to do a kind of chronology of events that was the basis of my research and the archives, getting all that together. And there was one—you know, we were interested in all kinds of things that were going on, and AIDS was one of them. So, I do have a tape of a meeting where we focused on AIDS in April 1983.

AS: Wow.

RH: Which is not really listenable to me. [laughter]

AS: But remarkable.

GK: Yes.

RH: And we had other—three or four tapes of different themed discussions that we had. At a certain point we left off high theory, and started talking about personal experience. There was a remarkable time where everybody was supposed to be making lists of all the places that they knew, especially outdoor cruising places, and so on. The francophone guys had an outstanding list going out to, you know, truck stops along highways, here and there. L'Île-aux-fesses was the best one. It's on the north side of the island, where the powerlines go across. Supposedly a cruising place, but – Tom Waugh and I, when we had a car, went up to see and it was very disappointing. [laughter] Anyway. Oh, the other thing was, in that period, we were very involved – because of the arrests and so on –with the coalition, which might have been called the Front Populaire. I was just looking at the notes, but I don't know exactly. We had been involved from Androgyny with something called L'opération liberté. [a broad coalition of popular groups organized by the Ligue des droits de l'homme]

GK: That's right.

RH: We had a big meeting that was all about the thing with the Catholic school board refusing to rent a hall, etc.

GK: Right.

RH: And there was, you know, on a personal level, I think, many men lived in a world that were totally men, but we had connections with women. So, there was a lot of interplay. People like Line, you know, had no time for lesbian separatism. [laughter]. And she never has had. And tries to be polite. So, she was quite open to...

AS: Working together.

RH: Working together. Although we weren't really working together in those days. You know, she was teaching CEGEP [Collège d'enseignement général et professionnelle], and our paths crossed every so often. Anyway. So, we had this discussion about AIDS. And I think around the same time

Jean-Gilles must have called a meeting. I have a feeling I have a page of notes, but... [laughter]

AS: Somewhere.

RH: I made a brief search for it the other day, without success. And it didn't really go anywhere. John Banks was there, too, according to my notes. And Michel Dorais. Do you know him? One of the most prolific writers. He teaches at Laval and has been in Quebec City for many years. But he occasionally turns up. He could probably be a person who could provide information on this CICAG [Collectif d'intervention communautaire auprès des gais].

AS: And, so, CICAG...

RH: Just in terms of what you were asking earlier, about information and so on, you know, I went regularly to Androgyny, obviously. I was also really connected with the people who were doing *Le Berdache*, and eventually *Sortie*.

AS: Those were *Le Berdache* and *Sortie*?

RH: That was the publication. *Le Berdache* was the publication, the third iteration of the publication of l'Association pour les droits de gai(e)s du Québec [ADGQ]. I can never remember, the "L" went in and out, but they used to have "E" in brackets. And when there was a conflict that emerged between the group that was doing the magazine and the actual organization... and that was when some of the people from *Le Berdache* went off and started *Sortie*, especially Bernard Courte.

GK: Yes.

RH: And John Banks was very involved in *Sortie*. John Banks turns up in absolutely every context. [laughter]

AS: Fingers in many pies.

RH: Yes. He was doing community radio shows and things like that at the time. Having given up his restaurant. He basically was a bartender for most of his career after he stopped being Marlene Dietrich's assistant.

AS: Wow.

RH: Yes. Anyway. So, it was very easy. I mean, one of the things that is hard to imagine, I think, from the point of view of today, is that in those days we knew everything that was published, we knew every TV show that dealt with homosexuality.

AS: It was possible.

RH: People, you know, were telling each other something was coming up, or whatever.

AS: Yes.

RH: So, it was very easy to stay informed, but there was no information on AIDS. And that was a very scary period.

AS: Yes.

RH: I taught, many times, different classes. You know, it went on for about three years of totally not knowing, and living in fear. So, the archives is partly because we decided it was time to actually do something.

AS: And is this a good time to start talking about how the archives came to be?

RH: Well, I had met Jacques Prince, who was the cofounder, in a bar. And we didn't last as an item, but we remained friends. And he was interested in the bookstore. So, he sort of came into the bookstore as I was leaving. Jacques never—now that he's been spending winters in Florida, his English is better, but it was never as strong. But, there had been a suggestion of another Androgyny person years before that material should be sent to the archive in Toronto, which I didn't think was a good idea. Jacques agreed with me. Then he went into library school. So, we decided that we would start it in the spring of '83. We don't have a particular date to mark the beginning, but we set it up. It was in my house, my old place, for the first ten years. We got other people involved, and got incorporated. In 1990 we got charitable status, and were able to raise money to open our own public office, which we did in '93, together with the people from the film festival in an adjacent office. We had a kind of...

AS: Collaboration?

RH: In looking for places. And we had offices, side by side, that were identical.

AS: Yes.

RH: They moved across the hall and that became the Divers/Cité office, later. And the film festival is still in that building, up on St-Laurent just around the corner at Duluth, but up on another floor.

AS: And can you just say something about that impulse to create an archive and to have it stay in Quebec? Why was that important?

RH: Well, people from here don't go to Toronto. [laughter] And they certainly wouldn't go to consult documents, if they were held in Toronto. It was just like throwing them away to send them to Toronto.

AS: Yes.

RH: And we were, you know, experiencing very intense police attention in those years. And there was a whole story to be documented. And we already knew that a lot of stuff had been lost, because there had been no place to put it. Even after we started, people were still unaware. One of

the things today is that people don't really know what an archive is and have never heard of it.

AS: Yes. And don't think that things were important enough to save.

RH: Yes, exactly. It's very hard when you're in the thick of mobilizing to actually remember the documentary aspect. And it's so much easier now, because everybody can make videos with their phone, and so on. But in those days, it was... we don't have much visual representation of the '70s.

AS: At all, yes.

RH: And some of the people that did a lot of photography had problems. And I know that there are some archives of negatives that were just burnt. So, we have prints. So, it was, you know, part of a whole thing. At this point, I was starting to think about what I would eventually do, but at the moment I was working on my Master's on Native women in Guatemala.

AS: Slightly different. A whole reorientation, yes.

RH: And starting to teach English as a second language in different places.

AS: Yes.

GK: So, as the archives is forming, the AIDS crisis is also emerging.

RH: Well, that's the thing, I said, you know, we kind of thought, "We don't know whether we are going to be dead in a year." So, we had to get moving.

AS: Yes.

GK: Right. But it does mean you had very interesting decisions about, like, the AIDS materials are here, and the more specific gay materials are here, in terms of organizing it. So, could you tell us...

RH: Yes. In terms of the clippings.

GK: Yes. But do you want to tell us a little more about that decision? In terms of how to handle AIDS related material?

RH: Well, because AIDS wasn't necessarily gay-related, either. It was more medical and that kind of thing. So, we just decided, as the volume grew, to make it a separate thing.

AS: Yes.

RH: Just for pure keeping track. I mean, our clippings were filed chronologically. So, we have a general AIDS, month by month.

AS: Yes. Wow. Because it's clear there was really rich and complicated gay, lesbian and

queer organizing in Montreal. As AIDS emerged as something that was really affecting people's lives, did it feel like it took over—or was there a displacement of queer organizing directly?

RH: Yes.

AS: Okay.

RH: Well, it was complicated. And I wasn't, you know, after I started the archives, I made that my primary commitment. You can't do... everything. When I got into my doctorate, you know, I was living in the 1950s in my head. Well, a lot of the worst stuff was going on, which is probably why I wasn't particularly involved or made aware of the conference of '89. I mean, I knew all kinds of people who were doing things around it, but I didn't take part in any of those actions.

AS: Yes.

RH: In a way, by that time, I was thinking it was time for the younger generation to step up. Little did I know that they were going to say, "Oh, we're the first!" [laughter]

AS: "Never happened before...!"

RH: Yes, "This is the first demonstration!" Uh, well... [laughter]

AS: We need to consult the archives and see if that's true. [laughter]

RH: Talk to somebody.

AS: Yes. So, I think, maybe because of our preoccupation in this project, I'm always interested in the impulse and the work to archive things; to keep track of history as it was generated. I mean, you've devoted so much of your life to that. Do you feel like everyone recognizes that this is really important, to have an archive?

RH: Many people do. I mean, there were people like Benard Courte, who was incredibly enthusiastic about what we were doing. And others, you know; we got support. As soon as we did our first fundraising appeal, we got enough to keep us going. We did have to sometimes contribute our money to pay the rent some months. But by and large, we survived on community support. It was only after we got the Alan Stone material that we got a little bit of government money to work on those, specifically. We have had contacts from other archives, not queer at all, because we're one of the rare self-financed archives in Canada.

AS: Yes. And in the years when it was in your house, how would it work? Like, people would call you and say, "I'm looking into something. I want to come research"?

RH: Yes. I mean, we had ads in various places, in the magazines that existed at that time. And the bar magazines were just starting in the late '70s, too. At first there was *Attitude*, and then *Fugues* kind of morphed out of it and has been going ever since, basically the same kind of thing. So, they

would find out and just make an appointment and come. You know, not always the most...
[laughter]

AS: Convenient?

RH: But there weren't a lot. There were some people who were very serious. Like, Roger Noël came and did the first major research on GHAP. And, you know, he now works for the Ministry of Justice in the Bureau de lutte contre l'homophobie [the fight against homophobia]. But more I remember having the members of the collective, and we basically just took the collective functioning from Androgyny and rolled it over into the archives. Although, once we got incorporated, we had a formal structure. So, they would all come to my place on a Sunday afternoon. And we'd have a group in the kitchen doing clippings, and a group on the living room floor sorting periodicals. And the posters were under my bed. [laughter]

AS: Amazing.

RH: I mean, I had had a dining room before where I used to have dinner parties, but that gradually was taken over.

AS: For storage. [laughter] And then, as people started to die in the AIDS years, did you start getting things from people?

RH: Not very much.

AS: Not very much?

RH: Yes. The first person that we knew about, who was somebody I didn't know, but Tom knew, who taught at Vanier, John Butcher. I still have the obituary. And I think he was—you know, Tom was a preacher's kid, so, this guy was, too. He had sort of liaison with the family, and so on. I didn't go to the funeral, but it was sometime in the fall of '84. I met the man once and he was already demented. I mean – this is another thing that you don't remember easily – people had mental problems [because of some opportunistic infections], as well as everything else.

AS: Yes. And so, the things... Well, I think maybe we should talk about that time and some of the things that you know about. I just have this obsession with archives. Let's do a little—some of the things that just Ross knows about that we want to track and capture.

GK: Well, maybe we should ask you... I know you have done work on developing chronologies of when things happened, in terms of gay history, which obviously overlaps with AIDS history. So, how did that project emerge out of the work that you were doing in the archives, and the other historical work you were doing?

RH: Well, the actual chronology was started by GHAP, by two anglo guys. It was a project of the Collectif du triangle rose in the early 1980s. We had already done interviews, recorded interviews, when I interviewed John Banks about the bars. That was my first one, I think. And other people interviewed some of the people who had been active in the Gay Montreal Association in the mid-

70s, like Tony Fairbrother, who left for Toronto after.

GK: That's right. I don't know what's happened to him, but, yes, I remember him from Toronto.

RH: So, I have notes on those, which turned up as I was going through CTR [Collectif du triangle rose] files, the other day. The interview notes are all there. A very complex bunch of papers, I must say, in terms of organization. [laughter] Going to have to do some work on them to make them more intelligible.

GK: Right.

RH: Sorry—what was the focus here?

GK: Well, how did that emerge. That's important to know. How did it, in terms of your work, both in terms of historical work on Montreal and in terms of how that overlaps with AIDS organizing? You began to sort of do some of the work on how these different AIDS groups had emerged. And you told us about the first attempt.

RH: Yes, but I mean, that was just because I was an activist.

GK: Right.

RH: And, I said it didn't go very far and I don't really know the story of that. But Michel Dorais might know better. I was doing too much at the time. You know, I was teaching three or four courses a term, working on my Master's, and all these other activities. We had started the chronology on a set of cue cards. And were reading, and kind of went through *The Body Politic* to set that all up. And, unfortunately, didn't make very good, full references to articles; I just had page numbers and things like that. So, there were gaps, which I still need to work on. And by the time we were starting the archives that [work] was highly relevant. But we were getting, you know, donations. We got a huge donation of physique photography, physique magazines. That was the first thing that we got from somebody that we didn't actually know. So, that was a sign of confidence.

AS: Yes.

RH: And we just tried to go around and pick up all the little loose papers that were circulating, which is a challenging thing to do. But I was not, you know, I mean, I guess I was consciously *not* working on AIDS.

GK: Right.

RH: But I was involved. I remember Bernard had a doctor who wrote a column in *Sortie*, Marc Steben. And I remember going to at least one meeting with him, just about what the medical situation was, and so on. He was a straight man, but quite open to collaborating, and obviously saw the need. There's a very undocumented group of gay doctors. Tom was already known as the dirty

picture man in the early '80s. So, he was invited to a place in somebody's apartment, downtown, I think it was, to give a picture show. That's where I met Nobby (Norbert) Gilmore, who focused on me as an activist. This was just at the time of the blood ban, so Nobby was intent on convincing me that it was justified. [laughter]

GK: I'm sure he didn't succeed.

RH: Somehow, we remained friends after that. But they were, you know, basically a social group. But nevertheless, that was an important network. And it meant that you had access to a whole network of doctors, and connections to the system. Because these were the days when somebody got sick their friends would organize into shifts to care for them.

GK: Yes.

AS: And whether you had a doctor that would actually be informed about anything was...

RH: No, you could only go to certain doctors.

AS: And those doctors would be working out of particular hospitals, or...?

RH: I don't know the whole chronology, you know, but they set up... what's the... the clinic l'Actuel [Clinique médicale l'Actuel], which became more and more an AIDS clinic. I don't think they intended it. There's a history by Réjean Thomas, which you can see online, which is more or less accurate, I think.¹

AS: Of that clinic?

RH: Well, no, about the history of AIDS. I used it in my classes at UQAM.

AS: Okay, yes.

RH: But we were still very marginalized, very in the dark about what was the whole medical situation. And we were very aware of the social consequences.

GK: For sure.

RH: I had a friend who worked at a place called The Lethbridge Rehabilitation Centre, out in NDG [Notre-Dame-De-Grace]. I had a friend who was a nurse who was working there, and she said, when they got their first AIDS patient – which was probably '85, or something – that some of the medical personnel refused to be in the same room with them.

AS: The medical personnel?

RH: The medical personnel, yes. Nurses, kind of thing.

¹ See [here](#) for the video created by Réjean Thomas.

GK: Yes.

RH: Tom was always very interested in the media portrayals. What's it called? *An Early Frost*. The first, rather horrifying things.

GK: Yes.

RH: But that did dramatize. You know, the ambulance wouldn't take the guy [who had AIDS], things like that.

AS: Yes.

RH: So, we were more and more living behind a one-way mirror, where we were crossing names out of our address books and everybody else was enjoying the '80s.

GK: Right. Was the situation beginning to change at all when some of the organizations started to actually form that sustain themselves for a while, like MARC/ARMS [Montreal AIDS Resource Committee/Association des ressources montréalaises contre le sida] and CSAM [Comité sida aide Montréal]

RH: MARC/ARMS I didn't really know much about it at the time, but CSAM I did, especially because I had a friend who worked for them for the first summer sorting through clippings, which we eventually inherited.

AS: Could you just say a little bit about what each of these organizations were?

RH: Well, MARC/ARMS was started by David Cassidy, and I don't know who else he was working with in those days. I mean, he was very much on the Anglo side, and I was very much on the Franco side, or the bilingual side. I don't think David really speaks French to this day, probably. So, he had a kind of network of things based on a phone line that they had, a kind of outgrowth from the Gay Montreal Association, called Gay Info. And he set up groups for bisexuals and did one of the early trans organizing things, I don't know whether that's documented in the papers we're going to be getting much. It will be interesting to see his cooking clubs and his religious cult of the phallus. [laughter]

AS: Might as well!

RH: Yes, still going strong. So, I wasn't really aware of that. But it was basically—he was a social worker and it was basically a service, certainly not a lobbying or anything like that, kind of group. But it morphed into CSAM, and I think it was because the government was becoming increasingly aware that they needed community contacts. And so, they encouraged them. CSAM was set up specifically *not* to be a gay group, which was offensive to us at the time, but, you know, that was one thing.

AS: So, it was set up to be a group that would be about HIV/AIDS?

RH: Yes. And their ambition was to include Haitians, and especially women, and so on. They were never very successful with the Haitians. I've heard more about that from other people, but there certainly were women who were involved there. And there was a monthly meeting, I don't know exactly when it started, it was called The Coalition. First, it was called RAGLAM [Réunion des associations gaies et lesbiennes à Montréal], which is an acronym. It was just a monthly, big table. We actually met in a Catholic building down on Maisonneuve. We went to these interminable meetings where you go around the table and every group would say what they were doing. That was where I met Patricia Fisher, also, who was, really, the first trans person that I remember meeting. She was doing this amazing work of going into prisons to try and do prevention with trans prisoners, at the time.

AS: Wow.

RH: Patricia was an odd person. Very odd person. Taller than me, with a prominent Adam's apple, and so on, but had been trans for a long, long time. Never really got her tongue around the French language, particularly. So, we were sitting there listening to her give this very difficult account of what she was doing. She would talk to me on the side, there were other Anglophones there, in a more intelligible way in English. [laughter] And we always maintained a friendly relationship. So, at some point she brought a whole dossier of her CV and things about her work to the archives that we have, and a photo of her.

AS: Is she still around?

RH: No. But we were looking at them a couple years ago. We went on the web, and I think she died in the early 2000s, or something. She was American originally, I didn't know her whole story until I read the papers. So, that was interesting. But it was also, you know, the AIDS groups were there. Eventually we moved. I think maybe the Catholic church threw us out [laughter].

CSAM had a building that was right near here at the corner of Hôtel-de-ville and Prince Arthur. The building is gone now, but they had a city-owned building that was upstairs. There were offices. They had quite a big layout, you know, because by that time their annual budget must have been considerable, considering how much money was stolen from them. They had more than that. So, we met there. The Coalition would meet there. You know, we were right in the centre of AIDS community organizing, at the time. And I knew more and more people who were involved, like Chris Cockrill, and so on. He was a friend of Tom's boyfriend at the time, José [Arroyo]. And so, we met this whole gang of young McGill students at the time. Chris was very, very involved in setting up CPAVIH [Comité des personnes atteintes du VIH du Québec] along with Kalpesh Oza.

GK: Could you tell us anything more about how that group gets set up? We're quite interested in the tensions. [laughter]

RH: No.

GK: Okay.

RH: I could have, had you asked me 20 years ago. [laughter]

AS: We should have asked you 20 years ago! [laughter]

GK: We are going to use the time travel device! [laughter]

RH: I mean, I do remember Kalpesh going on and on about bureaucratic wrangling and stuff, and probably Chris, too. But I just think it's the kind of tensions that you would expect, especially as you have this professionalization going on. This is what I call the arrival of the mandarins—their entry into taking over the queer world was AIDS.

GK: Could you tell us a bit more about that? Because we are very interested in that.

RH: Well, I wanted to do a paper – I never had the time to really do the research, but we have the material – on just the budget. Just look at the budgets of the ADGQ in 1984, '85, and CSAM began on a shoestring, and then suddenly you have hundreds of thousands of dollars being poured into it, making it a prime target for career bureaucrats who had no previous connection with the community. And it led to this horrific theft in the early '90s, which destroyed CSAM.

AS: And this was...

RH: The name CSAM—Comité sida aide Montréal. And it was started by Richard Burzynski. My friend Colin Bailey was employed for the first summer—they had summer student grant type thing, to do the clippings. I was never involved particularly in their work, but, you know, Ken Morrison was there. And, you know, we knew each other. People are always saying, “You know everyone.” But it's because I've been around and out there. But I think it was the tension between people who were sick and do-gooders, bureaucrats.

AS: And the farther...

RH: But they were very—CPAVIH had offices in the CSAM place.

AS: Right.

RH: And were integrally related, they just had their own separate thing. And they started putting out their own newsletter and things like that.

AS: Yes. And the fraud that happened, that closed down CSAM. Do you want to just talk about how that happened?

RH: Well, I don't remember. I know that there's a very good account in *Fugues* from that period, by Claudine Metcalfe.² But it was a scam; it was something to do with a fictitious brother leaving money to the organization, but just needed to, you know, have this other money to clear off the estate. Or I don't know what she said, but it didn't make a lot of sense to me. And I hope she's still

² These articles are available in *Fugues* février 1994 (pp.74-75) and mars 1994 (pp. 62-63)

in jail. Probably not, though.

AS: Probably not.

GK: We've got accounts from some of the other interviews of this, but that's basically what other people have told us, as well. So, that leads to the destruction of CSAM. So, maybe just to step back for a moment. Is there anything more you'd like to say about that process of professionalization? What does it mean for these AIDS groups to suddenly have access to such huge amounts of money, and how that comes to sort of reorganize what's going on?

RH: Well, they had to formalize. They had to have set objectives. Before that it had all been fairly casual.

GK: Right.

RH: And it was the takeover of that entire culture. Bean counters, I call them.

AS: Is there a thing in Quebec, like, in Ontario if you incorporate, and you have particular standing, you're mandated to only spend 10% of your operating budget on political advocacy. Is it similar in Quebec?

RH: Well, it's the same.

AS: It's the same. Okay.

RH: It's federal.

AS: It's federal money. Okay. Got it.

RH: In Quebec basically just—when we got our charitable status it was automatic with Quebec, after we had had approval from Ottawa.

GK: Right.

AS: I think that's so interesting, that thing where people come to self-regulate about what they're going to decide is going to... You know, it's this interesting thing where people say, "That probably would be seen as too political. And we don't want to lose funding." Looking at how it seems to happen, it becomes entirely internal. Right? I mean, in the Harper years it became more that people actually would get investigated and audited, and would need to justify that this thing they were doing was part of their mandate. But, for many years, it seems like just saying it's only 10% produced perfect self-regulation. And what's very strange to me – I mean maybe it's less strange in some of the environmental organizations that I've seen this happen with, but, in queer organizations it's really interesting, that quick move to not be oppositional. You know?

RH: Well, they had accepted to not be a gay organization, CSAM, from the beginning. That was

shocking.

AS: And maybe that's it. Yes.

RH: To us. But, you know, in practice they were. [laughter]

AS: Right.

RH: But more open to women. Didn't have queer in the name, or anything.

AS: Yes, but had already given up that kind of politics.

RH: Well, they had to. Otherwise, they wouldn't have had the money. And, you know, basically, their focus was on serving people who were in desperate need at that point.

AS: They needed money. Yes.

RH: There were increasing numbers of people who were sick. I mean, the epidemic took a strange course, here. Because, you know, the initial cases were Haitian.

GK: Right.

RH: So, there was a cluster of especially children in the very first years. And then, that kind of was totally overwhelmed by an increasing number of gay men who were getting sick.

AS: When did people start getting really sick here?

RH: In the late '80s.

AS: Yes.

RH: I would say. You know, and I think of 1991 as the big year when so many people died.

GK: Right.

AS: Yes.

GK: So, what happened after this debacle with CSAM?

RH: Well, again, I wasn't directly connected with that. So, maybe David could tell you, but he basically, having started MARC/ARMS, felt called upon to come back and get ACCM [AIDS Community Care Montreal] going.

GK: Right.

AS: And they're coming up on 30 years now.

RH: Yes.

AS: And, I mean, so we have various questions about this. We've asked about CPAVIH...

GK: I think that – unless there's something else you wanted to say about any of the AIDS groups that you have any knowledge of or had experiences with – we can sort of move on to some of the questions.

RH: Well, I don't particularly. Nothing comes to mind.

GK: That's fine. So, there's some specific events that we wanted to ask you about. And then about some specific individuals, right? So, just if you could tell us a little bit about the community response to the murder of Joe Rose, and what was going on around that time? What takes place then?

RH: We were upset. [laughter]

GK: Weren't you more than upset? [laughter]

RH: I mean, I didn't know Joe Rose. I'd never heard of him until he was killed. But then I went to the vigil, which was at the AIDS park.

GK: Right.

RH: It was an odd event.

AS: Because mostly people didn't know him? Or, why was it odd?

RH: No. I mean, I just remember, I was telling Gary, that there was this crazy person who took over the mic and was going on about something totally unrelated. You know, these things can happen. But my perception was that it was basically—because at that time, and maybe this is a relevant thing, that was when there was a whole effort to set up Lesbian Studies at Concordia. It was some of those women, I think, who must have called the rally. And we ended up, you know, we had placards. We marched from there to the front of the [Frontenac] metro, where the murder happened.

GK: Right.

RH: I sort of wasn't enough on the ball to collect the whole range of placards, but I did bring one or two, which we have in our collection.

AS: Amazing.

GK: Did you mention that Charlene Nero might have been involved in this?

RH: Yes. I remember her as one of the speakers.

GK: Yes. We are going to try and track her down. Because I knew her from Toronto. She was quite involved with one of the main photographers for *Rites* magazine for a while.

RH: Okay.

GK: So, we will try and track her down. And she was also connected with the Concordia Student Union, at some point.

RH: But there was this Lesbian Studies collective at Concordia that was quite dynamic, with Carolyn Gammon.

GK: Yes. That's right.

RH: And, you know, she led a long campaign to not get a Master's, but a Mistress of Arts.

GK: That's right. I remember that.

RH: Eventually successful, I believe.

AS: Wow.

RH: She lives in Berlin now. [laughter]

GK: Yes. I did know that, too. So, that was one event. The other one was – and I know we want to stress in all of our work that things did not start with Sex Garage – but is there anything you want to tell us about it, and the response to it?

RH: Well, I mean, I just heard about it as a news story, really. But that's after the conference.

GK: Oh, yes. For sure.

RH: The conference is a more...

GK: Yes, but you also weren't around at the conference. I was going to ask you about it. Maybe you could tell us about things that you heard about the conference?

RH: Well, one of the things I was thinking when listening to your talk, and you'd have to talk to Ken about it more, but that the '89 conference, as I recall what he said, was the first one to have a community component of any significance. So, it was already moving towards inclusiveness of people who were sick than previous ones had been.

GK: And there was a pre-conference organized perhaps by the Canadian AIDS Society. Because there were people from around the world who actually attended something before the conference took place.

RH: Okay.

GK: Which we've only learned a little bit about. Karen Herland spoke at it. I mean, various people were brought in to facilitate things at it. I was not in town when that was taking place.

AS: And until talking to Hugh yesterday, I didn't know that the AIDS quilt had come, and that there was this whole organizing thing, and that there was an event for it.

RH: Oh, yes.

AS: A quite extensive thing.

RH: It was at the arena somewhere. [Michael Hendricks told me the entire Canadian quilt is stored in Halifax].

AS: It was big. So, there's clearly a lot more.

RH: There was also, I mean, Ken Morrison was in charge of the cultural program. And Tom Waugh gave a talk that came out in the book edited by Morrison and Klusacek [*A Leap in the Dark*].

GK: Yes.

RH: And there was exhibits. John Schweitzer was very instrumental in that. And we have wonderful documentation, we didn't really know him, but there was theatre and all kinds of stuff going on at that time.

GK: Yes.

RH: So, I did go to some things. I didn't go to the demos, but...

AS: Yes.

RH: I just was not part of those. Those were younger people's networks, and that was the kind of basis for the Sex Garage crowd, as I sort of saw them. And some people, like Suzanne, were involved in the aftermath. I'm sure she wasn't at the party of anything, but there's that wonderful footage of Paula Synnowich being dragged off of the intersection with her crutch. [She is also in Anne Golden's film about women and AIDS, *Les Autres: Women and HIV* (19910)]

GK: Yes. There's a lot of footage around that.

RH: She was a friend of José [Arroyo], too. So, I knew her. And I knew David Shannon, he was doing the Queercore on the McGill radio station.

GK: Yes. We're going to try and talk to David. And is Paula still in Montreal?

RH: Yes.

GK: Okay. We need to talk to Paula, as well. So, then there were some specific people we wanted to ask you more about. The Archives now has the Ken Morrison papers. Maybe you could tell us a bit more about the role that Ken Morrison played in various aspects of AIDS organizing?

RH: Well, I had known Ken before. You know, I thought he was kind of a wastrel. [laughter]

GK: Okay.

RH: And he lived just around the corner from Tom. But he got involved in CSAM, I guess really early.

GK: Yes.

RH: Then, his organizing abilities came to the fore. He went from CSAM to, well, the conference work, then the Canadian AIDS Society. Then, especially with the Vancouver one before, he was continuing his role as coordinator of the community aspect of the conferences. Then he moved into international public health and has been living in Mexico for decades. He told me – I don't know, I don't think this can be totally true – that he ended up chairing meetings with Latin American health ministers, before he really spoke Spanish. [laughter] Which takes a great deal of skill.

GK: And he's given all of his papers in...?

RH: He keeps bringing me more.

GK: Oh. He's bringing more. Okay. [laughter]

RH: But, you know, he gave us around 600 posters. Elana Wright was extremely happy when all of that left. Ken had left two years before and she still had a room in their house that she couldn't use because it was full of stuff, which now we got.

GK: And now you have to figure out where to put it.

RH: There is you know, a very good core of real archival material, and tons and tons and tons of photocopies, multiple copies of this and that. So, we're weeding out things that are now available in other sources.

AS: Yes.

RH: You know, trying to focus on important material.

AS: Yes.

RH: Oh, we've had, you know, Douglas Buckley-Couvrette, when he died, his stuff was given to us. Michael Hendricks and René LeBoeuf have given us a huge amount of stuff: organizing around the park, and ACT UP, especially. Things from demonstrations, and so on.

GK: Yes. That's great stuff.

RH: You know, we had little things on sticks with hands. And masks... we don't have the women's demo masks. I'm sure I went to that, though. I was looking for myself in the picture. [laughter]

AS: Yes, it was striking. Yes, so lots of things are coming in, in people's collections.

RH: Well, now people are reaching an age where, you know, if they're not already dead, they are... Thinking about downsizing, so.

GK: Right.

RH: We got Roger Leclerc's papers, recently.

AS: Yes.

RH: Other stuff we're just at the beginning of...

GK: Of trying to deal with stuff, too. So, another aspect of what we're trying to do is to remember people who we can't interview, who died during this period. So, there might be more people, but, I mean, you've mentioned Bernard Courte.

RH: He was a crucial figure.

GK: Yes. So, maybe you could just tell us a bit about him?

RH: His boyfriend, Keith, worked for the Royal Bank, and got transferred to Toronto in '87, or something like that. And, so, we lost Bernard here, but then he was very instrumental in the francophone community in Toronto. But, also, in terms of keeping contact between Montreal and Toronto. So, he left us a lot of material before he moved. And then would send me more, or I would go there when I was in Toronto, and go pick them up.

You know, one of the worst experiences I had was going the last time. And, you know, he was in a high-rise, in sort of the K-Y belt there. And I went up to the floor, and the door was opened by this little old man who looked like Bernard's grandfather.

AS: And it was Bernard?

RH: Yes.

GK: Yes. He made a very important contribution to AIDS ACTION NOW!, as well, when he

moved to Toronto. And was actually quite instrumental in—because I think he had some sort of gig with the media centre at the '89 AIDS conference. So, he actually helped to get lots of people into the conference who wouldn't have been able to get into it otherwise. And there were all sorts of ingenious ways that people were getting false accreditation to go in. But the media—that's how we were actually going to get in to do that disruption of Brian Mulroney's talk. He gave us media passes.

RH: Okay.

GK: So, he was very, very, helpful. But do you have any other memories of Bernard? Could be from earlier. Like, just, what he was like?

RH: Oh, Bernard was a very jolly, outgoing person.

GK: Yes.

RH: And we did a lot of things together in those days. He was one of the most dynamic people at *Sortie*. He was also an English second language teacher at CEGEP.

GK: And then another person you had mentioned was Kalpesh, who I know also went to Toronto. But any memories of him?

RH: But not so much. I remember Kalpesh being here.

GK: Yes. Kalpesh must go to—it was after the '89 AIDS conference, he's clearly involved in ACT UP for at least a year and a half before he goes to Toronto. He died in 1995 in Toronto.

RH: But his memorial was here.

GK: I think there were events in both places.

RH: He got me very, very drunk once.

GK: Do you want to tell us about that? [laughter]

RH: [laughter] No, he just told me this story. It's somewhat delicate still, I would think. Because he came from a very prominent Gujarati family. And his story was about being arrested and trapped in the centre of Ahmedabad between the two bus stations by police. Who he then turned on and threatened them with the power of his relative, one of the policemen then asked him if he would do him. [laughter] And he was, you know, I don't really remember the politics of CSAM, CPAVIH, but he went on about problems with the Quebec government and their ridiculous attitude. And it was certainly something that ACT UP got involved in, as we saw in the videos.

AS: Yes. he just has seemed like a really interesting, important figure, in this way of someone who everyone describes as being, very flamboyant and very kind of out there. And then also this very sort of precise bench scientist.

RH: Well, he brought us Iain Blair, who's the Vice President of the Archives and has been a stalwart, since the time of Kalpesh's death. They were friends from McGill.

AS: Okay.

RH: Iain could possibly supply more details about Kalpesh.

AS: Yes. And we just met someone on Thursday who was Kalpesh's housemate.

RH: And Kalpesh was lovers with Chris Cockrill. I think in the last two years. They died around the same time.

GK: But Chris stayed in Montreal?

RH: No. Chris went to Ottawa.

GK: Okay. Was Chris working with the Canadian AIDS Society [CAS]?

RH: Yes. He was keeping track of proposed treatments. He was a Master's student in Sociology at UQAM. And because of that he was eligible to be an English course assistant. So, he was my assistant a couple of times and took some courses at UQAM. So, we got to know each other quite well. Went up and stayed with him in Ottawa at least once.

AS: And he was working for CAS doing what kind of work?

RH: Treatment.

AS: Treatment information?

RH: Yes. Alternative treatment. He was, you know, as you were saying, there was no reliable medical source. And there were all these things about Japanese cucumbers, and so on, that people were on about. So, he was trying to keep a kind of a balanced view of that and make it available to whoever.

AS: Right. Looking into things and, like, would this actually hurt anyone.

RH: Yes. Well, I don't know exactly. But I'm sure there are records of his work at CAS. And then, when he got sick and was no longer able to work, Jeff O'Malley, who by that time was off in international development, or the Rockefeller Foundation, or something, came back to Montreal and rented a house on St. Elizabeth where Chris spent the final part of his life. His parents came from BC. His mother was a nurse and they got a hospital bed that they set up.

AS: And so, he could just be there.

RH: It was horrible.

AS: Yes. Each one horrible in a different way.

GK: So, we really only have two questions left, which is, is there anything you've thought of as we've been talking that you haven't had an opportunity to say?

RH: Probably. [laughter]

GK: This is your opportunity.

RH: Well, I don't even know. Yes, I think one of the things, I mean, I was struck by this one man who got in touch with the Archives. Forgot his first name, now. A Francophone named Harrison, who was working on a screen play of a scenario for TV show that never, of course, got accepted. But he was somebody who had a much older lover. And he made the point that older gay men were not willing to talk about what they had experienced. So, in teaching the AIDS course, I became somewhat hardened. But I would get to the point where I would just not go there.

GK: Right.

AS: Yes.

RH: So, that's a major thing and one of the points that I tried to make in the UQAM course "Homosexualité et société," that I taught for the last five years of my teaching. I would do a night on health, where I'd have lesbian health, and gay health, but then I would always make sure to... and I just think that it's not, maybe you know more about it than I do, but men of our generation are still living with this.

GK: Yes.

RH: And so, the whole sort of queer theory, where we all get sort of pushed aside as having been totally mistaken about the way we thought about our lives.

AS: Yes.

RH: I've always suspected that there's an element of AIDSphobia that fueled that.

AS: You know, for me, I think about this also in terms of my desire to hear what happened and hear people's stories and document things. And then there are times where I think, well, maybe silence is the only response, right? Or that people shouldn't have to remember things. What does it do? You know? So, I think about it.

RH: I mean, even just going through David's materials, it brought all this stuff back to me. It's painful. I taught the AIDS course for eight years and after I was just—don't want to be in this headspace.

AS: Yes.

GK: Yes. And that's understandable. Do you want to maybe just tell us, because we will talk to Tom, at a later point, but just how that AIDS course came into existence? Given you taught it for a long time.

RH: Well. I didn't come in until it had been going for five years, or so.

GK: And do you know anything about the history before you got there?

RH: Well, naturally. [laughter] It was a remarkable pedagogical innovation. And I don't know exactly where they got the inspiration, but it was basically Tom and Fran Shaver who cooked it up.

GK: Right.

RH: Fran Shaver has always done work with sex workers. So, it was co-taught. There were always two people in those days. And you weren't really teaching, in fact, you were hosting. For me, it was financially ruinous because I was getting paid for one contract and working for two terms.

AS: Oh. Yes.

RH: But it was bringing in people like Nobby, who would come in and do virology night. And we would have through Greg's boyfriend, David, who was a pediatrician, we got this woman, Dr. Dorothy Moore, from the Children's Hospital, who talked about children with AIDS. So, we would have a component on medical, then a component on the cultural productions, and then on social productions. We had Glen Fash come in, I told you the story, the first time I, Donald Boisvert and I taught it together, he was the Dean of Students who had access to all kinds of resources. And Glen had been doing this with previous people teaching the course. He would come in in the second week and he had just been to the pharmacy. I'm sure he had this all thought out. So, he had these bags, and at the front of the room there was a table and he just went and took out his pills for the month. It was like [depicts size of table with hands]. The students were like [widens eyes][laughter],

AS: Yes.

RH: And, I mean, the wonderful thing about that course was that many people said it was not a course, it's a life changing experience. A huge number of people got jobs at the places where they did their internship. You know, they had to do 90 hours of community placement as part of the two-term course, which cut it off from a significant population, because people in science programs just couldn't do that kind of thing. So, that was part of the motivation for the online course. I had taught – because Fran kind of got me to take over – Social Construction of Sexuality. So, that's how I got into Concordia. Therefore, I was in the union and could do things. So, when they found out that I was computer skilled, the guy left who had been doing the distance course – which was the thing on the cable TV in the early days – but they wanted to make it more and more internet-based in the late '90s. So, I had done that once or twice. And had the idea of making an online version of the AIDS course that would be one term. Basically, the same kind of material, but, you know, with videos rather than presentations. So, it wasn't the same thing at all. And, basically,

I learned about opening up an information space that they could interact in. It had online discussion groups, but some of them would meet, or would get together. And I do remember being stopped after the first time, by a guy I had never seen before, on the street, and he said, “Sir, I took your online course. It was the best experience I’ve had.”

AS: Amazing. Because he just spent all this time with you. [laughter]

RH: Yes. I mean, there was a video of me introducing it. And Julie Larouche, who had been one of our assistants in the classroom version of the course did a thing about prevention. She’s a psychologist. And I had, my doctor at that time was John MacLeod, who spoke about how he had gotten into being an AIDS doctor. He was a colleague of Nobby’s at the Chest hospital.

GK: Right.

RH: And, I did interviews with Jeff and Ken, but, by that time, I was running out of energy. I mean, to do this I had had to learn how to shoot and edit videos and stream them.

AS: Yes.

RH: Because there was no infrastructure.

GK: Right.

AS: Wow.

RH: So, that was a very good achievement, but after I did that five times – it was only once a year in the winter term – I decided it was time to pass it on to someone else. And there were some problems of continuity, I think. When Karen came in, and especially with Viviane Namaste, who dropped the whole team teaching kind of approach to the classroom AIDS course, which I thought was a shame.

AS: Yes.

GK: But when you were doing it, it was still team taught all the time?

RH: Yes. The classroom one. There was also always a final artistic event, because one of the things they had to do was a major project, which could be a traditional paper or an art project, because Tom was also very aware of the fine arts side of things. The worst was probably when we had to evaluate a violin elegy.

GK: You had to play the part of evaluating it. Okay. [laughter]

RH: For all we knew it could have been something lifted from somewhere. But it was sad. [laughter] So, that was exciting. But it was fun. Donald was a great person to work with. And we had wonderful TAs. Well, that was I think one of the other things, I was telling this story in England to these professors, who were—my niece’s husband’s mother teaches at the business

school at U of T [University of Toronto] and, for some reason, I was talking about this. Because the early enrolment in the AIDS course was very half and half, Tom could tell you more, but through the '90s the percentage of men dropped. So, by the time I was teaching it there were only a few men in the class. But we still had a kind of ownership mentality over the whole subject. And there were some very smart women from Simone de Beauvoir Institute in the course. And this one woman, in particular, was making remarks of a certain – because we were always getting feedback, they had tutorials and stuff – and she was making remarks that you would interpret as homophobic. But it just happened that I had just been reading about women and AIDS and the whole symptoms for diagnosis, the revisions, and the exclusion of women. It struck me that the women who took the course were taking it not just out of compassionate interest, but out of personal concern. And that they had an impossible, you know, straight women, had no control over their own risk because they were getting infected because of bisexual men, or drug users, essentially. So, the next year, the second year that we taught the course, I mean, I had brought this up in our team meetings, we restructured it to start with women in many ways. There was never any kind of homophobic comment after that.

AS: Yes. So interesting.

RH: I was quite proud of actually recognizing and figuring out how that was.

AS: Yes. It's huge.

RH: It was the indirect risk.

AS: Yes.

RH: And they just were not getting what they wanted to hear.

AS: Right. Yes.

RH: Shut up about those gay men! [laughter]

GK: Yes. It's understandable.

AS: But it's how to make the current generation see those lines of solidarity, that the more I learn, I think were really there. That there was this kind of... I mean, even when we were in Vancouver talking to people, we ended up talking to three lesbians who had been involved in AIDS activism out there. And each of them said they identified that it was really central to be resisting a particular kind of separatist narrative and that it was just very clear to them that there was this solidarity duty to participate, not just with gay men, but also with drug users. So, anyone who was being stigmatized, they recognized that part of the work, and so how to transmit that now, as young people are sort of invited to have more fractured identifications, or less solidaristic identifications.

RH: One other thing, too, that didn't quite come out, but I think you were flirting with the other night, is that a lot of the gay response, or general response, in the '80s was inspired by *Our Bodies*

Ourselves, kind of.

AS: Yes. That's right.

RH: Critical patient responses to the medical authorities, especially when they're not doing anything, or they're doing really bad things.

AS: Yes. Good. Our last question is, you mentioned people we should talk to, but if there's anyone else that comes to mind now, or later?

RH: No.

AS: Okay.

GK: So, this has been very helpful, thank you very much.

AS: Thank you so much, Ross.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]