

AAHP
AIDS Activist History Project

Interview Transcript 57
2017.002

Interviewee:	Tracey TieF
Interviewers:	Gary Kinsman & Danielle Normandeau
Collection:	Toronto, Ontario
Date of Interview:	April 3, 2017

Persons present: Tracey TieF – TT
Gary Kinsman – GK
Danielle Normandeau – DN

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

GK: So, we start all the interviews with saying that we're in Toronto, we are talking to Tracey TieF, and it is April 3, 2017. And the first question we start off with is when you first heard about AIDS and what you heard?

TT: In grade 12, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. And my boyfriend was a pretty regular street worker. So, he worked—he did sex work. So, we heard about AIDS, and it was called GRID, Gay-Related Immune Disorder. And I remember discussing it. We saw it in the newspaper. And, I said, “How can a disease just have to do with anal sex? That doesn't actually make any medical sense. You know, because if it's sexually transmissible, it's sexually transmissible.” So, that was my very first thought. And everyone in my community was concerned because my boyfriend, and one of my best male friends, they both worked the streets. And most of the people I knew were living pretty close to that. So, there was lots of intermittent sex work. And it was a big deal. Like, “So, what is this disease? What is it about? And what's its trajectory?” And how did it concern us? And, that was a very long time ago. That was, like, 1985? I think that was quite a bit ahead of when most people encountered it and became concerned.

GK: Right. So, that was your first contact with it?

TT: And I should say that we were also a pretty queer crowd. Mixed: people who were kind of bisexual, but gay friendly; people who were really gay; people who were bisexual. So, the whole spectrum, but it was my high school friends and older friends and we were kind of a queer community. We didn't identify as such, but I think we identified as kind of sexually alternative.

GK: Right. So, at first you might have heard of AIDS as being medical or health related, but do you remember when you became aware that it could also be something that people could be activists around? Or organize around? That it was a political question?

TT: Pretty immediately.

GK: Yes.

TT: Pretty immediately we thought it was political, because anything that happens to poor people, anything that happens to marginalized people, you just know right away the medical system is going to screw you over. And, I think that was even part of our first discussion, because it was called Gay-Related Immune Deficiency, and that was bizarre and poorly thought through. [laughter] We just knew right away that it was going to be a problem that we would have to address.

GK: Right.

TT: And that was in high school. And then I moved to Toronto. And, I think AIDS activism started right away. The need to educate each other about keeping ourselves safe started right away.

GK: Right.

TT: I was part of, what was called at the time, Lesbian LGBT, Lesbian Bisexual Gay Toronto Youth. LGBYT? [laughter] At the time it was LGBYT.

GK: Right.

TT: We met at the 519 [Church Street Community Centre]. And I had a propensity for education. I was studying dance, but also performance art. And straight away it was about protecting ourselves.

GK: Right. So, many people when they get involved in AIDS activism bring experiences from other movements, or other struggles they've been involved in to that activism. Did you have any sort of previous organizing experiences that you brought with you? Or political perspectives?

TT: Yes. I have some sort of social justice gene. I was... My first major protest was, I think I was 6 years old, I boycotted grapes because I heard of Cesar Chavez. And, you know, children being exposed to pesticides. I was very concerned. And, I can't eat grapes, still, because it was so early in my life that I boycotted them. I remember protesting how First Nations people were portrayed at my church when I was 6 and 7. And my first, I guess, adult-type activism was anti-apartheid. Somebody, a so-called minority rights activist, was coming to Dalhousie University to talk about minority rights in South Africa. And I saw that, and my eyebrows shot to my forehead, and I was like, "You know what this means, you know he's a white supremacist, even if he's a liberal white supremacist." And, so, I made posters, and I just put them around town. There was no organizing activity. I just made posters. Like, decode this poster, show up, this is not okay. And it happened. This protest happened. Just because I made posters. And I also organized a student protest around funding cuts for special programs for people who had intellectual difficulties, as well as people who were gifted. They were cutting both of those. And I wasn't even going to be in town for the protest. I just organized it. I just phoned people and sent posters around, by mail, at the time that's how you did it. And, the protest happened. I wasn't even there. So, by the time I got to Toronto, there were other huge protests being organized and I took part.

GK: So, when you arrived in Toronto you got involved in Lesbian Gay Bisexual...

TT: Youth Toronto.

GK: Right.

TT: LGBYT.

GK: Okay.

TT: But there's more initials, of course.

GK: Yes, for sure.

TT: Yes.

GK: So, do you want to tell us a little bit about the groups you got involved with and the networks you got involved with in Toronto? I know that you end up in Cathedral B, so I am sort of foreshadowing that.

TT: So, I went to York University.

GK: Okay.

TT: And I lived in various strange squalid rooming house type situations for about a year or so. And I joined a band, an explicitly anarchist, feminist, band. And we were touring, and we came back from touring. And, I think to sort of save money, I was kind of living on the street. Like, I would have a job.

GK: Right.

TT: And then I would kind of just find ways to sleep at night, or not much. Because I was going to university, I didn't have funding or anything. I really wanted to go to university, so I might walk all night, or sleep on the subway or something. So, they were like, "We don't want to lose you. You're on tour and we need to find you, because there's a second leg of the tour." I think it was called – it was the Black Wedge tour that I went on, and then we all got off the bus, and then the Resist Much, Obey Little tour was happening. So, you needed to find me. So, they said, "You're going to stay at Cathedral B." So, they set me up in the basement. And it was pretty rough. So, I just sort of built myself a room, very quickly. And then I was looking to rent a place and I got hit by a car. I got hit by a drunk driver at the Take Back the Night protest. And then I couldn't leave. I couldn't rent a place. I was just – I was kind of flattened on one side.

GK: Right.

TT: So, I just sort of hung out quietly. I was just waiting for them to kick me out. And, after about a month, I said to everyone in the living room, "Okay. So, I think I am okay to look for a place, again. Thank you for your hospitality. I'm going to leave." And, they were like, "You're leaving?" And they were very surprised. So, then I was like, I don't have to leave. I could join this crazy group of queer activists and it was, like, brilliant. It was awesome.

GK: Do you want to tell us more about that?

TT: So, there was Cathedral A, which was actually the first place I went to in Toronto when I arrived because I was with a friend of Cathedral A. And we had been doing music together. So, Cathedral B was the crazy disorganized Cathedral. And it was mostly Radical Faeries and a couple of women, [laughter] who always ended up doing the housework. So, this was all a conflict, obviously. They'd be like, "We are not men." And you're like, "You're kidding me because you just act like them." But it was anarchist, as well. So, we heard about everything. We were anti-oppression. So, we didn't necessarily prioritize one form of oppression over another. I have to say, I don't think we were ever good at anti-racism, frankly. But, around queer stuff, we were good. And people really loved us to show up at their protests because we were colourful. We would wear clown suits, or we would dress up. I had this fantastic chicken suit. It was a big hairy jacket, like faux fur with, like, the inch and a half fur bits. It was insane. And I wasn't going because a protest had anything to do with being a chicken. It was just colourful, right? So, we were colourful. We would show up with instruments and play them badly. And people would phone us and say, "Would you come to our demo?" [laughter] But it was a great relief from being angry, because a lot of us had had difficult experiences, to say the least. So, it was also a refuge under the lightness.

One of our female housemates, who was a good friend of mine, had been imprisoned in Guatemala. She was an activist there. She was an anthropologist who became an activist for siding with the Indigenous people who were being, at the time, randomly massacred. And she sided with them. And she was put in prison with three of her friends. And she escaped. And she got to Canada. So, her experiences had been horrendous.

And we were also very friendly with First Nations communities, particularly Akwesasne when it was firebombed. *Akwesasne Notes*, the newspaper, was firebombed. And so, we became a city refuge for people from Akwesasne. And they were really good friends and allies. They didn't quite get the queer thing. That freaked them out. And, to be fair, we probably learned tons and tons and tons of stuff about real Aboriginal issues because of our relationship. But it was a great place to be surprised, and to learn about politics first hand, because it's not like we were reading about what had gone on, or what was going on in Central America. People from Central America came and told us. And people within the First Nations communities in Canada were coming and telling us.

GK: Right.

TT: So, it was a great learning space. It wasn't just about AIDS, but AIDS was happening.

GK: Right.

TT: Yes.

GK: So, two of the people at Cathedral B would have been Kenn Quayle and Michael Smith, then?

TT: Yes. Absolutely. So, Michael Smith had been at Cathedral A.

GK: Right.

TT: And he had been a founder of Cathedral B. When he died, I found out that he had been a major funder of Cathedral B. So, I was always a bit of a responsibility freak. I always wanted to keep things together, and make sure that things went on. So, consequently, I joined up with Michael, in terms of managing the bills and money stuff. And, as he became sicker, I had more of that responsibility. But we were joint on accounts. And, eventually, he had to – we were too irresponsible, we were not taking care of him properly as he became sicker. And, so, we found him, or better friends than we were, honestly, found him space at Spruce Co-Op. Probably Sunday did that, like another responsibility freak in the anarchist community. And, so, he moved there, and I took over the bills. So, yes, so Michael and I had like a mom and dad relationship with the house.

GK: [laughter]

TT: In a certain, sense, yes.

GK: And Kenn was also there at the time?

TT: Yes. So, Kenn was the pushing the envelope guy. He was really into his relationships, a bit of a party hog, and he left probably two years into my living there and moved out to the west coast.

GK: Right.

TT: Yes.

GK: We have interviewed him.

TT: Yes, so he was like the inspirational, charismatic leader guy.

GK: Okay.

TT: Yes. And we were mom and dad.

GK: [laughter]. So, Kenn at least, and I guess Michael to some extent, get involved in producing these safe sex, safe injection use...

TT: No, I did that.

GK: *Coming On...*

TT: They didn't do that.

GK: Okay. Tell us more about that.

TT: Well, Kenn had this magazine that he wanted to do called *Jerking Off*.¹

GK: Right.

TT: And I think, honestly, he probably involved me because I'm a doer, I get shit done. Probably. But we became good friends through working on these things. So, we did *Jerking Off*. I thought it was too masculinist, I thought it was too guy-oriented. I worked at Kinko's Copies. I was incredibly useful because while I worked at Kinko's. And I'll probably get sued now, but while I worked at Kinko's, I did any political poster, any brochure, any booklet for free, all the time. Like, practically, that was my job. I was actually really good at fixing machines, so I think, you know, for a minimum wage they still got good value out of me, but that was why I was there.

GK: Right.

TT: And so, *Jerking Off* was the first one, and it was a safer sex, very safe, sexually open, poly-friendly, super queer magazine. It was a queer core magazine. And then we also did *Coming On*.² So, *Coming On* was going to be the more feminine, more female-oriented version, which it was. We compiled them. And our intention had been to send it to queers in prisons, and the anarchist bookstores, and stuff like that. We immediately got into shit. I can't even remember what we got into shit so much about. But, it was just too pornographic. Now, pornographic, we're talking about like, sketches and, like, poorly photocopied ransom note-type... [laughter].

GK: [laughter].

TT: To call it pornographic is very strange, because it constantly referred to sexuality because it was about sexuality, but it is a very big stretch to call it pornographic. And there were anarchist bookstores that wouldn't carry it, we got, like, really shut out by the Montreal community, people thought it was misogynist. We had mentioned some stuff around NAMBLA, which is North American Man/Boy Love Association... I found it an interesting problem that there would be grown men who did not understand power dynamics between men and women, let alone girls and men. And I wanted to understand it, so I had a friendly correspondence with this fellow. And I wasn't deeply offended. I disagreed completely, I could not imagine a worse power dynamic than girls and grown men. Ridiculous power difference. But I was curious, and I was willing to talk about it. And I think I probably mentioned some of that stuff, or maybe published some exchanges. Anyway. We were in deep shit. Nobody would do anything with this magazine. It was too far. So, we decided to go on tour, Kenn and I, to talk to people. So, we literally hitchhiked across the country, all the way to the east coast, stopping off at all the places, and just walking in and saying, "Hi, you wrote this hate mail." [laughter]

GK: [laughter]

TT: "Hi, you wrote this hate letter, we're here to talk about it." And we did, it was good, we made friends. We had a good time.

¹ A digital scan of *Jerking Off* has been made available here: <http://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/724>

² A digital scan of *Coming On* has been made available here: <http://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/727>

GK: Okay.

TT: We weren't as scary in person as we were in print.

GK: [laughter].

TT: Which is interesting, it makes me wonder, like, how scary was that magazine? Like... [laughter]

GK: We've got copies of both of those.

TT: You do?!

GK: Yes.

TT: Well, I don't! [laughter]

GK: Well, we can make them available.

TT: Was it scary?

GK: No.

TT: Did you think it was pornographic?

GK: I mean, I saw them at the time.

TT: Yes. I think the truth is that the anarchist community has like, bunches of people, and some people are more academic than others, and I think the people who are more academic just didn't know where this fit within feminism, where it fit within the politics and analysis that they knew, and because they couldn't fit it in, it just freaked them out.

GK: Right. So, did you and Kenn continue to do things together after going to the east coast?

TT: I think we sort of wore each other out on that trip. By the time we landed... so, we had some really special connection, and then when we came back we were just distant. You know how when you're young everything is really intense? [laughter]

GK: [laughter]

TT: So, we still lived in a house together.

GK: Right.

TT: And seeing Kenn this year, and hosting him here was like, deeply moving, it was just

wonderful. So, we didn't like, *break up* break up.

GK: Kenn was here last spring then?

TT: Yes. Oh yes, see? I don't remember a thing, but, it was deeply moving.

GK: Yes, because we interviewed him in September. So, you're getting involved with doing some aspects of safer sex education, maybe safer sex injection use education?

TT: Yes, so actually I was doing a lot, I was an ambassador with the Works.

GK: Okay, with the Works, yes.

TT: So, the ambassador project with the Works was to talk to youth who were involved with people who injected drugs to teach them safer sex... or safer needle use, equip them with the tools and kits and send them out into the world to educate, go forth and educate everybody you meet. And so, I was all over that. And brought other people into that too. But I think the videos you're referring to, there was one that I did with David Findlay.

GK: Right.

TT: David Findlay initiated it, it was called *Please Adjust Your Sex*.³ And the narrative was that a group of youth, frustrated youth, took over a TV station, a cable access program, to put real information about safer sex out there. Because the information at the time was silly, I mean, ridiculous. It would be people in lab coats, they'd be authoritatively telling you something stupid about green monkeys that's completely irrelevant, unhelpful, and ridiculous, and untrue, and they'd be wasting time on this, like, stupid shit. And then they go and show you all the things you can do wrong, which is the opposite. Like, if you show people something, you're educating them to do that thing. So why show people doing things wrong? But, to do things right, you have to show sex! So, we were like, "Well fuck that, we're going to show sex." Right? So, we got famous, and we got kind of hated at the same time. The police got hold of the tape, which we had unfortunately, the master tape, that we'd initially worked on. We called it *The Children of Disobedience*. It's not child pornography, it was after Jerry Falwell's famous speech, that the wrath of God would be visited upon the children of disobedience. Meaning AIDS was punishment.

GK: Right.

TT: So, we called it *Children of Disobedience*. It ended up in some sleazy guy's porn collection, and the police raided him. Oh, because it got stolen off our porch, and shenanigans. And then the police were like, "Oh, you're doing child porn." And, in Canada child porn is if you are, or appear to be, under 18. And it's the production and distribution, not just the appearance in. And, of course, we are in our early 20s, many people are teenagers. Honestly, I don't think there was anyone under

³ A digital copy of *Please Adjust Your Sex* has been made available here:

<https://aidsactivisthistory.ca/2017/05/26/from-the-video-vault-please-adjust-your-sex-1988-and-another-man-1988/>

18, but the “Appeared to be” was a problem, and there were images, such as like, Kenn and his lover, Tim, wrapping each other up in saran wrap as an illustration of “You don’t have to do this,” because then the next shot was them tearing it off and being sensual. There’s no fucking, they’re naked, two naked guys, woo...! And that, apparently, for the police was like, going too far. And it was children. Anyway. We got in trouble, again. But, out of that, Kenn and I ended up getting a job. Oh, well the next thing that happened is we formed a group called the Fuckheads.

GK: Right.

TT: And we did the Rubber Rap.

GK: Right.

TT: Frankly, we weren’t terribly good, but I’m sure we were amusing.

GK: [laughter].

TT: And we recorded this, like, deadly long thing, because Tim and Kenn, and maybe Michael, got high. They got high on pot, and I was a straight edge, so it was so boring because they were just like, so high, and like, the drumming just went on and on. It was like, white people drumming. Right?

GK: [laughter]

TT: So, it was like, more like rain, and like, a lot less like something interesting. But we produced this Rubber Rap, and it was an honourable mention in a city public health contest to produce a rap about AIDS prevention. And all of the musically talented people, everybody was more musically talented than we were, I’m sure. But, their lyrics were probably really terrible. Right? Really sexist, really misinformed, whatever, and I think that ours was probably the only candidate that actually was educational. Beyond like, “Avoid the hose,” or something stupid like that. So, we were invited to apply for a job with what was then Inner-City Youth, now it’s under Youth Link.

GK: Yes.

TT: But we were invited to apply for a job to make safer sex and safer needle use videos by and for street involved youth. So, Kenn and I were part of that team, and then there were two other people who were part of that team. So, there was a gay man from the community who was HIV+, who was part of the project, and there was a woman, a single mother, a young single mother, who was a survivor of domestic assault. And then Kenn and I. So, we were the freaks [laughter].

GK: [laughter].

TT: We really stressed out the other people, I’m sure. But we made two videos... And part of our shtick was it has to be a narrative, no more suits, no more people in lab coats, it has to be truthful, fuck the green monkey story, nobody needs to hear that, it’s not even relevant, and push forward a

narrative. So, we made *STD Street Smarts*.

GK: Right.

TT: Which, admittedly, that's not a catchy title unless you're a social worker.

GK: [laughter]

TT: And it was made for social workers to show street kids.

GK: Right.

TT: So, street kids are not a monolithic group of people. There's like, queer street kids, there's all the reasons, all the people. So, they kept screening it and going, "Well, some of the audience, like, reacted poorly to the gay content," and it was like, yes, yes they did, because just because people are on the street doesn't mean they have, like, this monolithic ideology. *STD Street Smarts* managed to not have talking heads. But then, they were getting rushed near the end. They wanted to do two videos, one really geared towards women. And so, they hired Margaret Moores and Almerinda Travassos.

GK: Yes.

TT: And, they really pushed us away. We were not involved in writing the script much at all. We were just scene'd, you know? Like, go in this scene, and go in that scene, and go in that scene. And Dave Findlay and I, by this point, we were the only penis and hand who were willing to put a condom on scenes in Toronto, apparently. Any penis and any hand you saw putting a condom on in the 1980s was me and Dave.

GK: [laughter]

TT: So, not surprisingly, the skinheads had responded poorly to mixed race coupling in the first video. Not surprising—they would have objected to it anyway, they didn't like anybody who was a different race than white, so. But, so, they had a main character who was a First Nations woman, who's with a Black man, and they were like kind of weirded out. They were like, "We have to back off from the mixed race things." So, disappointingly to me they said, "Dave, we don't need your penis, we'll just use Tracey's hand again."

GK: [laughter]

TT: I'm like, "Ugh, God!" [laughter] So, they got my friend Julian, who was a heroin addict, who was white. So, they bring Julian in for the big sex scene, and I'm like, "Ugh!" And then they... I thought it was just, like, hand and penis, but no, they wanted this big make out scene, and like, romantic candles, and like, this... and I was like, "Ugh," and Julian was like, "Ugh," because we were friends, and like, pretty gay, so we're not like "Ughr," so we're like "Ugh," so we're like, "Okay, we'll do it." And then, so, it wasn't working. The scene was awkward, da da da, they wanted a different feel,

whatever, we had to look really romantic. So, we take a break, Julian goes off and he needs to score some heroin because he's sick. He needs to get more heroin. He goes off and dies.

GK: Yes.

TT: Temporarily, right? You know that sort of temporary dying thing where you overdose, and then...

GK: Right.

TT: And then your dealer has to shoot you up with naloxone, and then you're not high anymore, you're just like, messed up, and angry, and you're out \$100? So, he comes back to the shoot, and he's like "I just died, I don't think I can get a hard on. [laughter] Like, I'm really not there. Can I please just go home?" And I'm looking at Margaret Moores and Almerinda Travassos and I'm like, "Please don't ask him for the \$50 back, like for the photo shoot, because it's not happening. Like, just let the guy go." So, it was Dave's cock and my hand again.

GK: [laughter]

TT: So, Dave and I did the make out scene, and, maybe that was the final Tracey and Dave safer sex scene. [laughter]

GK: [laughter]

TT: But, disappointingly, that video was choppy. It wasn't a narrative, it was like talking heads and scenes, definitely not what we had wanted. I think it made social workers happy. But, I believe that if you really want people to believe that they're not just being preached to, that there were real situations, then you need two people who have a problem, that they solve together. And the meat of it is not communicating, "You use condoms to prevent, you know, to prevent AIDS." "Oh yeah? I didn't know!" You know, it's not like that, right? It's like, "How could you have fucked so and so?" "Well, that was before... that was when we were broken up," like, the meat of relationships, when shit happens. That's what people needed to see. Negotiating around safer sex and all of those grey areas. And unfortunately, I don't think we ever got there.

GK: So, is Chris Bearchell part of what was going on at Inner City Youth?

TT: Yes, so, Chris Bearchell and Karen somebody, they both died of breast cancer. Or, did Chris die of breast cancer?

GK: She died of breast cancer.

TT: Yes, they both died of breast cancer. Karen Positano.

GK: Right.

TT: At some point Chrisy B lost her voice in the whole thing, because, somehow she and Karen went out for a joint at lunch or something? They smoked pot, and it was found out. Karen told her boss, and it just became this big shit show. And so, I think that also bugged up the ability to produce a really innovative video the second time.

GK: Right. So, was there anything more that you did around youth oriented safer sex, safer injection drug use as well?

TT: I think so all the time. I think it just...

GK: [laughter] All the time.

TT: I think we deliberately campaigned with pharmacies... I was doing sex worker activism stuff, and you know, with the idea like, whores are safe sex pros, that kind of idea. We did comics for sex workers sometimes.

GK: Around that, were you connected with any of the sex worker groups? Like, would CORP have been around?

TT: CORP?

GK: Yes. The Canadian Organization for the Rights of Prostitutes.

TT: Yes. So, CORP was Val and Ryan, and they were like, doing the kind of escort end of things, and at the time, they were talking about, you know, "Prostitutes pay taxes, why are we treating it like it's illegal?" They were fighting it on that level. And it wasn't very street oriented. But there was a woman, Gwendolyn.

GK: Oh yes.

TT: Stinky the Clown.

GK: [laughter]

TT: She was awesome. So, she was doing stuff all the time, performance stuff, all the time, comedy stuff, all the time. And she was a stripper, but she probably spent more of her life doing activism and what she was doing was kind of the precursor to Maggie's. So, she was really great, and we would go out and support whatever she was up to.

GK: Right.

TT: And Val didn't really need us to... Val and Danny didn't really need us or want us to show up for anything. I mean, we were supportive, but.

GK: Right.

TT: They didn't really need us. We weren't working on the same things.

GK: So Danny was involved in CORP as well?

TT: Yes.

GK: Okay.

TT: Danny Cockerline.

GK: Yes. I'll ask you again about him.

TT: Okay, yes. And we were younger.

GK: No, I know. [laughter]

TT: Right, yes.

GK: I was much younger then too. So, I wanted to just come back to the Rubber Rap for a second, in terms of public performances of it. I can remember three performances.

TT: Really? [laughter]

GK: There's, well, there's one at Pride.

TT: Yes?

GK: I didn't actually see it, but I've heard about it.

TT: We got egged.

GK: You got egged.

TT: Yes, or vegetable'd, or something.

GK: [laughter]. Or vegetable'd.

TT: Something.

GK: And there was one at, because it's in John Greyson's video, *The World is Sick (sic)*.

TT: Really?

GK: It was performed at the 1989 International AIDS Conference. I think Karen Pearlston's

in it that time.

TT: No memory.

GK: But I think you're in it, too.

TT: Cool.

GK: And then it's performed in Michael's play.⁴

TT: Right. And it was also performed in parks when there would be festivals. So, there are a couple of core people who knew, like, all the lyrics. And then, people who wanted to join in, they would have like one of the verses that they could do. And so, it was a flexible crew. It could be as few as four people, and as many as twelve. So, we'd pile on stage and do that thing. The lyrics were very progressive. I don't think anybody ever took on as much as the Rubber Rap took on. When we performed it at Pride, this was when Pride was barely bigger than the 519, and the park around it.

GK: Right.

TT: The stage was in front of the 519, and I remember distinctly, and I could be wrong, but my memory of it is that skinheads showed up and were throwing shit at us, and the police stood there and didn't stop them. And, when we were coming on and off stage, we were pretty vulnerable to being attacked, like, they could have just grabbed us and pounded our head into the ground. Even though they were surrounded by hundreds and hundreds of queers, people wouldn't have really known before we got hurt.

GK: Right.

TT: So, the thugs were just lined up in front of the stage, and the police were behind them. And then [laughter] afterwards, I went right up to a police officer and I said, "What are you doing here? If you let them do that." And he said, "We're here to protect the public."

GK: [laughter].

TT: Yes.

GK: From you! [laughter]

TT: Right. [laughter] "We're here to protect the public." Yes. So, that was the state of affairs at the time.

GK: Right.

⁴ Michael Smith's 1990 theatrical production, *Person Livid with AIDS: A Day in the Life of a Gay Man Living with AIDS*, has been made available here: <https://aidsactivisthistory.ca/features/person-livid-with-aids-1990/>

TT: Yes.

GK: So, through Kenn and probably, especially Michael, did you have any connections with AIDS ACTION NOW!?

TT: I did, but not necessarily through Kenn.

GK: Okay.

TT: Through video making, and rabble rousing. Because Dave and I had done the video, and because Kenn and I were doing the videos, plural, we were being asked, also, to review other people's scripts.

GK: Right.

TT: You know, we were... you know, social worker types, they always have to consult a youth.

GK: [laughter]

TT: Consult five youth, right? So, we would be the targets. There were probably only five youth who were ever consulted in the 1980s, and it was us. [laughter] Because we were easy to find, and whatever, and predictable in what we would say. But, I must have been somewhat visible and useful, because I remember helping to organize a two or three-day conference around AIDS, that AIDS ACTION NOW! put on, and I was in charge of organizing a discussion around transmission issues. And, I think that was my thing, that was my ball to roll, and I found a woman, Jackie, who had been organizing. Before Black CAP [Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention].

GK: Right.

TT: There was another...

GK: Yes. COMBAT [Community Organizations Mutually Battling AIDS Together].

TT: COMBAT. So, she had started COMBAT, and I invited her in, for instance. And there was some other people who didn't show up, and so, it was she and I who conducted the workshop around transmission issues. So, I must have been somewhat visible.

GK: So, this was probably the conference at City Hall?

TT: Could be.

GK: And Karen Pearlston might have been involved in helping organize it?

TT: Could be.

GK: Might actually be how you got connected with it.

TT: Could be. I think because I had repeatedly pecked at AIDS ACTION NOW! to like, get real about women, and get hip to... Everybody was reeling from deaths. Up to half of your friends could be like, threatened to die at any given time. And so, I understand how people were like, sucked down that vortex, but in terms of who was getting HIV now, who's seroconverting now, you know, we unfortunately had to like, get at this like, supposedly heterosexual population out there who were seroconverting and not practicing safer sex. And that meant talking about women and AIDS, and AIDS ACTION NOW! was like, pretty far behind. And then they would like... there would be some lesbians involved, but I didn't think their materials were very real, or interesting, or captivating. So, me and KP, Karen Pearlston, we were always pushing them, criticizing them and pushing them. And, we would actually come up with some really, like, cool witty repartee stickers. And they would sort of adopt it. So, there was like this dialogue that wasn't really a dialogue, it was like, it was productive. I think that we really pushed them into producing some good materials. We did something called "Women Get AIDS Get Active." It was a brochure, I think. Anyway.

GK: Do you remember anything else around, specifically around, women and AIDS you would have been involved in?

TT: So, I was also doing prison support work.

GK: Right.

TT: People would literally phone our house and go, "Oh my God, I have AIDS, and I'm in prison, and I'm going to die, and what do I do?" And we would be like frantically looking for things that could be done, like, "Drink your pee," like crazy, crazy frantic things. And like, secretly trying to get them maybe, alternative diagnoses so that they could get some kind of medical help, or fed better, or something. And, these were other marginalized people, they were not queer people.

GK: Right.

TT: They were not queer-identified people. They didn't feel they could go to their communities, you know. Maybe we *were* talking to a gay Sri Lankan guy. We didn't want to go to his community and talk about *how* he got sick. He was just in jail and he needed someone to have his back, or even to know he was there.

GK: Right.

TT: So, we did that kind of support work. And, we also did... I was involved in the Women's Prison Support Survival Network.

GK: Right.

TT: Which was Christie and I. Well, she initiated it and I would help. And, so this was a magazine, a quarterly magazine that went out to women in prison. And, of course we talked about AIDS there,

too. We talked about AIDS a lot. You know, there we started to make connections around the so-called “bag lady’s lung,” [laughter] the deaths of street-involved women in New York City, in the late 70s and early 80s, that may in fact have been AIDS, and when they tested the blood samples, in fact, those women had died of AIDS. And, we found those things out, too. And they were published in the magazine. We talked about AIDS in that magazine because it was really, really relevant.

GK: Right, for sure.

TT: Yes.

GK: So, just coming back to AIDS ACTION NOW! for a moment, there’s that photo that you pointed out on our website that is not taken in Vancouver, of you, John Kozachenko, and Kenn Quayle. It’s actually ...

TT: It’s Ottawa.

GK: It’s Ottawa, and it’s actually the day that AIDS ACTION NOW! had a demonstration on Parliament Hill, where a number of people took unauthorized, illegal treatments. Do you have any memories of that?

TT: I remember doing lots of die-ins, and going lots of place, like, “I’ll get on the bus,” and, “Sure, I’ll get on the bus.”

GK: [laughter]

TT: I go to Ottawa a lot. All I ever do in Ottawa is protest, like, my entire life. I’ve got family there, but it’s like “Hi, I’m coming there for a protest.” So, I don’t specifically remember.

GK: Yes.

TT: I think my grandfather died around that time. I think I was actually in Ottawa because my grandfather died. And I was there with my girlfriend, and did I have pink hair? It’s black and white, we don’t know.

GK: Yes, we don’t know.

TT: So. [laughter]

GK: We’ll try and find out.

TT: I may have been up to other stuff in Ottawa, too. But, yes. Because people would just say, “Tracey, we’re going to die-in today,” and I’d be like, “Okay.” [laughter] We did it all the time.

GK: So, the next question is around the International AIDS Conference, which of course, is...

TT: The 5th.

GK: Yes, the one in Montreal in '89. Which I know you were at, because I remember seeing you there, and you're also in the footage that George Stamos and Andy Sorfleet put together. So, do you have any memories of the sex worker activism at that conference?

TT: Yes, I was pretty central, I have to say. I think it was... I was right there. George was my dance buddy from Halifax. And so, when he came to Toronto, he came to Cathedral B, and he stayed for a period of time. And, actually, I was doing a dance-intensive at York University that summer. And, like, they would let him take lessons and stuff for free, because he was so much fun, he's such a great dancer, and you don't get male dancers very often, so. He was my dance partner, dance buddy. And, he told me that he only went to the conference because I said "Hey, George, you should come to this thing." [laughter] So, I dragged George there, apparently. Kenn and I were working at Inner City Youth, so we were on like, a five-day furlough from our job to be there. I don't remember them having any expectations of us, so I was like, "Okay, I am going to be there, I'm going to do maximum, I'm going to maximum things." And from the very start, taking over the conference... Research at the time was abysmal, insulting, offensive, inaccurate, useless, and sometimes harmful. [laughter] Because there was just nothing. I think Val Scott does a really succinct, two-sentence analysis of the research in George's footage.

GK: Yes.

TT: Which is actually Catherine's footage, isn't it?

GK: That's right, yes.

TT: Yes. So, I arrived, and it was like, "Takeover, woohoo! Yes, let's do it!" I had been super sick with my own immune dysfunction. And, regrettably, some of that I was wearing a mask because I was really afraid of getting sick from other people, paralleling AIDS. But, I got well at that conference. Like, by the end of it, like, when I started I had been sleeping 16 hours, I could barely eat, I was just not very well. By the end of it I was like, "Wow, it cured me." I was like, healed. [laughter] Possibly because I slept more. I know that sounds strange, but I would like, just be so active at the conference and then I'd just crash. And eat well, because you're at a conference, there's buffets everywhere. It's all very healing. And meeting the Prostitute's Collective of Victoria, meeting those guys, Andrew, and Brett, and Cheryl Overs. All those characters. That was the bomb, it was beautiful. And, unbeknownst to me – I had done this song, called "Sex Trade Worker," with my band, Morning Sickness – and, "Sex Trade Worker" had been like, a minor college hit. It was a very strange, minimalist song. But, it had also been a hit in Australia.

GK: Okay.

TT: Like, a college hit, we're talking college hit. [laughter] And I had used a lot of phrases from COYOTE, Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics, that Margo St. James had started in California. And that was then adopted by CALPEP, California Prostitutes Education Project. But, the centre of that was

Scarlett Harlot, Carol Leigh.

GK: Right.

TT: And she had made up those phrases, and I didn't know that. But I had used a lot of these phrases in the song, because they were such great phrases. And so, I met Scarlett Harlot and it was like, "Ahh." She's like the greatest, because she's super energetic, she's unafraid to be, she's an unabashed performance artist. She had like all the politics of Gwendolyn, it was just lovely. And I can't believe I didn't follow her around entirely... the entire AIDS Conference. But, anything she wanted to do I was like, "I'm there." I don't know why I didn't do "Selling Sex," I don't know why I wasn't here, but George says I was probably doing something very serious, like disrupting some research I wasn't approving of. [laughter] I was probably doing something serious, he thought.

GK: Might have been.

TT: But I attended the conference quite thoroughly. And then there was the last day... So, activists had organized different themes for different days, to make sure that they all got addressed. So, of course, what was the bucket pot? Like, where did everything that didn't fit go? It was the Women and Sex Worker Day. So, I was asked to give a speech by Réaction SIDA. Réaction SIDA were a very small, dedicated group of Montrealers. Quite young. And everybody was feeling really overwhelmed by the New York people. By ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power]. Because they were so loud and organized, and big. And they'd like walk into a room and go, "Where's the fax machine?" And it would be like, "Oh my God, we don't even have phones."

GK: [laughter]

TT: So, Réaction SIDA had done a great job of having like, this press room and space. For a small group they pulled off this mega project and like, ACT UP would come in and go, "We need a second fax machine," or something. And it would be like, "Oh my God, could you get off yourself? Like, really."

GK: [laughter]

TT: So, I was feeling kind of overwhelmed by them and, luckily, I was asked to give this bullhorn speech, and I did it in French and English, about the scapegoating of prostitutes, which wasn't terribly innovative if you had ever thought about it. But, I think it was like a lone voice in the wilderness in terms of like, an official speech there. And it was on the front cover of *Canadian Nurse Magazine*. It was like, a big deal. I was so nervous, I was like, shaking into the megaphone. And I was in my usual, like, messed up punk rock gear: lime green fluorescent things, straps everywhere. And my mother saw it in *Canadian Nurse*. So, when I went home to see my mother in the summer, she had this dinner party, and she's like, "I'm so proud of my daughter, she dressed as a prostitute for this," and I was like, "Woah, I wasn't dressed as a prostitute." Like, that's how I dressed. Like, "That's punk, mom. I wasn't dressed as a prostitute." [laughter]

So, that happened. We were... you know how they say if you send an email, politicians think like,

five people care. But if you send a hand-written letter, politicians think a thousand people care, etc.? So, I think that, for this group of 5-10 sex worker activists, we made things look really big. Our main message around AIDS was just to make sure that women and men who worked the streets had the civil rights to make good decisions to protect their health, that they had the resources to do that, and ultimately, decriminalization would facilitate both of those things. And that you had to listen to the sex workers in order to work with them. You couldn't just like, study them. That wasn't going to help, because you don't even know the answer, and you couldn't implement it if you tried. So, obviously you need to work with the people. And that was a no brainer. There were sex worker activists from Southeast Asia, from South Asia, from Australia, from all kinds of places, all saying the same thing, like, "You have to talk to us. We have organizations. We're already here, like, but you have to collaborate. You can't just like, come in and take our blood and leave." Like, which would have been happening. Then that message was sadly, quite radical at the time.

GK: Do you remember any tensions? So, there was that particular day, which was the sex worker day of activism.

TT: Sex worker and women.

GK: Well, I think that might be a bit more complicated because Karen Herland describes this as, it was originally only a sex worker day, and that the ACT UP Women's Caucus from New York City actually changed the character of the event.

TT: Yes, they were all about like, dental dams and shit.

GK: But all about lesbians being affected by HIV.

TT: And it's like, sure, sure, that's true. But, why do you have to throw us all into the same bucket? It's not the same issue. And there's plenty of queer women who do sex work. Men are primarily the clients. I had big questions about, for years I've had questions about whether a dental dam was effective or not, because it had never been tested. I don't know if you ever tried a dental dam, but really, not going very far. And dental dams themselves weren't made to be licked constantly. So, the safety of a dental dam was a question. But also, pore size. They were meant to prevent water in a dental situation, really. But, why not split a condom? So, I had done preaching the "split a condom" thing. But also, very curious about, where was HIV, and how did it get around? We were just beginning to get aware that there were different HIVs.

GK: Right.

TT: Some of them were more virulent than others. There were gay men who were pretty sure that the transmission had happened orally. But instead of asking questions, it just seemed to me like, there was just this like, boneheaded "Lesbians get AIDS get active." And not talking about how lesbians might get AIDS.

GK: Right.

TT: And, what you would do about it was the important thing. What would you do about it? You know? That seemed to be missing.

GK: Right.

TT: But they were loud, and they were big, and they were popular with themselves.

GK: Yes. If you haven't read Karen Herland's interview, she talks a little bit about some of this.

TT: So, I actually didn't talk to them much, really, the New York people. They weren't curious about what we were on about. They were really just, into their thing.

GK: They had their plan.

TT: Yes, they didn't really let us in on it, they just seemed to be... George is very forgiving of them, he was like, "They were Americans."

GK: They were Americans. [laughter]

TT: They were Americans.

GK: Well, the one thing I will say for them is, if they hadn't had the initiative to take over the opening session, it wouldn't have happened.

TT: Really?

GK: That was their initiative. It was.

TT: Aww.

GK: It really was.

TT: That's great.

GK: That was not the plan.

TT: I just saw a sea of white, gay men. Really, that's what it looked like to me.

GK: And Blane.

TT: Oh my God, yes, we can name the Black guy in the crowd of hundreds, that is a sad situation, right?

GK: Well, he also was the one who helps to set up ACT UP in Montreal, he moves there afterwards.

TT: Okay.

GK: So, it's more complicated than that.

TT: Right, yes, but it was a very white movement, and Black people were quite affected but, the intersection of you know, being marginalized anyway, and do you come out as gay to your Caribbean parents? Do you come out as gay... like so, all of the intersectionality prevented them from being public AIDS activists for a while.

GK: Right, for sure. So, you come back to Toronto after the conference, and you continue doing some of the same work? Or, what takes place?

TT: I think so, I think so. I think I keep doing the things. I made, completed, two videos.

GK: Right.

TT: And, I was the unpaid script editor. You know, constantly taking on scripts and crossing out the fucking green monkey shit, and telling people to have a narrative. And, I think there was a video done after our videos, which involved like, the kids of Degrassi or whatever? I saved that video, that would have been fucking awful, really. Honestly, they started the video with the fucking green monkey thing.

GK: God. [laughter]

TT: The lab coat and the green monkey thing. Are you freaking kidding? And, every scene youth were doing it wrong. And then some adult, some white guy in a lab coat would come and straighten them out, and he was like, "You can't do that." People have to do something right. And, they have to negotiate... please God, could you have a negotiation between two consenting youth about using a condom? What the hell do you think you're doing this for anyway? Right? And they did. They did. They had like the subtlest, the most subtle negotiation ever, but they did manage to do that.

GK: That's great.

TT: Yes.

GK: So, how long did you stay involved in terms of doing AIDS-related things?

TT: I don't remember stopping.

GK: Okay.

TT: But there was an era of protest. And... after I left Inner City Youth, I got a social worker job through AIDS ACTION NOW! As hostile as I was.

GK: [laughter]

TT: Sistering was hiring a support worker to work in their drop-in centre.

GK: Right.

TT: And, Sistering's population was increasingly multicultural, non-English speaking. The women were marginalized, some of them were doing sex work. Some of them were perceived as difficult to talk about sex with. I think they meant Muslim women, and I just never found that to be true. It was kind of an assumption, an untested assumption. But anyway, they were like, "Oh my God, we have to have someone who can talk about sex. We have to have someone who can talk about AIDS." So, my understanding is they phoned Leslie Gaynor.

GK: Oh yes.

TT: And asked her, "Was there anyone they could think of who could talk to any woman about sex, and safer sex?" And she mentioned my name. I didn't know this had happened. I'd just come back from like, some disastrous breakup from Vancouver, where I thought I would move. I came back. I was looking for a job. I applied to Sistering, I was one of like, 200 people. And I was abjectly not qualified.

GK: [laughter]

TT: The only thing that qualified me was all of this activism, right? And all of this politics. And this stint at Inner City Youth. And I had a dance degree. Let's just put it—I had a dance degree. So, mysteriously, they chose to interview me. And the interview went on and on and on, and then they hired me. Which was crazy. So, suddenly I was a social worker instead of a performance artist. And that began a 17-year social work career. My uncredentialed [laughter] social work career. Yes.

GK: Was it all with Sistering? Or?

TT: So, I was with Sistering, and they wanted someone who could talk about safer sex. And I think I pretty much taught everyone to talk about sex. And it was kind of funny, because it wasn't hard to talk to Muslim women about sex. It wasn't hard to start a discussion with older women about sex. Like, it just didn't seem to be that big a deal once we got going, you know? But you had to talk frankly about like, you know, a woman would say, "My husband would never use a condom," and we'd say, "So, like, some people say it's possible to do it secretly," right? And so, it just meant problem solving. And talking about it openly. Which I found... there was no population of women unwilling to do that. Everyone was quite willing to do it. So, I think I gave permission for all of the other support workers to talk about it, and to feel comfortable talking about it. And to realize that there weren't these huge cultural barriers that were assumed.

GK: So, I guess the first question before getting to people who died is whether there's anything else that you would want to say about your involvement with the various forms of AIDS activism you were connected with. Whether it's involving young people, injection drug use, sex worker activism, any of those sorts of things.

TT: So, I never saw myself as a member of AIDS ACTION NOW!

GK: Right.

TT: And, once I became a social worker, then it was just something that Tracey could talk about, it was something that Tracey could train others to talk about. I was an ambassador around the needle use stuff. And so, anyone who was willing to listen, I would teach them. I constantly told people where to get safer sex kits, where to get needle kits, how do to that thing, different alternatives, the prison support work I did... We just constantly informed, informed, informed. And like, so recently, I found a list of pharmacies that have naloxone kits to help when somebody's overdosed. And I'm just going to get one and put it in our first aid kit here, and like, put a sign on the door that we have a kit. I think it's just become part of my lifestyle. I was the person who always had the basket of condoms, [laughter] and lube and stuff. And I have a sexual health department in the store now. So, it became part of my life. And I never formed an activist group of our own. I was part of the Fuckheads. I was part of, with David Findlay, we were Better Information Towards Community Health. We were BITCH. So, as BITCH, we would get to edit videos in schools, and whenever I felt inspired I would just make a poster and put it up everywhere. So, there was WARN, Women Armed Resisting Nastiness. So, I did that stuff, but I never joined an organization formally.

GK: That's fine. You obviously did an awful lot. So, part of what we're trying to do with the AIDS Activist History Project is also to remember people we can't interview. So, we're also interested in people's memories of people who died during this period of time. There's obviously Michael Smith, who we'll come back to. But are there other people? Like, one person no one's talked about yet, largely because we started with AIDS ACTION NOW! is Danny Cockerline. And, I know you didn't necessarily know him that well, I mean I knew him for a little bit as well, but do you have any, sort of, memories of him as a sex worker activist?

TT: Well I do, I mean, initially with Danny, and Val, and that crowd, they were sort of in a different category because they were wealthier than us, they had better means, they were older than us. And I was kind of critical that they didn't, in their politics, encompass street workers enough. They were all about the queer thing, and making sex work, like, positive, all happy, all the time. And my awareness of it was that people do street work when they're poor, when they don't have other options. It doesn't make them bad people. It doesn't mean sex work should be illegal. It's certainly not trafficking. It's about when you're poor, you do shit you wouldn't otherwise do. And the same with coal mining. I'm from Nova Scotia, I know all the jobs are shit nobody would ever do if they didn't have to, right? So, I just thought we weren't like, on the same level politically. We knew we were comrades, but not really. But, I do remember Danny invited me to – invited us – frankly, it was because I was with a bunch of cute boys...

GK: [laughter].

TT: ...up to his apartment to watch Pride Day. So, I felt very important to be at his apartment. Like, he had a really cool apartment that overlooked, was it Wellesley? But, it was on the corner of Church and Wellesley. And, I loved... he was super smart, and had a great sense of humour, and he's funny. And, I was a very angry person, really negative. Not, well, I'm kind of morbid inside. So, to be around these people like Michael Smith and Danny Cockerline who were funny and, like, just kind of funny and knew how to spin even difficult things in a way that was celebratory of something. I really loved that. So, he was fun to be around.

GK: Right. So, are there other people aside from Michael? Because we obviously want to talk in more detail about him. But, other people who would have died of AIDS that you would have known? AIDS activists, or sex workers?

TT: Yes, street kids, people who live on the street and probably, my ex-boyfriend. And there were suicides that were associated with it. Yes. I was trying to think about that because, you know, at first I was like, I read your piece about how some of the questions may be emotional. And I was like, "Aww shucks, I can talk about it." And then, I just realized I can't even remember people's names because it was just this black hole of like, death looming over everything. And there was also my good friend Binsky, Rabinsky [Robin Turney], who's like, alive, which is fabulous. I knew so many people who were HIV+ and then you wouldn't see them around, you'd just assume they were dead. So, there was a lot of death. And not necessarily high-profile death.

GK: Yes.

TT: Right? But. A lot of street people.

GK: So, maybe we'll move on to talk about Michael?

TT: Yes.

GK: So, we already got some people talking about their memories of Michael, but, sort of, what would your sense have been of Michael, and his energy, and enthusiasm, and stuff?

TT: Oh, he was just a complete joy. He was a complete joy. And he was just like, "That's *fabulous!*" Like, I would just want to poke Michael and make him talk shit because I just enjoyed hearing him so much. His politics were so thorough, and admirable. He was cheerful about things that I was like, morose and critical about. And his analysis was glorious, like, everything he said glittered for me. And, he was also a really fun person. And kind. So kind. And I was hostile. I was kind of mean. I was really hardline, politically. And probably no one knew how shockingly judgmental I was. [laughter]. But, I really loved people like Michael for the way they were open towards the world, and took emotional risks. Shared their—weren't snooty about their backgrounds, or... because he had a Master's degree, which he poo-pooed. I think it was from Oxford or something ridiculous like that, right? Yes. It was all good.

GK: Yes, he was also like, involved in lots of stuff like, helped to set up a group coming out of AIDS ACTION NOW! that forms PASAN [Prisoners with AIDS Support Action Network], and Indigenous solidarity work, so, his politics were very broad ranging.

TT: Ah, PASAN, yes. He was like, in solidarity with everything, and when we did... probably we did more politics together than Kenn and I did. So, when it came to the Leonard Peltier support survival tour, my God we were busy. We worked on that together. We got like, busted at the airport together. We got busted on our way to the March on Washington together. We did a lot of Native solidarity stuff together.

GK: Right. So, Michael gets sicker. I actually visited him at the Oak Street Co-Op, shortly before he died. But I wasn't actually around when he died. But, were you at all involved in his support team towards the end?

TT: Well, I remember he was living in the attic, and I was below him, and I just remember hearing that he'd become dehydrated. And, I was like, oh my God, I hadn't paid attention for two days. And, I remember that day as the day I started to talk to Karen Pearlston, and the new extended community. We couldn't take care of him, we were too flakey, and you know, the thought that he would just die there in a house full of people, and nobody would have checked to see if he had water, it was just crazy. So, I remember that. And, when he moved to the Co-Op, I think I was still deeply ashamed that I hadn't taken care of him, that I hadn't... I just hadn't gotten it together. I just didn't realize how sick he was. [crying] So, when he was dying, he invited my girlfriend and I. We went to see him, and I didn't know that he was going to go so fast. And, I regret not visiting him enough. Because he was such a good person. He was so important to me. And when he died, the day he died, he called me. I think he wanted me to be there. I couldn't be there. I was there after he died, like an hour or so. He was wearing my pajama pants. And he had my childhood sheet under him, with green polka dots. It was truly a ridiculous set of sheets. [laughter]. I didn't realize how close it was. And he took his life because he didn't want to be a burden to women. He didn't want to have dementia. He didn't want to hurt us. I have probably never cried like that. Because I never told anybody, I felt so bad about it.

GK: When I visited him at the Oak Street Co-Op, I was living in St. John's then, so I wasn't here when he died. I was really glad to be able to visit him shortly before he died. The sense I got from him was he was starting to feel like he had fantasies and dreams about hurting people. And that is just something he couldn't handle.

TT: Yes, he couldn't abide it.

GK: He just couldn't.

TT: I totally understand.

GK: So, that was my sense.

TT: Yes, I totally understand. And, he was being taken care of very much by Sunday Harrison, and other people at the Co-Op.

GK: Right.

TT: It was not like I thought his decision was illogical. But, I mean, it touches on so much tragedy. It touches on what a good person he was, just hardcore. And, how thoughtful and anti-misogynist. The Radical Faeries really did not have much to gather around what women go through, except for him. Yeah. He had become aware that if he was not in control of his thoughts, or what he said, that he would hurt us, so. Yes. He chose the time.

GK: So, maybe just before talking about his funeral and stuff, one thing I did miss was talking about the play. And your participation in it. So, if there was anything you wanted to say about that.

TT: He was doing a play, and I was like, “Sure, you’re doing a play, whatever.” Like, people always had plans, so I was like, “Okay, sure.” And then, I think, I was told to show up at the Factory Theatre and I was told, “Do this,” or “Do that,” or whatever. I think because we – Morning Sickness, my band – we were asked to be protestors, and it’s like fine, that’s a walk-on job. And then, to do the Rubber Rap. And so, we did. There wasn’t a rehearsal as far as I remember.

GK: Right.

TT: [laughter] We kind of showed up, and I didn’t know how epic it was going to be. Right?

GK: Yes.

TT: I didn’t know. But he could pull that off. Like, he could just pull it off when he’d been so sick. It was amazing. Yeah.

GK: Do you remember one of the participants said, “AIDS ACTION PLEASE!”?

TT: Uh-huh.

GK: Anyway, just so, I know that was sort of, his in joke with AIDS ACTION NOW!

TT: Right. Yes.

GK: [laughter]

TT: And that might have something to do with a button that my friend and I mercilessly mocked. Which said, “Fairness. Not a lot to ask for.” It was like, some union button. I was like, “That is the worst slogan ever.” “Fairness. Not a lot to ask for.”

GK: [laughter]

TT: Anyway. It was ridiculous on so many levels. And so, “AIDS ACTION PLEASE!” Like, yes.

GK: Yes.

TT: “AIDS ACTION SOMEDAY!” I’m pretty sure we made fun of it in a lot of different ways.

GK: So, Michael does die. And, then there’s a memorial service for him.

TT: Yes.

GK: Were you able to attend that?

TT: Yes, for sure. For sure.

GK: Can you tell us anything about that? We had a couple of people tell us a little bit about it, and the march afterwards. We’re actually quite interested in that.

TT: The only thing I remember from that, because it was a whirlwind of people visiting, and coming and going, and we were in the middle of shit, and, I remember sort of writing the service with other people choosing things. I remember making the memorial cards, so that’s my handwriting, his *In Memoriam*.⁵

GK: Right.

TT: I think like, Lynna Landstreet laid it out, and I did that, I did that thing. I think I had discussed with him what he wanted. Anyway. I participated in that. And, it incorporated some of his doodles. And I participated in whatever that equivalent of liturgy or Haggadah or whatever. And I remember taking some clay that I had collected from the Great Salt Lake and putting it in his coffin. I remember that we were dressing him up, and we were putting things in, and I really liked that. But, it was a lot of comings and goings, and I don’t remember the parade so much.

GK: Okay.

TT: Yes.

GK: Yes, it was really interesting to us that in the States, at that point in time, they were having all of these political funerals, including dumping people’s ashes on the White House grounds.

TT: Oh, wow.

GK: Because, there was sort of that initial optimistic period of AIDS activism, where there

⁵ A digital scan of Michael Smith’s memorial card has been made available here:
<http://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/674>

were certain treatment victories and people were living longer, and then it sort of stopped. And people started to die again.

TT: And transmission was just going up, and up, and up, and up in these populations who really needed the message to have reached them years ago.

GK: Yes. And Michael's is the closest to that in terms of, sort of, people marched and protested a bit.

TT: And I did that subsequently, because I worked as a social worker with Homes for Society, and there was a lot of death. A lot of death. And sometimes the funerals, and memorials that I would organize for people, we did protests. We did marches. And singing, and did that. I didn't know it was the thing though.

GK: It was just something that they would do.

TT: We didn't have a TV, so I lived kind of under a rock, and people had to kind of tell me what was going on. Pre-internet.

GK: Yes, I actually didn't know about these political funerals until I saw the ACT UP Oral History Project video.

TT: When you say, "political funerals," though, I think of South Africa during apartheid.

GK: Yes.

TT: And those were huge.

GK: Yes.

TT: That was a thing.

GK: These though, these were never that huge. But if you look at the ACT UP Oral History Project movie called *United in Anger*, there were hundreds of people at some of them. And they had collective ones. They would actually bring people together who died recently, and would march to the White House, and throw ashes onto the lawn. People had said that's what they wanted to have happen to them after they die.

TT: I think I remember when the ashes, and light bulbs, and like, pelting places with them. But they weren't people's ashes actually, they were just ashes.

GK: The next question is, is there anything that sort of, cropped up that you haven't had an opportunity to talk about? Or, reflections on your involvement?

TT: So, I have a 22-year old daughter, and my apprentices upstairs, some of them are quite young.

Some of them are in their early 20s. And a lot of them are in queer and mixed queer communities. And so, it comes up on Facebook and stuff, sometimes those young people, they think they have an original idea. [laughter] Then you're like... So, I always pop in and go, "We did that in '85," you know? I'm like, the crotchety old lady. But, realizing that I'm telling a younger generation, who don't know what it was like, and who just have no idea how quickly laws and contexts changed. Huge changes. From people dying of AIDS within six months of a diagnosis, to people living with AIDS. We used to talk about living with AIDS before people lived with AIDS. Like, before it was even very possible. And, you know, from hiding lesbian mothers who are charged with kidnapping in our house, to lesbian mothers having columns, and talking about being lesbian, and adoption rates, and huge differences. And so, what I'm telling the younger generation, is that didn't happen by accident. Nobody just like, legislators didn't get up in the morning and go, "I think gay marriage would be a good idea." Like, it was all through activism. It was all fought for. Yes. And, we could lose it, of course, now. We see this. With America.

GK: For sure.

TT: Yes. And even civil rights have eroded in Canada, since Mulroney's time. There's been, around terrorism and stuff, unrelated to AIDS, but eventually, if they wanted to go criminalize another disease, they could, because they've eroded a lot of civil rights.

GK: For sure.

TT: Yes.

GK: So, anything else you want to add in? The last question is basically just, are there other people you think we should talk to? Who we might not have?

TT: Nicole Tanguay. So, she was my girlfriend at the time that Michael died.

GK: Right.

TT: And she's Anishnawbe. And queer. I guess that's implied. [laughter]

GK: I should have assumed so, but who knows?

TT: Who else to talk to? Jackie, the woman who founded COMBAT.

GK: We've tried to find her.

TT: And have you been in touch with Black CAP?

GK: We've interviewed Douglas Stewart and Dionne Falconer.

TT: Beautiful!

GK: They're both online now.

TT: Okay. And so then, have you talked to... I'm trying to think of the outliers. And so, this is a Canadian reflection, right?

GK: Yes.

TT: And you've talked to Karen Herland.

GK: Yes. And we've talked to a number of the other Réaction SIDA people as well.

TT: Okay. Great.

GK: And we'll probably go talk to one or two more.

TT: Sue Goldstein.

GK: Yes, I know who you're talking about.

TT: Right. So, she had actually fallen in love with a Réaction SIDA woman in Montreal, and moved to Toronto, and she's still here. Her primary thing now is around Palestinian rights. So, she's Jewish, I'm Jewish. So, we do stuff around opposing the state of Israel as Jews.

GK: Right. I've had some contact with Sue around that.

TT: Yes. And First Nations solidarity work.

GK: Right.

TT: So, who else? I mean, you've probably just talked to all the usual suspects, right? Who were in the core groups. You've talked to people from PASAN.

GK: We're going to try and talk to some more. But yes, we do want to... that's one area we still have a couple of interviews to do in. We talked to Julia Barnett, who was involved at the beginning.

TT: Ah, yes. So, she's part of the Morris Winchevsky Centre too! So, she's part of that gang.

GK: Right. Yes, I think we want to do a few more interviews around PASAN.

TT: Who else? Karen Pearlston?

GK: We have talked to her.

TT: Okay. So, you know the difficulty is, is I can't remember who was sort of, an activist around

AIDS, and who was an activist around First Nations struggles. Young people these days, they talk about intersectionality. And, in retrospect, I think we were kind of, a little, there. We were almost there. Because being anarchists, our philosophy encompassed more than just the one-issue-wonder. Yes. So, not that we were personally intersectional very much. But that we interacted with people who were intersectional. Because, whoa, one of the things I did was projects... I worked with people, or helped people out, who were getting the message out around AIDS and the First Nations community. And I can't remember what those projects were called. But there was a national tour...

GK: Right.

TT: ...that I helped organize. The events in Toronto, helped publicize, helped hook them up with other people, and acted as a consultant, host-type person. And that was important, because I knew that people were doing the stuff in the middle. I knew AIDS ACTION NOW!—they had their turf. And then, anything that was kind of outside, and weirder than that, then that might be something that would become, like, our anarchist business.

GK: Right.

TT: You might talk to Tiss Clark, who's in the Yukon now. And you can see her on Facebook.

GK: So, she's in the Yukon?

TT: She's doing literacy work at an agency. So, she was one of the first, like, officially employed, social worker types.

GK: Right.

TT: And I don't know how direct her work around AIDS would have been. But, as a social worker, she most certainly would have been talking to people about AIDS... that would have been a thing at her work.

GK: For sure.

TT: Yes.

GK: This is all great.

TT: Yes, thank you.

GK: Thank you. Any final words?

TT: Oh, God. We'll be here another night. Yes. I didn't realize until I started talking to my daughter how fucking traumatic that whole black cloud, of like—you didn't know who was going to be around. And it was not that I had so many friends. I had friends die of overdoses, too. But it was

the whole community. Because you go to the next protest, and who's missing? And you know, you unconsciously got used to it, that they might be dead already. It was huge. It was like apocalyptic. And, when I hear about Ebola, or these epidemics in other places, it's just like, I know what that's like a little bit.

GK: Well, thank you. This is great.

TT: Thanks. Yes.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]