

AAHP  
**AIDS Activist History Project**

**Interview Transcript 64**

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<b>Interviewee:</b>	Earl Pinchuk
<b>Interviewers:</b>	Ryan Conrad
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Persons present: Earl Pinchuk – EP  
Ryan Conrad – RC

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

**RC: So, we're here in Montreal, and it's February 16th, 2018. I'm interviewing Earl Pinchuk for the AIDS Activist History Project. And, I know I didn't say this, but any questions—we're focusing from the early-to-mid '80s, to about the 1996 moment. And if we go beyond that, that's fine. But we can't do everything, so that's really where we're trying to narrow our focus. Also, if there are any questions that you don't want to answer, you don't have to answer them.**

EP: Okay.

**RC: We usually start with a number of questions that we ask everyone, just to open up the conversation. And so, when did you first hear about AIDS, and what was it that you heard?**

EP: Well, I believe it was July of 1981. And, of course, the famous *New York Times* article that came out, about "gay cancer," there was a rare form of cancer that was killing gay men in New York. It could have been Los Angeles, too. So, that grabbed our attention, because it was something that was killing gay men. But it was not called AIDS at the time. So, that would have been July of 1981. I was nineteen. I came out in 1980. And we just followed everything as it unfurled.

**RC: And, in addition to *The New York Times*, would there have been anything else that you were reading in particular?**

EP: At the time, *The Body Politic* would have been a very good tool of information. Because again, there really was nowhere to get information, besides what was published in the press. I don't think the mainstream press was publishing that much about it. So, maybe even L'Androgyne, could have been a place, which was Montreal's LGBTQ bookstore that no longer exists. They could have had things posted up. Gay bars could have had information, too. There really wasn't a lot of people publishing information.

**RC: As time went on, were there any publications that you turned to for solid information?**

EP: Well, *The Body Politic*, *Xtra!* and *The Advocate* [...] Well, okay. So, I would say, again, *The Body Politic*, very informative. From the US publications, *The Advocate* was very, very informative. They were reporting what was going on at the beginning.

**RC: Great. And when did you first hear about AIDS activism? Because there's the initial response, where people are scared, and don't know what's going on. Then there's sort of an initial response with people organizing services for people. And then, at a certain point, there's a shift from understanding the AIDS crisis as a medical crisis or an individual issue, to a sort of collective and political response to that epidemic.**

EP: Sure. Well, I would say in Montreal, the first groups that formed were a group called CSAM, which was the Comité sida aide Montréal. They were basically a buddy group, because so many people were getting sick, and not able to do their groceries and clean their apartments, so they had a buddy system. I was never a buddy, but I did get involved with the group. CSAM then became ACCM [AIDS Community Care Montreal], the Anglophone branch of what CSAM was doing. Again, I didn't become a buddy, but I got involved with them as well. I remember hearing about ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power] New York starting in 1987. There was not much in Montreal at the time. ACT UP came to Montreal because of the International AIDS Conference of 1989. ACT UP New York came up, and—I guess we're going to talk about that.

**RC: Yeah, we'll talk more about it—**

EP: Later on. So, when I got involved with ACT UP Montreal, well, I guess I'll talk about that once we talk about *that* more, too. [laughter] I'm like, way ahead!

**RC: Well, maybe something to also get us there is, had you had any previous experience doing activism, or being involved with things that you brought with you?**

EP: Absolutely. So, gay activism for me started in 1982, with *The Body Politic*. So, I was bored of Montreal, and went to school in Toronto, at the University of Toronto [U of T]. And when I found out about *The Body Politic*... when I arrived in Toronto, I was more interested in spending time with *The Body Politic* than I was at school, because I felt that being a gay activist was really what I wanted to do; to get this movement going. And I wasn't going to do it in the library, the Robarts Library at U of T. I was going to do it with *The Body Politic*. So, that's really where my activism started, with gay activism.

**RC: And were you writing for the paper, or what was your involvement?**

EP: You know what? No, I was not writing for the paper. I was more... I could be at reception. I would be there whenever an issue was about to be published. Let's say a forty-page issue, the night before it would go to publication, each of the pages would be up on a clip on a clothesline, in the middle of this office. It wasn't a big office. And there would be people proofreading, making sure that everything was fine. For me, it wasn't really about writing, or one thing in particular. It was about, what could I do to help this movement? The movement, for me, was coming from *The Body Politic*. But it was also coming out of U of T, as well. There were gay and lesbian groups at U of T that I got involved with. So, I was always the type of person that wanted to make things happen. And because I was gay, well, that was the thing that I really wanted to make happen, was to keep the movement going.

**RC: That's great. It's really interesting to hear what people were doing leading up to the AIDS crisis. It really helps put into perspective.**

EP: Who got involved and who didn't?

**RC: Yeah. Who knew who, and who was friends with who, and who was involved in what organizations, and how that all sort of—a lot of it happened organically, right? And AIDS activism didn't come from nowhere. It has this precedent, you know, whether it was people in the women's movement, the women's health movement, people in the gay rights movement... Like, there's all sorts of places that people come from. So, it's always interesting to hear how this happens.**

EP: Yeah. We all definitely come from different places, but there I was.

**RC: So, when did you move back to Montreal?**

EP: So, I was in Toronto only two years. I never finished school. I came back to Montreal to work in the Pinchuk family business, which is where I spent most of my adult life, a comforter manufacturer. It wasn't really exactly where I wanted to be. So, during the years that I worked there—probably twenty-three to forty—again, I was always doing gay activism, and then of course, AIDS activism, to balance everything out. That kind of led to the Art for Healing Foundation, which my husband and I started in 2002, which brings art into healthcare environments. On one hand there's a lot of art in the city of Montreal, and this would be a whole other interview, so I'll make it short. Basically, the premise for Art for Healing is that there's a lot of art in the city that artists own, art collectors own, and they just can't sell, because there's not a lot of people buying original art in the city. And then in hospitals—we had a friend who was sick and died, and we saw that the walls in the entire hospital looked terrible. We thought, “Well, is there a way to marry these two worlds

together?" That being the art that's there, that's not being used. We could have people donate the art to us, and then we'll put it up. Our friend said, "Well, it sounds pretty far-fetched and ambitious, because nobody is going to want to donate. The hospitals are going to think you're too much work for them." We just said, "Well, we really are convinced that this could work." And now we're across Canada, and we went to Europe, and it's successful.

So, I think, you know, I think a lot of people who become the "activist," it's kind of in their blood. So, I think it's in my blood to be an activist, of whatever kind. So, I'm gay, I became a gay activist. AIDS came, I became an AIDS activist. We had a friend sick in the hospital, and I was looking for a career change, and thought it was going to be in an art gallery, so we made that happen. So, I think that, well, when you do like to be in the middle of making things happen, you have to consider yourself very fortunate, I guess. Although that has nothing to do with AIDS. [laughter] But it tells you about my personality, you know? And if you met my husband, he's the same way. It's like, "Do it!"

**RC: Yeah. Get it done! That's great. So, there's the murder of Joe Rose. Would you have been here for that, you would have been back from Toronto about '89?**

EP: I was.

**RC: We know that this group, Réaction SIDA, sort of comes out of that moment. It's a combination of Joe Rose and the Montreal AIDS Conference is coming up. And so...**

EP: Exactly. And, would it help, or be interesting for the interview, if you ask me about Joe Rose? I happen to have in there... [points to records] I found I have multiple copies of things. One of them is the pamphlet that was printed for the Joe Rose manifestación.<sup>1</sup> The date and all that. Maybe we'll leave that.

**RC: That would be great, any ephemera you want to share with us. We'll digitize everything and put it online.**

EP: That you can leave with, anyway, I'm happy to share that with you.

**RC: That's amazing. So, Réaction SIDA is the group that comes together just before the AIDS conference, or between Joe's murder and the conference, which is a very short window of time, because the conference happens in '89, as well, in the summer of '89. So, March is the murder of Joe Rose, and then I believe July '89 is the**

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<sup>1</sup> The pamphlet for the Jose Rose manifestación has been made available [here](https://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/736).  
[https://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/736]

**conference. And so, this group comes together really quickly. Were you involved? Or did you attend the International AIDS Conference at all?**

EP: I didn't. It's interesting, I had fallen off my bicycle in June of 1989. And I was on crutches for like, two months. So I was just not part of that whole experience. It's too bad, but I mean, circumstances led me not to be there. But I did hear what was going on, see what was going on. David Shannon, at the time, was writing a column in the [*Montreal Mirror*], "Out in the City," and he was also in *The Homo Show*, which I listened to and read. I heard about what was going on at the conference, and then heard about the fact that one member of ACT UP New York had stayed behind after the conference and had organized ACT UP Montreal.

**RC: And that would be Blane Mosley?**

EP: That would be Blane Mosley. Who's now Blane Charles.

**RC: There's actually an interview with him on the ACT UP Oral History Project as Blane Charles.**

EP: So, he really was instrumental in starting it, I believe, with David. I think Michael [Hendricks] and René [Leboeuf] were part of the beginning, too. And Douglas Buckley-Couvrette, who you've probably heard of. But I still didn't get involved right away. Whatever was happening in my life, personally, I had drifted away from activism. Then, it wasn't until the following year, until Sex Garage.

**RC: Okay. In 1990.**

EP: Yeah, in 1990. I was not at the party, but I was in the [Gay] Village the following night. David Shannon was there with his megaphone, and we were stopping traffic, and we said, "We're not leaving here until the police come and tell us they're going to meet with the gay community at Station 10 tomorrow," or whenever it was going to be, in the next three days. They finally said yes. That whole experience, of—well, stopping traffic, and seeing that if you ask for something that seems logical, you can get something. Maybe something, once again, had to happen, if we're gonna come together with the police. Then, the next day, when the demonstrators, because the police wouldn't see them, were sitting in on de Maisonneuve [Street], and of course, the police came, and were basically hitting people, and driving them away—it was terrible. That got me totally into the "new movement." And that night, at the Gay and Lesbian Community Centre, as it was called then, there were maybe eighty of us there. Everybody was saying—we were all in our mid-to-late twenties, probably younger, too—that you know, this was our moment. "Let this be our Stonewall. We have something to do here in Montreal" [filmmaker Maureen Bradley said this]. That started the whole movement. Like LGV, which was Lesbians and Gays against Violence. It

also got ACT UP a lot more mobilized, because more people wanted to get involved. I think fewer people knew about it before.

That's when I started keeping my archives, was right at that time. So, 1990, the news would come on, and if it was about ACT UP, or anything that was going on in Montreal, gay or AIDS, I'd press "record," and I knew that I had my little archive going on here. And so, Michael Hendricks, when he found out I was doing this, he said, "Oh, you should be the head of the media committee. No one else is doing that." So, what I did, was I would scan newspapers, magazines, every week, and photocopy whatever I would find, and give it out at the meetings on Wednesday night. So, people would hear what was the latest coming out of the world of AIDS. Not just Montreal, but internationally. Particularly treatment and data. We had, I guess, our own treatment and data committee.

I would say that ACT UP Montreal really looked—everybody looked up to the mothership, ACT UP New York, because they really did start the ACT UP movement. But I think by 1991, there probably were eighty chapters, maybe, worldwide. We had ACT UP Paris contact us, and say they were going to be in Montreal, and they arrive at the meeting with their ACT UP Paris t-shirts, and it's like a fraternity. It was like brotherly love. I went to Miami in December 1990. My parents had a condo there and I was gone for a week. "What are you doing, Earl?" "Well, I'm just going out for a drive!" And I'd be going to ACT UP Miami.

**RC: Amazing! [laughter]**

EP: Well, because I wanted to know what was going on in Miami, you know? And at least bring back some information there, and vice versa. So, when I arrived at this meeting, I said, "I'm from Montreal, I'm a part of ACT UP." I was treated like a king! That was a great part of ACT UP. There was so much passion involved in the fact that nothing was being done, and that these groups of people, who joined ACT UP chapters around the world, really felt like, "how could we make a difference?" We could do it by being nonviolent and getting our message out there.

**RC: Can you tell me a bit more—I mean, it's amazing how you describe everything happening quite organically, right? Like, Michael Hendricks finds out you're making media packets out of the news, and it's like, "Oh, a media committee! Why don't you do this?"**

EP: "Perfect!" I love that! [laughter]

**RC: Can you tell me a little bit more about like, what did the media committee entail, and what did you do?**

EP: Well, I mean, for me it was more... again, it was offering whoever was coming to the meetings information that they may not have heard over the course of the week. So, *The Gazette*. There was nothing online at that point. So, I wouldn't necessarily buy *Le Devoir* and *La Presse* and *The Globe and Mail* every day. Although, *Globe and Mail* I was getting at the office. So, I'd scan as many papers as I could. So, even if I was at, I don't know, anywhere, and there was like, *Le Journal de Montréal* hanging around, I'd go see, "Was there anything about AIDS in the paper today?" Because that could be part of my "media package," if you want to call it that. I would print maybe ten or fifteen. If there were twenty-three people there, some people would say to me, "Oh, there's no more? I really wanted to bring it home and read it! Can I get one?" Of course I kept all the originals, so I could always get somebody that version, if they really wanted. So, that's really what it entailed. It entailed information. It wasn't so much—well, it was also me recording, you know, all of the news that was on television. So, again, it could be everything from the start of Sex Garage to the first anniversary of Sex Garage, to the demo ACT UP had at the Palais des congrès in 1991, where we got fake media passes to get in. It was the Minister of Health that was speaking, Marc-Yvan Côté. We went up with our banner and stopped it. So, I had my video camera there. For me, again, it was about recording history. For example, these "media packages" that I had weekly from 1990 to 1993, I had them all here in a box, all the originals. So, [shrugs] whoever would like to look through them, and see if there's something they can take from it, great. So, it's like, *Entertainment Weekly*, *People*, *New York Post*, *New York Times*... like, you know, whatever paper. People would send me newspapers, which was great. "Oh, put this in this week's edition! This week's issue." So, keeping them was very important. Well, actually, that could be something to digitalize for you guys.

**RC: That would be amazing.**

EP: I'll show them to you.

**RC: Knowing what was being handed out weekly at the ACT UP Montreal meetings is quite fascinating.**

EP: I have to say, at that time, and you're going to see them. A magazine like *Entertainment Weekly*, which I think still publishes, they would print once a year, all the people in the entertainment business that died of AIDS. Mostly all men. And not just the famous people. You know, stunt men, makeup artists—and you just saw all the lives lost in that year from that industry. That has an impact.

So, they're there [in the box]. I mean, you'll see everything from—we had a fight with Mayor [Jean] Doré at the time, because we approached the city and said, "We think you should have condoms in all bar bathrooms. Bars and restaurants." And they said, "No, that's promoting sex." It's not promoting sex. People are going to have sex. You know, this was one of the struggles that we had, that is in some of that information, in the media packages. So that's maybe some lost information that I don't know if it's on the internet.

But, the importance of, again, recording history. I mean, as I just showed you with the 1983 *Newsweeks* and that kind of stuff... You know, when I was a kid, I would love looking at 1950s *LIFE Magazines*. So, I guess as I became an adult I decided, "Well, in thirty years from now, this will probably be very cool to look at. Just like looking back through the years from this moment is." And, of course, it is. We didn't really know that at the time, but I'm happy to share my passion of these archives with as many people as could use it. Because it *is* history.

**RC: Yeah. And it brings up an interesting question around ACT UP Montreal, and sort of the demographics of who was involved. Because I imagine a lot of the media reports were in English, correct?**

EP: They were, um.... probably. I would say more. But there was—I mean, I would never *not* put something in the media because it was French. I mean, I think there were more English people than French people. Why? What were the French people doing? I don't know, at that time. Were they involved in other groups? There really was nothing like ACT UP. There was mostly Anglophone stuff. I think that explains it.

**RC: And the same is true for Réaction SIDA. That small group that came together was primarily Anglophone as well.**

EP: Oh, really?

**RC: Yeah.**

EP: And who was Réaction SIDA?

**RC: Karen Herland was involved.**

EP: David Cassidy? He would be a good person, too, maybe, for you.

**RC: Penny Pattison, she was involved. A guy named Karl [Small]. It's a handful of people. It's a pretty small group.**

EP: Yeah, I don't—

**RC: It's just interesting, that the two groups in Montreal that come to mind in terms of the moment of the late '80s early '90s, are both primarily Anglophone. And we know that—**

EP: I don't know what it is, but it's a Francophone kind of mentality, of... I mean, people used to always say, "Well, the church always had influence over the people, so Francophones still are kind of adapting to the New World, which is, well, there is no church, so are we gonna march...?" Well, you know, a lot of the protests in the streets were very Francophone. So, I don't know. I really don't know.

**RC: Yeah, there's no like, causal relationship or something. But it is interesting to think about. And we know from talking with Michael Hendricks, and he shared with us the sort of Safer Sex pamphlet<sup>2</sup> that ACT UP Montreal put out, that that was translated from English to French, based on—**

EP: Oh yeah. It's in there! [points to archive]

**RC: Yeah, and it's just interesting to know that...**

EP: Yeah, it's great. So many people didn't want us to hand it out, because it said "fucking" on it, and other, you know, not guttural language, but you know, raw kids' language.

**RC: Yeah.**

EP: So, then we didn't. Like, Ogilvy's once had an event. They were having an AIDS event. And they wouldn't allow us in. Even into the stores on the street. Sorry, go ahead.

**RC: No, I mean, I just find it fascinating. Like, Montreal is a fascinating place in terms of language politics and the cultural politics of English and French.**

EP: Yeah. I wonder, because ACT UP New York, and that was American, and if the Francophone community, gay community in Montreal, was living more of the just Quebec life? I mean, that wouldn't really apply now, but maybe back then. So, they were less exposed to the activism that was going on? I don't know.

**RC: I know there were also some controversies with ACT UP New York at the Montreal AIDS Conference, where local activists felt a bit steamrolled by New Yorkers, and then AIDS ACTION NOW! Toronto folks—**

EP: Oh yeah, they were there, too.

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<sup>2</sup> ACT UP Montreal's Safer Sex pamphlet has been made available [here](https://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/89).  
[https://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/89]

**RC: So, it's like, you know, New York and Toronto sort of came to Montreal and some of the local people felt steamrolled, and rightfully so, in the descriptions they'd given. So, I mean, that could also be part of the... not necessarily resistance, but the like, "Oh, that's from away," or "That's not from here," kind of mentality. So, it's just an interesting moment to think about who was in ACT UP.**

EP: Yeah. Because even some of the photos I have there, there weren't that many. Well, there were a few, but there were not many adding in. Why? That's a good question.

**RC: I know Michael Hendricks also noted that there was this shift, where in the beginning it was almost all Anglophone, and the longer they had been around the more Francophones were involved.**

EP: Yeah. I think so. Because that was around three, maybe four years?

**RC: Yeah. Short-lived, but...**

EP: Well, also, it's intense. So, I mean, three or four years at '94. I had met Gary [Blair] in '92, so my life kind of changed. But, it's intense, so, you know, four years of activism... Well, I mean, I guess there are some activists that are twenty-year activists. But you still have to take a break. And AIDS, I guess, the burn out of losing friends. And no hope. There's almost no hope in '94. So, and then everything changed.

**RC: Coming back to ACT UP Montreal, and some of the actions they did. We have a general understanding from some of the other people that we've interviewed, but are there any that stick out to you, that were, you know, important moments in ACT UP Montreal history?**

EP: Yeah, well. You know what? I mean, one was actually for prisoners, in Quebec prisons. Because, I believe it was ACT UP, had actually approached the prisons and said, "The HIV rate in your prisons is very high, but you're not giving anybody condoms. So, if you don't give condoms, you're going to continue to have a high rate." So, "Oh no, we're promoting sex!" I think finally... well, I know there was a fantastic theatrical demonstration in front of Le Complexe Guy-Favreau in 1990. That's actually on my video, of the guy that falls to the ground. So, it was great. The media was there, the message got out. I don't remember how that all played itself out. I would think, now, in 2018... are there condoms given out in Quebec prisons? No. Still. Really? Because they think if we give them condoms, they'll have sex. Well...

**RC: And in most places, sex is not legal between prisoners, right? You're not supposed to have relations. But we all know that's not how it actually works. [laughter]**

EP: Okay. Well, anyways, there was that one, but... [laughter]

**RC: The same way that you can't give out needles in prison. Because nobody is doing drugs in prison. [sarcasm]**

EP: Right. Of course not. There was another thing, where the prostitutes—well, I think it was CACTUS [Montréal], I've sure you've heard of CACTUS, who probably got more involved with prostitutes than we did. But again, we had the thing with the city, where we wanted condoms to be available in restrooms. And we talked about that exactly so people—you know, HIV was not something that was easy to contract if you used a condom every time you had sex. You will protect yourself. It's not 100%, but you will protect yourself. They didn't want those in the bathrooms. Finally, they relented and they were in the bathrooms, so.

**RC: Was this in the Village particularly, or...?**

EP: I think it was city-wide. City-wide. And then there was... well, there was also this program called *malades sur pied*. So, *malades sur pied* was a government, provincial programme, that people who were epileptic and had to take Dilantin, I guess was the name of the medication, or if you are diabetic and you need insulin, you would pay \$2 a month for your medication. Fantastic. What ACT UP was trying to do was to get HIV to be considered a chronic illness as well, because it was. The government wouldn't relent. We lobbied, and lobbied, and lobbied. But you know what? I don't know how that story ended.

**RC: Ah.**

EP: Do you? [laughter]

**RC: Yes. I do know, only because of the other interviews. It was a victory... ACT UP had a victory, but it was when the PQ [Parti Québécois] came to power in 1995.**

EP: Okay.

**RC: And the Liberals were finally out of power, that's when things changed. And that's also where the National Pharmacare plan...**

EP: That was five years after we started.

**RC: It was a long battle. But I know that the change in government... you know, you can't say ACT UP did it, because by the time it actually changed, ACT UP had kind of fizzled out. But, you know, I think there's an argument to say that if ACT UP hadn't been pushing, and pushing the Liberals and the PQ, it might not have actually been a platform of the PQ in 1995.**

EP: No. So, that was definitely a big one. Other demos... Again, am I forgetting? [laughter]

**RC: Well, were you involved at all when there was the fight for Parc de l'espoir?**

EP: Yes. Yes, yes, yes. So, Parc de l'espoir. We had asked the city, starting in 1990, to have a park in the Gay Village designated to people who had died of AIDS. And they kept saying no. They said, "We don't name parks after illnesses in Montreal," is what we were told. So, what does ACT UP do? Well, ACT UP had an art committee. So, the art committee replicated a city of Montreal logo, and we put up our own plaque, [laughter] which was great. It took them about two or three days to figure out what was up, and they took it down, and we put it up again, and they took it down again, so we didn't bother the third time. But, then, finally, you know what? We put... I think at that point, in 1990, there were a thousand people who had died of AIDS in Quebec. We put up a thousand black ribbons in the park. I think it took... it probably took four years, finally, for the park to be named Parc de l'espoir. It was during a Ça Marche [AIDS Walk] which is actually on that video as well. Evelyn Farha, Jean Doré walking down... is it Panet [Street]? Or, whatever that's—

**RC: It's at Panet and Sainte-Catherine [Street].**

EP: Exactly. And, finally dedicating the park. What's interesting about the park is it was designed by Marc Pageau, and you should speak to him and his husband. So, Marc designed it, he's a landscape architect. And at the time, in 1994, everybody was still dying of AIDS. So, he designed it with the look that you see today, which is the black granite coffins. I think the message was, "We need to do something." So, now, flash forward to 2004, which is how many years? Ten years. So, you'll see that as well, in what I'm going to give you. We started discussing, the community, so like, five of us [laughter] started discussing, "Most people don't care about the Parc de l'espoir, I don't think. That this is awful. This is ugly. Ribbons in trees don't look good. It needs to be totally redone. Let's come up with some type of design contest, and then have the city, if we can get the city to finance—but there's nobody to finance it—to get it done." It never happened. So, I don't know what's new there now; if they've added anything new since 1995. Probably not, eh? And it's so depressing. It *is* depressing. Because think how great it could look! So, that would be a great project for the Village, which is a whole other story. Because I remember the Gay Village in 1984, the Pope came to Montreal, at the Olympic Stadium. Celine Dion sang. And before he came, Mayor Drapeau decided to get rid of the gay bars on Stanley Street and Peele [Street], mostly Stanley. That's when the Gay Village really started, was in '84. It had come such a long way

in twenty years, it was really doing good, like, Ben and Jerry's was there! Wow! [laughter] Now the Village is a bit of a ghost town. So, I don't know if it... can the Village be saved? We often discuss, among a bunch of friends of ours, what can be done to the Village for us to love that Village again? Because how many stores are empty? Too many. So, anyways, that's a whole other story.

**RC: That's interesting, I didn't know about the Pope coming, and that being... I mean, I knew Drapeau did all sorts of terrible things, and I know about the cleanups during the Olympics, the cleanups during the World Fair, so the cleanups when the Pope was here, it all makes sense in the history of Montreal, and the regular cleanups of the city.**

EP: I know. You just think, 1984, the cleanups... you know what? I think that by 1984, I guess by 1984 AIDS... yeah, so, we're now in the midst of this gay panic going on in the community. So, it's like, you know how vulnerable they were? "We're cleaning out the Village!" "Okay! Like, half of us are dying!" You know? "We're fighting for our lives." But that was a good thing, because the Village did become pretty nice at one time. I don't remember. Now, I mean, I don't go there that often. But, so, to get back to the park, wouldn't it be great to have a beautiful—like Cawthra [Square] Park in Toronto—AIDS Memorial in Montreal. Whatever is next to the 519, I guess. It's lovely. Something that is organic and contemplative, and people can go and feel good.

**RC: Yeah. The only sort of... there was a small, ongoing controversy at the park, around the ribbons on the trees... because at one point they were black, and then they were red, and there was a compromise to do them as a rainbow, but then no one knew what was going on.**

EP: Just take them all off.

**RC: So I know that there've been iterations of what the park—**

EP: The problem is, if you google Parc de l'espoir, you'll see my name, from when I was vice president. Because, I guess, when we imagined... from 1995, I guess, we had to... I don't know what we had to do. Why I'm vice president. But I'm happy to be vice president. But who will get a say? The community's going to have to get a say, I guess, if something is to be redone. But you know what I think most people will say? That whatever they're going to do will be better than what's there now. Because it really is sad. It's run down... Do you agree?

**RC: Yeah, but I'm glad it exists as a thing.**

EP: Absolutely. It could be better.

**RC: And the fight for it I find is quite interesting. I like the idea of ACT UP going and just declaring it Parc de l'espoir, you know? I think that's great. It's really smart activism. And sort of, culture jamming, using the logo of the city.**

EP: You know what? It was so exciting, because we knew what we were doing was right. It was like fighting a war. We were fighting a war. And we were fighting for our lives! We really were. It was... well, as you can imagine, I'm thrilled that I was part of it.

I didn't tell you about I went to live in San Francisco when I was eighteen. That preceded Toronto. Because when I came out, when I was eighteen, it was in between first and second year CEGEP, that summer, and then second year CEGEP started, and I saw all these people that I grew up with, and I had seen on television—no internet then—and reading about San Francisco as the new international gay mecca. I thought, "Well, if I'm gay and I want to learn about gay life, I should go to the gay mecca!" So, I told my parents, "I'm quitting school. I mean I'm not going forever, but I could do second year CEGEP at another time." I went to live in San Francisco. So, I guess my life has kind of always been about you know, if you want to do something, you just do it. So, I guess... but you know what? I mean, even with ACT UP. When I see people who are involved in ACT UP, and I'm sure you have seen it, just with the people in ACT UP, it is a certain type of person that's drawn to ACT UP. And, if you look at other things they've probably done with their lives, there will be a pattern of, well, either making things happen, or trying to make things happen. But at least making your voice heard, as opposed to just sitting back and doing nothing.

**RC: Yeah. That's totally true. And it's true not just with ACT UP, but most people involved in AIDS activism across Canada have been doing interesting things, and continued to do interesting things, even after the movement quiets down.**

EP: You know what, it's interesting. Because I'm Jewish, and whenever I see the Holocaust whatever—and believe me I've seen so many that I can't see anymore—you see people who are thriving in the 1930s in Budapest and wherever, Jews, and just by fate, because they were born at the wrong place in the wrong time, they died. That's how I saw gay men who were dying of AIDS. Just because of being born of a certain age at a certain time, they died of AIDS. So, I lost my point, kind of... [laughter] Okay!

**RC: I mean, that analogy that you're making, I think, is an analogy that many gay men, particularly in New York, were also making.**

EP: Yes. The Holocaust, and also, you know, you just look at—even if you look at the famous people, you know? The famous, creative men that died in the 1980s. If they weren't born in 1948 and they were born in 1988, they would probably be alive. But they weren't. So, again, we're all born into the times we're born into. So, too bad for those Jews that so many

millions have died, and for how many people, thirty-five million have died of AIDS now in the world?

**RC: Yeah.**

EP: And when do we ever hear about AIDS? Once a year now, right? Even World AIDS Day is like one little thing. I guess because it doesn't seem like anybody's died of AIDS, to most people. I mean, David Shannon was more liver cancer, he was HIV+, but I think he died more of liver cancer than being HIV+, so.

**RC: I mean, which could have had some impact based on the medications, right? But...**

EP: It won't help your liver. But yeah.

**RC: Yeah. So, are there any other things that come to mind in terms of ACT UP actions? I mean, we might have covered the ones that...**

EP: Yeah, you know what? I wonder if I marked it... [refers to notes] I guess I mentioned the Minister of Health, Marc-Yvan Côté, was speaking at World AIDS Day, and we got in and stopped him, so that was good. That was at the Palais des congrès de Montréal. So, we got to interrupt his speech about AIDS, because he was doing nothing. We unfurled our banner, and read the [Montreal] Manifesto. It was great, because again, it was peaceful, we weren't hurting anybody. But there's something really empowering about unfurling a banner in a government conference, and getting your message across, when you feel so passionately about.

**RC: Do you remember what the banner said?**

EP: I think it just said ACT UP Montreal. And it's all on that video [*ACT UP Montreal: 1990-1993*].<sup>3</sup>

**RC: Okay.**

EP: That whole event is there. Because I had a 1990 video camera. [laughter] Which weighed about thirty pounds.

**RC: One of the big ones, right?**

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<sup>3</sup>*ACT UP MONTREAL: 1990-1993* has been made available [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAwkNiwP9Oo).  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAwkNiwP9Oo]

EP: Oh, god! [laughter] But, it worked!

**RC: Yeah, I remember my father had one.**

EP: Yeah, they're fun!

**RC: You can stick a whole VHS tape in there, right? Or a Betacam, even.**

EP: Yeah, I never had a Betacam. But it's amazing how things—

**RC: Yeah, the progression of the video technology is quite interesting.**

EP: Yeah, fast.

**RC: Do you remember any particular activities of ACT UP Montreal that had to do with women and HIV?**

EP: Yes. Well, actually, 1990, I believe it was... for World AIDS Day, it was declared the Year of Women and AIDS. I guess because, by 1990, women really hadn't been the focus of AIDS. So, ACT UP did lead a demonstration along Sainte-Catherine Street. There had been 113 women who had died of AIDS in Quebec at that point. And the art committee of ACT UP had made 113 white masks, and we walked single file along Sainte-Catherine Street. We didn't say a word. It was fantastic.<sup>4</sup>

**RC: And that's also in the video, I recall it. Were there any poster campaigns or anything like that?**

EP: Yes. We did have a wheat pasting poster campaign. But there was only one that I remember doing, and that was Safe Sex posters. We kind of made a joke about one area that we did, which was the corner of Jeanne-Mance and Sherbrooke [Street]. There were these little gravestones, but there was a big wood fence along Jeanne-Mance, and we pasted the wooden fence, and then like, two days later the whole building burned down. [laughter] And the fence. And we said, "They really hated our posters, didn't they!" Because it said "fuck" or something. [laughter] So, that was kind of... we didn't do wheat pasting too often. At least, I didn't. But again, a great way to get your message out there.

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<sup>4</sup> A news article featuring an image of ACT UP's demonstration has been made available [here](https://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/739).  
[https://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/739]

**RC: It was just one of many strategies, I assume?**

EP: Yeah. I think what we did a lot of was again, going into—we could go into bars and restaurants, and I guess even bathhouses, there must have been some of the other groups, also, going into bathhouses to promote safe sex by giving out condoms, because it wasn't really being done as assertively by whoever was running the sauna. So, maybe ACT UP would do things like that as well, with condoms, and safe sex pamphlets.

**RC: That makes sense. Do you remember how ACT UP ended? Or, when you sort of exited that part of your life?**

EP: Yeah, well, I think for me, after four years. So, I was there from '90-'94, and then having met my husband in 1992, my life changed, and I was just going, I guess, less and less. And also, it had been four years of pretty intense experience. So, I think everybody kind of came and went and did their stint and we needed new blood and new energy to keep things moving. And then, I guess, by '96, I mean, '96 I guess, was the advent of protease inhibitors, I'm trying to think back now—did people stop dying right away? Do you recall?

**RC: It's an important question to ask, right?**

EP: Because I don't remember.

**RC: The cocktail comes out at the Vancouver AIDS Conference in 1996. So then, there's a question of like, between the knowing it works and getting it to people, and the question of access to medication—it's an important question. Because people talk about, just everyone coming back from the dead, and some people didn't, and some people couldn't take the medication because it made them very ill.**

EP: Right. Exactly. And now we're, what? Twenty-two years after 1996, and you don't hear about people dying of AIDS. So, if they are, we're not hearing about it. I think the whole point of ACT UP was to become a voice of getting treatment to people. There was not enough treatment, there was not enough research being done on AIDS. And people were dying. And then, again, post-1996, people were living. Was there still a need for ACT UP? I don't know exactly why ACT UP Montreal kind of folded. Maybe because the need wasn't there anymore, or the passion wasn't there anymore, or there was no need for that particular group. Although ACT UP New York still exists. I don't know if they meet every week, but I think there's still work to do.

**RC: ACT UP New York and ACT UP Montreal actually fizzle out about the same time. And what ACT UP New York is today is a different iteration. It's between '94 and '95 that things sort of fizzle.**

EP: The big question now is... I'll meet, or have a friend who's twenty-five years old, and he'll tell me, "I'm HIV+" and that's when I think, "How did you become HIV+?" If all we were doing for the last thirty years was telling you, the gay community, how you can contract HIV, and how to protect yourself, how could you become HIV+? And his answer was, "I was drunk, and I really liked the guy." So, from that point of view, there is work to do in the community. I don't know the statistics, but again, what I hear, is there's now a whole new generation of seroconversion. People think, "Okay, I'll take whatever medication I'll take and it's a manageable illness," but no one should be HIV+.

**RC: I think it's a very complicated question to ask, right?**

EP: It is. With PrEP, right? What does PrEP really do, right? I mean, I don't know.

**RC: And I mean, there's the question of—I mean, there are all sorts of people who are undetectable, and how do you represent undetectability, right? I mean, being positive pre-the cocktail, being HIV+ had visual signifiers. Whereas today it doesn't. But, interestingly, in Montreal, a group called LIPO-ACTION! continues in the late '90s early 2000's, and it's about lipodystrophy. No one tells you that the medications for HIV can actually cause serious side effects, in terms of the redistribution of fat in your body. You know, there's like, very obvious signs of lipodystrophy. And other questions sort of arise around—**

EP: So, you don't want to be HIV+. I mean, if someone thinks, "I'm going to have unprotected anal sex, because I'm on PrEP, and maybe I won't become positive," but what if you do? Like, what are the consequences of being positive? So, maybe somebody who is positive should be lecturing to people who aren't. Warn young kids, because it's the eighteen-years-olds...

**RC: Yeah. And you've also got to think of it from a structural point. I mean, I think it's important, and I think ACT UP had a structural analysis. Like, there's no sex education in public schools in Quebec, right? So, the problem maintains itself as a political one. And it's now—**

EP: Right. Because if we teach kids sex in school they'll have it, and if we don't they'll forget about it, right? Like, *really*? Because I would think the generation that has fifteen-year-olds

now would be informed and educated enough to go, "No, no. I mean, you can't stop people from having sex. Come on! They're kids! We had sex! Like, we have to tell them the way it is!" But, they're afraid.

**RC: It's interestingly the same conversation you're having in the '80s, you know? And the '90s. [laughter]**

EP: Well, and that's, "Sex is uncomfortable." Which is too bad. So, that's why we have Madonna! [laughter] She did her bit. She really did, oh my god! How about Madonna and AIDS? That would be a good PhD dissertation, wouldn't it? Or just Madonna! [laughter]

**RC: Yeah. I mean, I've actually been... I grew up in the punk subculture, and like, I didn't care much for Madonna. But now, being older, and having an interest in the history of the AIDS crisis and activist response to it, I have a newfound respect for Madonna... [laughter] Which is pretty funny, and maybe sounds frivolous, but...**

EP: Well, it was almost an ACT UP mentality when it comes to sexuality, you know? Because, yeah. I don't know if you ever saw her *Sex* book? The book, *Sex*?

**RC: I haven't, but I recently got the documentary that came out about the tour that she did, in 1990 or 1991, with all the backup dancers, almost all of them were gay.**

EP: Right, the tour. And they came back to say that she was a bitch or something?

**RC: Well, there's a new documentary about that, but there's one that's actually from 1990 or 1991.**

EP: *Truth or Dare*.

**RC: Yeah, *Truth or Dare*. That's the one.**

EP: I love that.

**RC: So, you know, there's interesting things that came out in pop culture, and Madonna, you know?**

EP: She was there for gay men and AIDS, I mean, there's actually, on Youtube if you just do Madonna 1989 AIDS message, her with her dark hair, and she's talking about AIDS and safe

sex, I mean, she lost a lot of friends to AIDS. I mean, she's a trailblazer, so I can't criticize her.

**RC: Yeah, I have newfound respect for pop culture. Which, to me, is really funny.**

EP: Yeah, well, if you're gonna influence people in a positive way, then, that's good. Although some people might say she didn't.

**RC: Or some people might say she was opportunistic, making money of gay culture...**

EP: Too much in your face...

**RC: But there's good and bad with almost everything.**

EP: With everything, right.

**RC: So, I have a couple more questions. We're sort of moving towards the end of the interview. But I wanted to know if you had any memory of the Queer Nation group in Montreal, that arose? And what do you recall?**

EP: Well, I believe Queer Nation grew out of the fact that ACT UP was taking up so much airtime in NYC over AIDS, that "gay issues" were now being overlooked. So, Queer Nation may have started in 1989 or '90. One of those years. And, then, when Joe Rose was murdered, Montreal decided to start a Queer Nation chapter in Montreal, but called it Queer Nation Rose. But I was never involved with that group. And I don't know what their time frame was, because there was LGV, which kind of was doing—would have been doing the same work as Queer Nation Rose. So, I'm not—so, my involvement with it was very minimal, with Queer Nation Rose. And I don't even know how long...

**RC: It was pretty short-lived.**

EP: And even Queer Nation, for that matter, how long did that last? Three years, maybe?

**RC: Yeah, all of it was a splash in the pan.**

EP: So, Doc Martens. Thermal socks, whatever. Black shorts, rolled up, and tight white t-shirt or black t-shirt. If you were in that, your activist garb, that was heaven. And that was like, well, I can't imagine doing that now, but I'm not—I was twenty-eight, maybe, so it was fun.

**RC: It's great that you've captured so much of it on video because, you know. I mean, the aesthetics are amazing, but also, you know, the context and the events, it gives meaning to it in a new way.**

EP: Yeah. I mean, everything in life is fleeting. So that's why we, I mean, I'm sure you love photography, too, because that's capturing the moment forever. So, that's what that video does, and I guess that's why I like all those magazines. Because if you—and well, I mean, it's interesting. It's interesting because we can have probably some people in the room who might go, "Oh, that's interesting. Now let's go up and let's watch, I don't know, let's watch *Mama Mia* the movie again, or something." Depends what your interests are, for sure.

**RC: One of the important things with this project is to capture the memories of people who have passed. Are there any people from this time period that you think are either particularly important to mention because of their contributions, or also people that you were just personally connected to?**

EP: Well, number one would be David Shannon. For me, David Shannon, in the late 1980s, he was Montreal's premier gay activist. Again, in an age where there was no internet, to get information he had two avenues, to give people information. He was somebody who spoke so well that he was somebody that I totally looked up to. Not just to get my information about what was going on in the city, but to be proud about being gay. So, I remember when I first met David right after Sex Garage, I was like, "Oh my god! It's David Shannon!" [laughter] That was kind of funny. Then we ended up going for a drink that night, so that was very exciting. And David always had—you always had that excitement with David, because he was so smart. He was a pleasure to deal with. He unfortunately has just passed away in the last few weeks. But the mark he left on gay activism in Montreal in the '80s and '90s looms very, very large. So, he would definitely be number one.

Other people that maybe I don't like so much... [laughter] You know what? Douglas Buckley-Couvette, or Douglas Buckley, he went by both, we also did a lot of work together in ACT UP. He was also somebody that, he was in your face if you wanted, you know, if he wanted this point made, he would make it, he wasn't shy. He must have died fifteen years ago. I'm drawing a blank.

**RC: Did you happen to know any of the early CPAVIH [Comité des personnes atteintes du VIH du Québec] people? Like José Sousa, Kalpesh Oza?**

EP: Yeah, I knew Kalpesh. And I saw Kalpesh on the website. I said, "Oh my god! Kalpesh!" So, Kalpesh Oza, that's somebody to remember. If we have a photo of him, show it, because Kalpesh was also from an Indian family, so they did not get his homosexuality. He was involved with ACT UP, he was involved with CPAVIH, he was involved with so much. And sadly, he died of AIDS probably over twenty years ago. So, he was a big part of that initial fight, and people that died in the early '90s.

**RC: He's an interesting character, too, because he moved to Toronto at some point.**

EP: Oh, did he?

**RC: Yes. So there are people in Toronto who remember him and people in Montreal who remember him, and everybody talks about how magnetic and exuberant and exciting he was to be around.**

EP: Yeah. Christopher Cockerill, would that name ring a bell? Because that was his roommate.

**RC: Yes. José, Chris and Kalpesh all lived together.**

EP: Oh, did they?

**RC: And they were all early CPAVIH people.**

EP: Wow. And they're all gone?

**RC: José is still around, I'm trying to interview him. We've been in touch by email.**

EP: Oh, good, okay.

**RC: And José was involved in the group LIPO-ACTION!, and did treatment activism continuing on.**

EP: That's good. It's great, when I hear people are positive for twenty-five years I think what a miracle for them, because, you know, they were positive before protease inhibitors. And, then, when I think of people who died in 1994, '95, you know, you almost want to say like, "Hang on just another year!" And it wasn't meant to be, so, you know. The AIDS crisis, it's been what, thirty... 1981 is... thirty-seven years now. I mean, you could write a book... [laughter]

**RC: Yeah, write many books!**

EP: Make a movie! My god, when you think about everything that's happened, so... When you think about thirty-five million people have died worldwide, and I guess less so now in the west, but still so much in Africa, that I don't know... I mean, the Steven Lewis Foundation, not quite sure what kind of hands on work they do for AIDS in Africa, but... I don't even know what's going on with AIDS in Africa. How would I find out? Google AIDS in Africa and see what's out there? I guess. So, it just doesn't... I mean, it's too bad that AIDS in Africa has really been forgotten, and AIDS in general is forgotten. Because who's talking about AIDS? I mean, I don't know a lot of people talking about AIDS. My generation went through it, and then the next generation, your generation—I don't know if anybody's really talking about AIDS.

**RC: No, not really.**

EP: So, that's where this comes in. Because it's a bit of a missing link. It ended, and then it never existed. But it did—I mean, there's a lot out there, but this is fantastic.

**RC: Maybe circling back a little bit, just because in the Montreal context for HIV/AIDS is quite interesting, and you're thinking—you were just thinking and talking globally—thinking about the Haitian community in Montreal. And if you have any memory of, or connection to, activism? Or were there any links between ACT UP Montreal, were there any attempts to reach out to that community, as one of the disproportionately affected groups of people?**

EP: Yeah, not that I recall. I don't even remember there ever even being a Haitian member of ACT UP. So, I don't know. Because at that time, I remember there were four groups. Gays, Haitians, Hemophiliacs, and what was the fourth?

**RC: It's debatable. Some people say "hookers," and some people say heroin users.**

EP: Right. So, IV drug users, give them clean needles. "Who the hell wants to give them clean needles? Let them all die. We don't need them anyways!" And Haitians, "Well, who needs Haitians anyways? And who needs gays? And hemophiliacs, well, they just take up too much medical expense, so get rid of them too!" The '80s were... pretty special.

**RC: Yeah. You could even say that—**

EP: Well, it was like a science fiction film almost. Because think about it. Especially if you were, I mean, because I was born in 1962, I didn't go through the '70s or even the '60s. But I think a gay man born maybe in 1950 or in that period, to have gone through the '60s, which in general were electrifying, but then have lived through Stonewall in '69, and then the first gay pride parade in NYC in 1970, and then all of what was happening in the '70s with San Francisco and the gay acceptance. I mean, it was like... I'm sure like, I think at the New Year's Eve 1979, I mean, there could have been gay men who had been through a lot of bad things in their lives, who maybe came from the Midwest and built a life in New York City. And like, wow, the world was our oyster in 1979. And then came the 1980s. But that's what happened.

**RC: I guess I have two last questions. One is, what do you think the contribution of ACT UP Montreal was, either to Montreal or to Canada, to the world?**

EP: Well, I think ACT UP Montreal certainly had an impact in Montreal. I think that the reason for different chapters worldwide was that every chapter could, you know, look after their own city. Whether we made people more aware of AIDS, I think we did, by just getting onto the news, doing things like the street theatrics of World AIDS Day 1990, with white masks, that also made the news. That was Women and AIDS. So, I think the impact that ACT UP made was really from that period of probably, again, 1989 after the AIDS Conference until 1996. And just making people aware that AIDS was... That I think our slogan at the time was, "We are all living with AIDS." So, you don't have to be HIV+. We're all living with AIDS, is what we were all saying. Whoever was involved in the movement made a difference. Even if you came to one ACT UP meeting, you made a difference.

**RC: That's great. So the last question. Is there anything we haven't covered that you think we should make sure to get on public record?**

EP: Yeah, well, let's take a look here. [consults notes]

**RC: Take a look, because we've jumped around a bit. I mean, if you'd like to talk a little bit about your current work. I know you mentioned it quickly, but it might be— just to hear more in depth.**

EP: Okay well, so ACT UP influenced me to start Art for Healing.

**RC: And even the personal context, right? Like, you were in the hospital for a reason, right? So, telling a little more about that would be interesting.**

EP: Sure. So, it's interesting how the experience of being part of ACT UP has had a big influence on my life after the ACT UP years. In 2001, my husband and I, my husband Gary Blair and I, had a friend who was sick at the Royal Victoria Hospital, dying of AIDS. This was the year that I... I was thirty-nine years old, and I wanted to, like most people do when they're about to turn forty, make some changes. I felt that I was going to open up an art gallery in Montreal. That's what I was going to do, leave the family business. Basically, I was able to get a year sabbatical from my job to go learn about the Montreal art gallery world. I got a job at an art gallery and through that I started visiting artists in their studios. Every artist's studio that I would go into, they would have a surplus of art. The older the artist, the more they'd have. I'd come home and say to Gary, "It's crazy in this city how much art there is!" We basically decided that the reason for this is artists create to create, so there's all this art being created. And people do buy art, but it's not a huge segment of the population. So, there's a huge, huge amount of art out there in the city. Our friend was sick, again, at the Royal Victoria Hospital, dying of AIDS. We'd walk into the hospital and look around and just be really depressed for him that, not only when we walked into the hospital it didn't look so good, but his floor, palliative, looked terrible. He was staring at a blank wall. So, he passed away, and I continued my foray into the Montreal art scene. I continued to work at an art gallery. But, basically, after six months of working in the gallery business, I had many discussions with Gary and I said, "You know what, I don't think my destiny is to open up an art gallery. Montreal doesn't need another commercial art gallery. Montreal needs an organization to try and get as much art as possible that's out there, which is a lot of it, into the hospitals in a constructive way." So, we would curate it and we would put it up and we'd get somebody to hang it up. So, maybe we would be able to make that difference. The hospitals, they're busy with day to day operations and beds and staffing, they're not thinking about what they're going to put on the walls. So, with that in mind, we launched the Art for Healing Foundation on my fortieth birthday party, in February 2002. With the idea that maybe we could tap into the art—get artists to donate their art, and then we would then approach a hospital and say, "Okay, we have these three paintings, would you like to have them?" Not knowing what the reaction would be. And basically, well, at the party, we asked our friends and family to bring their checkbooks. We said, "It's going to be a fundraiser, I don't need any gifts, we're starting an organization to bring art into hospitals. We don't know what the name is going to be yet, but we'll launch all that at the party." So, we raised \$8000. So, we thought, who would be the most vulnerable people who we could help? And that would be children. So, we approached the Montreal Children's Hospital. And we said, "We have \$8,000 to spend, and we'd like to spend it on art, can we come work with you?" And they said, "It sounds like a great idea!" So, what we did was, we didn't work with original art at the beginning. We bought reproductions, because we saw that with reproductions we could stretch our dollar, our \$8000, and it's still going to have the same impact. Colour, beauty, message art for kids, that says "Love," kids holding hands,

all that kind of stuff. So, they said "Great idea." We ordered a hundred reproductions. They gave us a room for storage. We started working with different departments and putting up these reproductions. From the first three that we put up, suddenly everybody in the hospital knew that there were now these reproductions up in the hematology department, so could they have it in oncology? So, we ended up putting up the whole—all one hundred pieces in the hospital. And then, another hospital called us, and another hospital called us, and then two more artists called, and three more family called of dead artists, and before you know it, or before we knew it, we're now... fifteen years old. So, we've installed 11,500 pieces in 81 healthcare institutions across Canada and Paris, France. So, basically what that says to me is, that the environment in healthcare is important. That you can't overlook it. There are ways to do things inexpensively, because all the artists donated, that there should be no institution that doesn't have art in it. So, I think we've been able to show the institutions how to do it in a cost-effective way, which is to have everything donated, and so on and so forth.

So, that's what I do. For the last fifteen years. And I think this takes me back to ACT UP. Because so much of ACT UP was about, first of all, making a difference in the world. And how could you do that, but also, how are you going to assert yourself to make that difference happen? And I guess, for me, thinking back to my life now at this stage, at 56, what I think of... eighteen years old, coming out, and decided to go to San Francisco to working at *The Body Politic* in Toronto, to getting involved in gay activism, to ACT UP, and then... which led to, I guess, Art for Healing to a certain degree, too. So, I guess it's part of my personality.

**RC: It's a really beautiful story.**

EP: It's a good story! I'm happy. I'm really happy. Wow. Like I never would have—no, you can't ever predict. You know? You put an idea out there, and you don't know how anybody's going react. So, we've been lucky, but. You haven't met Gary, but you'll have to meet him one day. And you'll see. We're both really organized. And I think if you're organized and focused, you can do a lot. If you're organized but... you know, you just have to have certain things. But, you know, you have that same thing, because you've already done in academia to where you've gotten to. You're not—you didn't settle for your Bachelor's. You keep pushing yourself. But you can push yourself because you're capable. So, congratulations! [laughter]

**RC: Thank you. What I think is really beautiful about hearing the story about... or, let me backtrack. So you know, Pharmacare in Quebec, the malade sur pied campaign, the Trillium Pharmacare plan in Ontario... All of these things are because of AIDS**

**activists and people don't know that. That part of the origin story is missing. And, it's really neat to hear your story about, you know, doing things with the Children's Hospital... having gone through a period of AIDS activism has shaped you in a certain way. And shaped your perspective.**

EP: Absolutely.

**RC: And now there's things that exist in the world today that would not have existed had it not been for AIDS activists. I think that's really important. It's part of the powerful story that we're trying to tell, is that, you know, maybe AIDS activism is over to most people, but it still has these reverberations today.**

EP: Absolutely. And well, you know what, that's a great point.

**RC: So, it's just great to hear you talk about that.**

EP: Well, you know what, it's almost like—I wonder if you went back to even some of the original ACT UP New York people who are alive, Larry Kramer is one of them. And it's not a great interview because he's pretty angry and bitter still.

**RC: A curmudgeon? [laughter]**

EP: Pretty difficult. But, "How did ACT UP change your life?" You know? I guess everybody would have a different answer. But certainly, yeah, AIDS activists are unsung heroes, I guess so? If they're unknown. That's why I love these films that have been coming out, like *United in Anger*, which was ACT UP, and then there was this French one that just came out, *120 Beats Per Minute*, that I haven't seen yet, that looks great. Because it is, it was, an electric time. Again, people thought, "What do we have to lose?" I mean, whether you're HIV+ or not, it's like, so many people are dying and this is getting worse, so yeah, "We're gonna line up on the street!" But again, not everybody did. So, I think everybody has a different—well, everybody has a different life. You know? Why things happen the way they happen. But I think that if you're a thinker, then you're lucky. [laughter] Because most people—not most, but a lot, I mean, I look at Trump country and think, you kind of look at these people and it's almost like it's not their fault, because we are all different. Gary and I had this saying that, well it's not our saying, but it's a woman from Hungary who came here penniless and she made a lot of money and she was very successful, and she was saying she thought like, "80% of the population is mediocre." Like, just watching TV and not contributing to the world and not doing anything. But they don't—can they? Well, maybe a few. You can influence people. I don't know. It's kind of hard to motivate unmotivated

people. But you can try. I mean, if you're a teacher, you can see who's motivated and who's not in your class. Can you? I don't know. Because, are people allowed to text in university if they're in a class? [laughter]It's like, "You don't have to be here!" [laughter]

**RC: So, are there any last things? Last thoughts?**

EP: I think we've covered it. We've certainly covered a lot. So, thank you.

**RC: Well, thank you.**

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]