

AAHP  
**AIDS Activist History Project**

**Interview Transcript 09**

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<b>Interviewee:</b>	Karen Pearlston
<b>Interviewers:</b>	Alexis Shotwell & Gary Kinsman
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Persons present: Karen Pearlston – KP  
Alexis Shotwell - AS  
Gary Kinsman – GK

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

**GK: We're starting off with some general questions we ask everyone. So, one of the questions we're asking everyone is how did you first hear about AIDS activism, and if you have any memories of that in terms of what was going on in the 1980s?**

KP: Well, I mean, I'd heard about it pretty early. I had some idea of what was going on in New York. I knew about Gay Men's Health Crisis, I knew about ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power], and I knew about AIDS ACTION NOW!. I was involved in the activist community. I think that's when I was working on *Rites* a bit.

**GK: Do you have any memories on how you became involved with AIDS ACTION NOW!?**

KP: I don't know, but I suspect that it might have been through Gary Kinsman. [laughter]

**GK: Nothing more than that?**

KP: I was in the anarchist community. I was hanging out. I had friends who had AIDS in the community. Everybody was involved in doing stuff, so I don't remember specifically about AIDS ACTION NOW!. But if it wasn't through Kenn Quayle, it was through Gary or Patrick. It would have been through either the people at B or through...

**AS: And B was Cathedral B, the collective house?**

KP: Yes.

**GK: On Crawford Street, right?**

**AS: Had you moved into Cathedral B right away?**

KP: No, I moved into B at some point... It had been around for a long time. I didn't live there for that long because it was not an easy place to live. But I was living there during the Anarchist Convention in 1988, I think. Was I? It was maybe around then. I don't know if I was living there during the Convention or just hanging out there. Where the heck did I live before I lived at B? Oh, I know. I was living with these kind of uptight straight people. And then I moved into B.

**GK: Do you remember, at that anarchist gathering, was there anything around AIDS that happened at it? It was '88, so I'm just wondering if you have any memories of that?**

KP: That's what I was saying earlier about the Rubber Rap, right. So, the Rubber Rap was happening around that time. Was there anything around AIDS? There was all kinds of queer stuff happening especially at B. There was Faerie stuff. I'm sure there was stuff happening around AIDS. How could there not have been? But I don't remember that there was anything specific about AIDS at the gathering. Does anyone else remember anything specific around AIDS at the gathering so far?

**GK: No, you're the first person who's mentioned it. That's why I thought I'd ask.**

KP: Really? Some of the other people you've been talking to were there as well and involved. There's people who aren't on your list but who were quite involved in organizing that gathering who I'm still friends with, so you could always ask them. Yes. So, I don't know. I *remember* being around B. I remember, you know, meeting Robin. I met Michael, you know, Kenn... I knew a bunch of those people. And I remember going to Pride with that crew. I don't know if it was the same summer. Probably it was. I would think it probably was. And then there was the zine coming out at B, right? I can't remember the name of it. Do you remember the name of it?

**GK: *Jerking Off and Coming On*.<sup>1</sup>**

KP: Okay. Yes. So, that had AIDS stuff. And yes, there was a lot of safe sex... There was a lot of safe sex education, that's what it was I think. And that was what the Rubber Rap was about.

**AS: Can you just talk about the Rubber Rap?**

KP: The Rubber Rap was something that Tracey and Michael and Kenn and a few other people did.

**AS: Michael Smith.**

KP: Right, Michael Smith. Tim, who was Kenn's boyfriend at the time, George who was living in B at that time I think as well. And I was older than most of these people. I don't know how much older than Michael I was. I think I was older than Michael. But I was, you know, a bit older than the rest of them – younger than Robin, but older than most of the B people. So, I remember them going to Pride and doing the Rubber Rap, I think at one of the stages. So, they dressed really outrageously. There were pictures. Did you see in those pictures Michael's wearing some really colourful thing?

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<sup>1</sup> Digitalized copies of *Jerking Off* and *Coming On* have been made available [here](https://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/724) [https://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/724] and [here](https://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/727) [https://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/727].

**GK: I’ve certainly seen pictures of Michael wearing very colourful things.**

KP: Yes, of course you have. I think wearing that like striped miniskirt thing. I know I said I was going to try to remember the Rubber Rap, but I didn’t actually.<sup>2</sup>

<b>The Rubber Rap</b> <i>to the tune of ...</i> <i>“Stop in the Name of Love”</i>	
Put on a latex glove Pinch the tip and roll it on It’s called a condom Roll it on	Just say yes to free sex Just say yes to freedom
(rapping/chanting rhythm) Sharing our love sharing our wealth Lets figure out how to share our health Talk about sex Talk about love Talk about aids Talk about drugs	Don’t stick your fit with no rusty prick When a clean needle will do the trick You want to get high? Ain’t no reason to die Enjoy yourself the better way Use a clean needle today
Is it a virus a little evolution? Is it a poison of industrial pollution? Is it a plan for the final solution? Is there a life in all this confusion?	All day long Masturbate There’s nothing wrong Masturbate Just sing your own song and masturbate Masturbate masturbate Sing your own song and masturbate
Just say no is what the bigots preach No sex no drugs and no free speech But we say this is not the way to learn or to teach You can sterilize a needle in water and beach	Talk about it Rubber music Talk about it Rubber music
Water and bleach water and bleach You can sterilize a needle in water and bleach	Do it in a disco Do it in a fridge Do it in a suitcase Wear a rubber for the rat race!
Just say yes to free needles Just say yes to free condoms	

**GK: We can find out more about that. So, obviously there’s the safe sex stuff and you’re connected with Cathedral B and the anarchist scene in Toronto and somehow you get connected with AIDS ACTION NOW! But in what political context would you have understood AIDS in that time period?**

KP: Well, the other thing that was happening was that I was working at Nellie’s hostel, right. So, I was working with homeless women; so that affected the context. Also, I did have connections to AIDS activists in the States because I was dating someone who was very

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<sup>2</sup> Lyrics to “Rubber Rap” were written by Cathedral B and submitted to the AIDS Activist History Project by Karen Pearlston.

active in ACT UP Chicago. So, I'd been to some of the big national demonstrations. At least one of the big ones. I always think it was the National Institutes of Health [NIH].

**AS: A demo there?**

**GK: Storm the NIH.**

KP: Yes, the Storm the NIH. It was in the DC area, it was something like that. It might have been the Storm the NIH. Carol might remember, my ex. Actually, I met her through friends I'd met at the anarchist gathering, and then I went down and visited them, and she was the housemate of a friend of mine. So we met there and then we were both at this demo and I kind of fell for her because we both kind of picked up a barricade together and started moving it around. So, we dated for a couple of years. I don't remember exactly how long... probably three years. So, I was up and down to Chicago a fair bit and met a lot of people who were involved in ACT UP Chicago, and went to some demos in Chicago for sure; I don't remember if I went to any other national demos. So, really... I had a politics around AIDS that was informed by this kind of American experience, and also by feminism, by working with straight women, by working with – you know – outrageous queer anarchist types, so maybe a little broader in some ways than some of the people in AIDS ACTION NOW!

**AS: Yes.**

KS: Does that answer the question?

**AS: Yes, totally.**

**GK: That's really helpful. So, do you have any sense of when you got involved in AIDS ACTION NOW!? Because I don't think it's at the very start of it.**

**AS: Another way to think about this might be if some of the things that were happening... So, there was a big meeting that – probably you weren't at the first meeting –and then there were things like the big aerosolized pentamidine action...**

**GK: You were definitely involved by '89.**

KP: Yes. It would have been '88-'89, I think.

**GK: What do you remember being involved in in AIDS ACTION NOW!?**

KP: Well, the Public Action Committee – lots of kvetching, organizing demos, going to demos, leading chants at demos because I always thought that Canadians didn't chant with enough energy... and, I mean, I remember having some political disagreements with people. I remember this was a period in my life that was actually quite upsetting in some ways, because it was when it hit me, even though I had been an activist for a long time, I was in my thirties already. It hit me that not everyone who was in activism was necessarily there

for altruistic reasons. And the kind of careerism and vanguardism in the left became noticeable to me, whereas before that I was kind of a happy-go-lucky revolutionary whatever.

**AS: How did you notice that?**

KP: It was some of the people in AIDS ACTION NOW!. I mean, there were some people who I did think were very sincere and I had political differences with, but it was the connection to the careerism and the way people make careers out of their activism. Of course, now that I'm fifty-five I think I was an idiot not to, right, because all these people have these great jobs and they're having lovely times. And I became a law professor, which is fine in its own way, but it's not as exciting as what some people have done. But to me, the reason I didn't was because I did have a very pure revolutionary ethic and I didn't go to the university and get a PhD when I was younger. I mean, I just thought it was kind of cute that I knew all these people who were doing that, and then of course they all got to be sociology professors and have great careers. I mean not just Gary, right... I mean Becki Ross as well, Steven Maynard, you know, a lot of people. And it just didn't even occur to me that that was something that I should consider doing when I was in my twenties. It was just not even in my scope of ideas about what I might do, even though I was middle-class and, you know, university was the expected kind of thing. So, there's that, and then there's the people who got kind of movement-type jobs as well, and those were more the kinds of people I'm thinking about as careerist. And, you know, it's just my experience with them. I don't know what went on inside of them, what they were really thinking, you know.

**AS: Yes. But maybe like practices in meetings, or ways of being with each other?**

KP: Yes, and I think not being honest. You know, a lack of honesty, right. You know, you'd think the organization is being run democratically and then things would happen behind the scenes.

**AS: Decisions would get made and you wouldn't know how they got made...**

KP: Yes. So, I feel kind of sad about that period in a lot of ways because of that, not to mention the AIDS epidemic.

**GK: Right, and people dying.**

KP: Yes.

**AS: So, in the Public Action Committee, how were decisions made there? Can you just talk about what was...?**

KP: Well, I think we just got together and made decisions, but I don't know what happened afterwards necessarily, because I didn't really relate to the rest of the organization. I mean, Gary, Patrick, Greg...

**AS: Pavelich?**

KP: Yes. You know, I was in it, Michael was in it... I don't know... I don't remember... I think Tracey and Kenn were in and out at different times if I recall. Renee?

**GK: ...wasn't involved with Public Action but she was around. And Brent would have been involved in Public Action.**

KP: Brent was involved in Public Action. And Shawn, was he?

**GK: You're talking about Shawn Syms?**

KP: Yes. Was he around...?

**GK: He was around. Yes. So, that's just some of the people involved in...**

KP: I don't know if Robin was involved in Public Action.

**GK: ... He came to some meetings. So, in terms of AIDS ACTION NOW!, do you remember specific things you would have taken on some responsibility for being involved in? Like, for instance, the teach-in, in '89?**

KP: I don't know.

**GK: It was at City Hall.**

[Gary and Alexis showing Karen some of the flyers and information from 1989]<sup>3</sup>

KP: So, this is... wait, this is not the teach-in... Oh this. I don't remember this. I don't remember the leaflet.

**GK: Anyway, that's one of the things you were involved in.**

KP: Okay. You remember it. [laughter]

**GK: I'm telling you that.**

KP: I believe it. Well, it's the kind of thing I would be involved in.

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<sup>3</sup> See below for links to digitalized copies of flyers from, and information on, the AIDS ACTION NOW! teach-in:  
[<https://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/40>]  
[<https://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/16>]  
[<https://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/94>]  
[<https://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/634>]

**AS: [laughter] It seems plausible...**

KP: Yes. It looks familiar.

**GK: So that was organized in '89 prior to...**

KP: Oh yes, "The homophobia, sexism, and racism" part that would be me.

**GK: It was before the AIDS conference.**

**AS: ...in Montreal? It was a teach-in leading up to the demonstration? So, who did the women's workshop? Was it Darien?**

**GK: I don't know. I think that Patrick and Linda Gardner did the anonymous testing one. That's the only one I remember myself.**

KP: This is definitely something I would have been involved in.

**GK: If there's no distinctive memories we can talk about other things... There were certainly other things you were involved in, like organizing some of the town hall meetings and around women, and trying to get the discussion around Women and AIDS going.**

KP: Okay. So, I don't even remember there being town hall meetings. What were the town hall meetings?

**GK: Well, you're pictured speaking at one. Here's an article from *AIDS ACTION NEWS* about the town hall meetings, and there's you sitting with Brent.**

KP: I remember this picture.

**GK: I mean, the article doesn't relate directly to you being at one of the town hall meetings. There was something going on in '89 that produced town hall meetings and this teach-in.**

KP: Do you remember what it was?

**GK: No.**

**AS: Some of the things that we're curious about is like this, [reading] "in spreading the message of AIDS activism we must expose the ways in which the official response to AIDS has been characterized by homophobia, sexism, and racism. As the epidemiology of AIDS changes it's vitally important that a coalition of all communities directly affected by AIDS be forged to deal with both the social and**

medical issues concerning it.”<sup>4</sup> So, right, this is just a really beautiful articulation of all these things coming together. And then there’s like accessibility, you know there’s sign language interpreters and accessible space. If a thing like this happens today I’m like, “That’s awesome. You’re really doing these things.” One of the things that I’m curious about that I think you might have had some sort of role in is making there be an awareness that race is involved and that people in poverty matter to this analysis, you know, that women are central. So, do you remember any thinking about that?

KP: Oh yes. I thought about it all the time. This is a big source of my political difference, I think, was that I was working with homeless women plus, in the Chicago context, there was already work being done around women with AIDS. I mean I remember being at a demo in the States where everyone was chanting, “AIDS is a disaster, women die faster.” You know, I was dating this woman who was one of the many key organizers in Chicago, there were a lot of them at the time, who had a very broad-based politic, and she had been an activist a really long time in a lot of different movements, and who was working with other people who had, you know, similar politics, who were explicitly anti-racist, anti-sexist in their AIDS organizing. And I think ACT UP had the same kind of tensions there, but also it was big, and it was Chicago. But there was some quite well developed militant politics in Chicago ACT UP, and a lot of really interesting creative people as well. I just didn’t see it in the same way. I mean, there was this sort of more militant politic that was coming from the anarchists from the Public Action Committee, and certainly the anarchists were creative and artistic as well, but there wasn’t the sort of embrace of everyone into one group feeling, I don’t think. Now, again, I’m saying this as someone who was pretty much an outsider in Chicago. So, I don’t really know what was going on behind the scenes.

So, I had been exposed, and besides my general politics, I had been exposed to more developed thinking about AIDS and about women and AIDS. And also, I was working with street women who lived on the street. I don’t remember specifically having women staying at the shelter who said that they were positive at that point. It was still fairly early in a way. But there were definitely women who were like, ripe for becoming positive, right, and I thought it was a really important message to start getting out and it wasn’t getting out, and I didn’t find support for it getting out. And then racism, I mean... Black CAP [Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention] was around at the time. That was the lead. I just thought we should be...

**AS: ... following them...**

KP: Yes, following them, supporting them, right. And I think there were some Asian groups as well...

**GK: Do you remember in that context COMBAT [Community Organizations Mutually Battling AIDS Together] and Jackie?**

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<sup>4</sup> Excerpt read from a flyer for AIDS ACTION NOW!’s 1989 teach-in. A digitalized copy has been made available [here](https://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/94). [https://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/94]

KP: Yes, I do remember Jackie. I remember liking her and thinking she was really cool, that she did cool stuff. For sure.

**AS: Would she come to AIDS ACTION NOW! meetings sometimes?**

KP: I think so. I remember being with Jackie at some apartment somewhere – so, whether that would have been a bunch of us having a meeting with her at her place, or her being at a meeting somewhere. Because Public Action used to meet at Greg's place a lot, I think; his little apartment on Church Street, near Church and Wellesley; he lived somewhere around there.

**GK: Probably over at Jarvis [Collegiate Institute].**

KP: Jarvis, yes – somewhere around there. And I don't know if it was the same apartment.

**AS: Did you do any direct work with COMBAT or with Black CAP as an ally?**

KP: I wouldn't have with Black CAP. It's possible that I did with COMBAT. If I did do direct work, it would have been with COMBAT.

**GK: So, you started to talk about how, because of these political experiences, there were things you were seeing that AIDS ACTION NOW! wasn't doing, or wasn't doing as well? So, is there anything around that or how that progressed in terms of raising questions or criticisms or positions?**

KP: Well, I just remember having fights with people about it and not getting very far and being really frustrated. And Glen Brown once telling me that AIDS ACTION NOW! is an organization of faggots and he was proud of that. And I was like, "Okay..." I mean, not that I have anything against the faggots. Right? [laughter] But it was just like, "Alright."

**AS: But as someone not faggot identified yourself...**

KP: Yes. Of course, I knew the AIDS epidemic. I knew what it was doing to gay men. Of course I knew, but I just knew what it was doing to other people as well. And I just don't have the kind of politic that thinks that you can solve a problem like that in just one spot.

**AS: And did you feel that, because looking back as someone outside who wasn't involved, it seems to be like there were lots and lots of things that AIDS ACTION NOW! in coalition with these other groups that were active did that actually did advance a more coalitional complex politics... When I look at that, I think people like you having those fights meant that certain decisions were made that had this very important, really wonderful benefit.**

KP: Maybe...

**AS: But did you have a sense that those fights were making any difference in people's actions or decisions in the organization?**

KP: No.

**AS: No?**

KP: No, but that doesn't mean it didn't. I didn't stick with AIDS ACTION NOW! for the long haul. It just got to be, I don't know what happened; it got to be too much for me.

**GK: Just to try to put that into maybe a specific context to see if you have any memories about this. There are some pictures there of the AIDS ACTION NOW! retreat at the Hart House Farm. Do you have any memories of the discussions that took place there? Because that's where some of these debates really came out.**

KP: Not really. I mean I remember being there, but I don't remember substance, what people talked about.

**AS: Do you remember feeling? Like, how it felt to be there with everyone?**

KP: I didn't feel good, right, because I didn't really like fighting with George Smith. I mean why would I want to do that, right?

**GK: Do you want to tell us more about what fighting with George Smith was like?**

KP: I just remember George talking about... That he was talking from the perspective of people who were dying and etc... Of course, you know, that is a real thing, as well as potentially manipulative. But it is a real thing too, right. So, what can you say back except to say, "Well, you're not the only person who's dying," which is a pretty rude thing to say, right?

**AS: Yes, being the person who's having to say those things is hard.**

KP: Yes. So, I did find it quite difficult. I thought there was a level of politics there that was not where I wanted to be, like the way people were interacting and what they were trying to do. I mean, of course I agreed with some of the stuff but again, this kind of back room politics. I know AIDS ACTION NOW! is still around, right? And it's doing its thing, and you know, that work about criminalization of HIV transmission is really serious, and it's working on that and I don't know what else it's doing. So, I mean, good... good for the people who keep it going.

**AS: When you started stepping back... I can imagine that just sort of the wearing down of having to be oppositional, but is there any specific time or things that were happening around then that come to mind as like... things that were happening as**

**you were stepping back? Or not stepping up? I mean, maybe there's a difference between actively stepping back and maybe not so actively stepping up.**

KP: Well, Michael Smith died.

**AS: And were you involved with his care when he was dying?**

KP: Not at the end.

**GK: Why don't we finish talking about Michael in terms of AIDS ACTION NOW!, or what he brought to AIDS ACTION NOW!**

KP: I met him through the whole scene. I mean, Michael was an incredible person. He had this positive energy; he was extremely creative. He got a lot of things going. He was a little older than some of the other people, so he had a bit of maturity in that sense. You know, he could really show some leadership. Very creative, and a very loving person. It was a real loss.

**GK: Do you remember having discussions with Michael about what was going on in AIDS ACTION NOW!, and sort of similar types of critiques or anything like that?**

KP: Probably, but no, I don't remember any in particular.

**AS: And he identified politically as anarchist?**

KP: Oh yes.

**AS: Did you see that orientation infusing the way he was in the world or the way that he did activism with AIDS ACTION NOW!?**

KP: Oh, yes, of course.

**AS: How did you perceive that?**

KP: Well, we were doing this whole queer anarchist thing, right. It infused everything. I mean, anti-authoritarianism, and really radical queerness, and anti-capitalist. We didn't call it anti-capitalist then, what did we call it? Anarchist, right.

**AS: Yes. I would call it anarchist, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist.**

KP: Well, we were anti-imperialist, you know – anarchist, anti-sexist, a very strong critique of patriarchy and quite a sophisticated critique of patriarchy, I think, among the whole group. It wasn't just, you know, about critique.

**AS: Refusal of vanguardism, you were mentioning.**

KP: Yes, refusal of vanguardism.

**AS: And so, it sounds like that also played out in people's relationships with each other. Like, in Cathedral B or in some of that organizing.**

KP: Cathedral B was not a healthy commune at all. No, it was not healthy. It was quite screwed up in a lot of ways when I was living there, but it was also a centre for a lot of activity. But, I mean, it wasn't necessarily a pleasant place to live. We didn't always live our ideals properly, right. So, I wouldn't say it was always a beautiful place to live, but a lot of shit happened there, and a lot of people went through there. So, B was down the block from A, A existed first. A was always a more communal house by the rules.

**AS: People did their chores.**

KP: Apparently, yes. It wasn't an explicitly political commune. And then B was political, artistic. So, it was the usual stuff that goes down in those kind of places, right. People flaking off, not paying their rent, doing weird things, chores not getting done, chores getting done in really crazy ways when they did get done. I lived in the garage, which was detached along the laneway, and at some point, someone had built a room inside. So, there was a finished room inside of the garage. So, I didn't have plumbing, so I had a bucket. I had to take my bucket into the house. I had a phone line. We had just strung together these extension cords and I took one out there so I could talk to people. This was before the days of cellphones. So, I lived there for a few months, I didn't live there that long.

**GK: So, putting that back in with AIDS ACTION NOW! a bit, and you and Michael, who would your allies have been in AIDS ACTION NOW!?**

KP: Well, Gary Kinsman and Patrick Barnholden; and Greg Pavelich, right, I mean really, you know, and Shawn Syms when he was around. And then there was like, the anarchists. So, they were always my allies and there were these other queer folks who I also quite liked. ...The anarchists were involved in a lot of other stuff at the time as well. So, I mean, Kenn and Tracey were doing harm reduction work. There was sex work stuff going on that people were involved in...

**AS: ...prison...**

KP: ...and the prison, yes, the prison work was getting off the ground as well. So, I was involved in getting the prison stuff off the ground.

**AS: You were?**

KP: Yes. Yes. We had a demo at the Don Jail.

**AS: Can you talk about what motivated it?**

KP: Well, I think it was the no needles, no bleach, no whatever kind of thing. I remember we picketed all around the Don Jail. Yes. So, I was involved with organizing that. Anarchists were involved in prison issues. I mean, *The Bulldozer* came out of Toronto for years and years. Jim Campbell was probably one of the key people in the prison solidarity movement in North America in the 1980s and '90s. I'm not quite sure when he stopped doing *The Bulldozer*, but he was devoted for years and years, corresponding with prisoners. And then there were the younger anarchists who came in in the '80s... They were doing prison solidarity work and there was a name of a group. It was the Anarchist Black Cross. So, they did a lot of prison stuff. So, I mean, we were always very aware, especially with prison issues, you're aware of racism, right – like you can't separate the two. So, I think the prisoner politics probably informed us quite a bit - prisoners, people who live on the streets, poverty - through getting that going... And those were all AIDS activism, but separate from AIDS ACTION NOW!. So, really, I remember working pretty steadily for a while on the Public Action Committee, and my other anarchist pals moving in and out of the Public Action Committee, but not being there as steadily as I am. Would that be accurate?

**GK: Aside from Michael. Michael was always there.**

KP: Yes, Michael was always there.

**GK: Yes, I think that's right, from my memory too.**

**AS: And then would people come, if there was a demonstration, people would come to support?**

KP: Yes. A lot of people would come. The queer anarchists would come. Did the straight anarchists come? Probably.

**AS: Do you have any memories of particular campaigns or demonstrations or things that you were happy to be involved in during the Public Action Committee time?**

KP: You know, I think about this sometimes. I've organized so many demonstrations, I don't remember them very specifically.

**GK: So, one strand of influence on you that you've already talked about was ACT UP in Chicago and the ACT NOW network that it was part of, but I guess at the time of the Montreal conference, which you were at right?**

KP: I was at the Montreal conference.

**GK: And if you want to talk about that that'd be great in terms of the activism there.**

KP: I didn't do much activism at the Montreal conference. I went but I wasn't really involved in anything.

**GK: But there was a major presence of ACT UP New York City, and you also went at least once or twice, I think, to ACT UP meetings in New York. Do you remember those at all...**

KP: I went to one of them.

**GK: ...and how they might have had an influence on you?**

KP: I don't think the ACT UP New York meeting had much of an influence.

**AS: Patrick did go to one.**

KP: Would it have been Patrick and Shawn?

**GK: I would have loved to have gone, but I was never at an ACT UP New York City meeting.**

KP: It was after the heyday of ACT UP. So, I mean I knew some ACT UP people, so it's not so much of an ACT UP meeting that has influenced me. I actually knew some ACT UP people.

**GK: Ok, that was the next thing. So, this is actually the constitutional amendment. This is, just to put it in context, the position that gets raised at the Hart House retreat about women and about people of colour. Partly, it's around Jackie being there and what she raises. But a bunch of people, I'm not really in town at this point in time, put together some constitutional amendments to try to change AIDS ACTION NOW!, right. To try to put more emphasis on general meetings and less on the Steering Committee, if I could sort of summarize what this is about. But do you have any memories of that? It does not get adopted, right, by AIDS ACTION NOW!. Do you have any memories of that? And it relates to another person, which is Renee du Plessis who you haven't talked about.**

KP: I think I remember us plotting this.

**GK: Who would have plotted it?**

KP: You and me and Patrick and Greg.

**GK: And Michael?**

KP: If Michael was still alive.

**GK: He was.**

KP: Yes.

**GK: Well, I was actually living in St. Johns.**

KP: Ok. So, it wouldn't be... So, was Patrick living in St. Johns too at that point?

**GK: No, not yet.**

KP: Okay, that was before he left. It was after this that Glen said that to me.

**GK: Might have been.**

**AS: Was he co-chairing then?**

**GK: This is still '89, so I don't think so. It would have been...**

**AS: Tim and Darien maybe?**

**GK: No, Darien would not have been co-chair then. That comes...**

**AS: ...later**

**GK: Darien was just getting involved around this time.**

**AS: Oh, okay.**

**GK: It's a series of constitutional amendments... but this seems to be the basis for what some people who we've talked to describe as the alleged anarchist take-over attempt.**

KP: Yes, this would have been it.

**AS: So, can you tell us about 'the anarchist take-over attempt?'**

KP: Well, it was very frustrating trying to work with this organization when the Steering Committee made all the decisions. I mean, I didn't even know the people on the Steering Committee. I met them since I got involved, but I didn't have a history with them, because I wasn't a gay man. Was Renee on the Steering Committee?

**GK: She went to meetings and she was the secretary.**

KP: Yes. Was there anyone I was friends with on the Steering Committee? Patrick? Greg?

**GK: Well, each of the committees usually had representatives. So, at some point I was, but I would have been out of town at this point.**

KP: It was probably Brent.

**GK: Brent or... Glen initially was involved in the Public Action Committee.**

KP: He was. That's when I knew, yes. I don't remember much about it, but reading this I remember us trying to make the organization more democratic.

**GK: So that was sort of what this was about? So, it was basically to try to get the monthly meetings to be the basic decision-making framework, not the Steering Committee.**

KP: Yes, I would not be happy with the Steering Committee structure. Why would I? Especially since I didn't like where they were sending the organization at the time.

**AS: Where were they sending the organization?**

KP: They didn't want to have a more broad politic about AIDS. They weren't interested in doing safer sex education for women and that sort of thing. When Darien got involved I imagine that started to change. And this is what I mean when I say I don't want to knock them completely, because the whole Treatment Information, what was it called? They got a lot of government funding. I mean, that was good, but it was nothing I would have done at the time. I wouldn't have had a thing to do with something like that. I would have had no interest in it. I would have possibly been suspicious of it.

**AS: The Treatment Information Exchange...**

KP: Well you know, getting government funding.

**AS: And making CATIE.**

KP: Yes. So, it's very far from...

**AS: ...what you were doing or interested in. Do you remember what the response was when this document was presented?**

KP: No. I'm sure it wasn't favourable.

**AS: Yes, they didn't adopt it.**

**GK: Are there any things that have cropped up for you that...**

KP: No, but now I want you to tell me all the things I don't remember.

**AS: Okay, but wait, before you do that; so, the other that we're inviting is, if there's any people that you want to name or talk about or mention who died during this**

**time, or who were involved then. Just as we did with Michael to try to bring some of their names back, or even people's names you don't remember but you think there is this person who did this, and they should be mentioned.**

KP: I didn't know that many people who died because I wasn't really in the gay male community in that way. And I will say that of the people with AIDS who I've been close to over the years, there are probably three of them, very fortunately two of them are long term survivors. What about Torvald? Has anyone talked about Torvald? Do you remember Torvald? Was he in AIDS ACTION NOW! or was he around?

**GK: I think he comes later. He does die of AIDS, but I think it's much later.**

**AS: Who was he?**

KP: He was this kind of nice, quirky, queer radical guy.

**GK: Trotskyist.**

KP: Torvald was a Trot.

**GK: More people would probably identify with him as Tom Patterson.**

KP: Tom Patterson, right. Yes, I liked him. He was a good guy.

**GK: I think he was in Vancouver then and was involved in ACT UP in Vancouver, and he was working in and around *Angles*.**

**AS: Did you know Kalpesh Oza?**

KP: I think I met Kalpesh.

**AS: But you didn't know him.**

KP: No.

**GK: And you have met Doug Wilson a couple of times at least.**

KP: Probably, yes. And of course I knew George. But I can't think of anyone else in Toronto. One person I remember well from ACT UP Chicago was Fred Eggan, who was an activist and an artist.

**GK: One person no one's talked about and maybe you could talk a little about her is just Renee du Plessis and how she was involved.**

KP: Well, I don't remember that much about Renee, except I remember liking her and that she seems to be quite torn because she had been close with some of the people on the Steering Committee, and she was now disagreeing with them politically. She seemed to be having a hard time. When I was a young activist there were some older women activists who went through my communities who I remember quite fondly but never knew that well. Partly because they were older, and they were living a different kind of life, and Renee would have been one of those. Should I remember more about Renee? I have a terrible memory.

**GK: Memory is not the question.**

KP: Well, I want to know more now.

**AS: Luckily we're going to transcribe all the interviews of everyone and put them up.**

KP: And you know Kevin.

**GK: Which Kevin?**

KP: Kevin Thomas.

**GK: The name is familiar...**

KP: Yes. You'd recognize him. And I mean, some of the people who were around then I haven't seen in decades. Some of them I see or hear about occasionally. Eden and I, as you can tell, are still tight, because I am staying at her house at the moment.

**GK: So, is there anything else you want to say?**

KP: No, but I have some photos and memorabilia that I should probably try and dig up. It might take me a while. Did you know that Michael Smith put out that sort of record album with the pink cover? It was called "Mr. Tim." I don't know if the Rubber Rap was on it. Anyway, it's somewhere in my basement. I have some of them. But it might take years to find. I have some other stuff. I have some photos, I might have copies of the zines somewhere.

**GK: Thanks for all of this.**

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]