

AAHP
AIDS Activist History Project

Interview Transcript 70

2018.009

Interviewee:	Nicole Tanguay
Interviewers:	Ryan Conrad; Gary Kinsman
Collection:	Toronto, ON
Date of Interview:	May 19, 2018

May 19, 2018

Persons Present: Nicole Tanguay (NT)
Ryan Conrad (RC)
Gary Kinsman (GK)

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

GK: We always start our interviews by saying “We’re in Toronto and we’re interviewing Nicole Tanguay.” Now we are going to tell you a little about us as part of the interview so that that it creates a better context for it. The AIDS Activist History Project (AAHP) is a project that was set up to try to recover AIDS activist history in the broadest sense between the years of 1986 and 1996. But we’re also interested in what happens after that. As well, I think everyone who’s been employed with AAHP has been a settler of one sort or another, but we also have tried to go out of our way to include the voices of people of colour and Indigenous people. But we also are a project that’s committed to support for Indigenous struggles and Indigenous sovereignty. So that’s sort of where we’re coming from and we hope that provides a bit of a context for you to talk about where you’re coming from.

NT: My name is Nicole Tanguay. That’s my colonial name. My spirit name is Bedoske, which is roughly translated as Light Comes Through. I am from the Sturgeon Clan and I’m from the Cree nation and I am mixed race. And I’ve been around AIDS activism before it was even called “AIDS,” in the early ‘80s. A bunch of gay men took me under their wing. I was just coming out as just this young baby off the street. And they went, “Oh she’s so cute, we’ll take her in and take care of her, and show her the ropes.” And so that’s when I first started being aware was around ‘83 where it was the “gay cancer.” A couple of the guys I’d just met had died very quickly of it. Within a matter of months, actually. And it really impacted me, to the point where I was like “I need to get involved and use my voice.” I actually became an AIDS educator too. An HIV/AIDS educator at Anishnawbe Health, for a couple of years. I had PWA (person having HIV/AIDS) clients. And I went around and I did workshops in our community here in Toronto around protecting and educating and just, you know, out there.

GK: So to go back to the 1980s, you’re in Vancouver—

NT: I’m in Victoria.

GK: Oh, you’re in Victoria.

NT: Yes. So I was on the street in Victoria. I got off the street. Went to my first gay bar, called The Queen’s Head. These guys that were there, they were like “Hey! Come and have a beer with us” and started talking. And bonded instantly. And they’re like “You’re such a baby dyke! Let’s meet up tomorrow!” And I became instant friends with them. They’re really nice guys. Settlers. Really nice guys, though. They saw in me this little spark that they thought “We’d better take care of her because... she’s (a) naïve, and (b) kind of, like, fresh”(laughing).

GK: So did you start to do some work around AIDS when you were in Victoria or does that happen when you're in Vancouver?

NT: A little bit in Vancouver? There wasn't a lot of demos back then, in Vancouver? The only thing was that they had the first Pride that I was actually involved in, I went to it. And I remember seeing signs about gay men and health and it still didn't have the name. AIDS. So it wasn't until I moved to Toronto that the whole "This is AIDS and HIV," and they even didn't call it HIV at the time. So then I started going to AIDS ACTION NOW! events. And doing all the street demos and street actions.

GK: Just to go back to the Vancouver situation. So is there anything you would want to tell us about what you were involved in doing there?

NT: Well, I was actually living with a bunch of anarchists. And I was involved in doing support work around the Vancouver Five [also known as the Squamish Five, a direct action based group responsible for a series of bombings] . And I was also getting involved in prison justice. I was starting to learn about my own Indigenous culture, so I was starting to get involved with that. I was heavy into the music, the alternative music scene. I'm a musician and I also write poetry, so I was starting to do poetry readings and get my feet in the arts world, art sort of radical queer world. I've been busy!

GK: Yes, you've been very busy.

NT: I'm tired now (laughing).

GK: And then, at some point, you moved to Toronto, and you were telling us the circumstances under-which that occurred a little bit before we started the interview.

NT: Well I moved with my partner from Vancouver to Montreal for a year. And... we both, because she was Japanese and I was Indigenous, we had to experience a lot of racism there. And I wanted to get to know part of my culture. Like, I'm part French. So I was like "What a great opportunity, I'll learn the language and learn the culture," and I lasted a year where I was so disgusted with the anti-Haitian sentiment in Montreal that I just, I was like "I can't live here." I'd rather live in a colonial state where it's obvious and it's not hidden. At least then I could, kind of live my life without... being worried about the police there and stuff.

RC: This was around '88?

NT: Yes.

RC: Because you end up in Toronto in '89.

NT: In '89. Yes. And when I moved to Toronto, I... when was Oka? Oka was, like, a year or two afterwards. Was it...

GK: '90?

NT: '90? Yes. So I got involved with that. I was still doing the AIDS ACTION NOW! stuff. And then, in '92, I actually opened for the International Women's Day, when they were having it at Queen's Park. So I was the first Indigenous woman speaker. That they "allowed." So I've been very active.

GK: So you come to Toronto and you get involved in the same types of things you were involved in before?

NT: Yes.

GK: And are you connected with the anarchist scene in Toronto?

NT: Somewhat... Not as much anymore, just because I've gotten older. I'm in my late 50s now. And I had an incident where my last real anarchist demo was in front of the cop shop, and it was during a time that, you know, these young bucks who were, you know, trying to make a statement, covering their faces, putting the rest of us – people like me – at risk of violence from the police. And I was actually picked up by a cop and thrown into the crowd, and I... don't remember what the demo was. They had horses going into the crowd and it was very frightening and... I stopped going to their demos after that.

GK: That might have been the... I'm trying to think of it. Was it in 2001 or shortly there-after?

NT: Yes.

GK: There was a large march from Alan Gardens to Queen's Park.

NT: And we stopped at the cop shop, or something. There was one that was spent most of the time at the cop shop on Carleton.

GK: So when you came here, you met some of the people from the Kathedrals?

NT: Yes.

GK: Can you tell us a little bit about that?

NT: Cathedral A and Cathedral B. It was funny, because Cathedral A was more the, intellect (laughing). But we're still anarchists, but we're very intellectual and, you know, university students and... Cathedral B was more the younger and sort of the wild anarchists, and that's actually where Morning Sickness came out of was Cathedral B. I was also the drummer for

Morning Sickness. I got a little bit more involved with the anarchist scene and started meeting people like my friend Scott, who lived in Cathedral A. And he was taking me around and, like, sort of showing me the places to go, and to demos. And then it just started branching out, meeting people outside of that.

GK: I was interested in maybe coming back to Morning Sickness and what it was and how it got formed.

NT: Well, I'm not sure exactly how it got formed. I know this group of women got together and some of them were learning their instruments, and were interested in the sort of Industrial music scene. So it was Industrial music. There were times where I was playing on garbage cans and drum sets and little hand-made things for, like, percussion. And I was able to actually contribute by putting some of my poetry into it. In fact, a friend of one of the women that was part of the group found a cassette, from twenty-five years ago, it's the Jubilee Anniversary of Morning Sickness. Which is really hilarious! I was like "Twenty-five years ago? Holy crap!" And so she was able to take the cassette and put it into digital and sent me, a couple of nights ago, a copy of the piece that I wrote called "By Any Means Necessary." Yes. So it's quite exciting. I was like "Oh my god! It's still relevant today!" It was very cool. And we did a little tour to Vancouver, played at the, I think it was called the Flying Monkey, on Granville street. I stayed with them for a couple of years. I left that, we kind of dissolved. And so I joined the band called Steal This Book.

GK: Oh, yes.

NT: A bunch of good folks. And so, yeah, our music, my music has always represented what I'm involved with, what's going on around me. The different sort of scenes, anarchists, the Native whatever.

GK: So, in terms of Morning Sickness were some members of it doing "The Rubber Rap?" Remember that?

NT: Kind of... It's a little fuzzy (laughing).

GK: Well a section of it, anyway, and some of the people from Morning Sickness, I'm not sure it's the entire group from Morning Sickness, were in Michael Smith's play *Person Livid With AIDS*?

NT: No. I met him after that.

GK: You actually have some of the people from Morning Sickness, doing The Rubber Rap, which I don't think was a Morning Sickness song, but I think some people participated in it? Rubber Rap was about condoms and using safe practices.

NT: Is that where they wrapped themselves around in plastic?

GK: They may very well have.

NT: I would just sit back and go... “What are you doing?” (laughing) I love them.

GK: So you would have met people like Kenn Quayle

NT: Oh, god yes. Kenn and his partner. Tim?

GK: Yes his partner at the time was Tim. Both he and Michael Smith were quite involved with Radical Faeries.

NT: Yes. I met Michael just before he passed, actually. I think about a year before he passed. And it was so sad. Just after he passed I got a call, and I was able to go and smudge him before they came and took him away. So that was really cool, I was able to do that for him.

GK: Do you know if you were at the memorial service for him?

NT: Yes, I was.

GK: And you were part of the march that occurred?

NT: Yes I was.

GK: Because we’re really interested in actually hearing more about that—

NT: But don’t ask me very many questions, because it’s very blurry (laughing).

GK: Even impressions. Because one of the reasons why it’s interesting to us is that, in the States, in the early 1990s, there’s this period where AIDS treatment activism actually is leading to people’s lives being longer because the opportunistic infections aren’t killing people. And then there’s this moment where people start to die again.

NT: Yes.

GK: And in the States, that’s the moment where – in some ways, out of desperation – ACT UP and other groups are organizing what they refer to as political funerals.

NT: Yes. The die-ins.

GK: And more than that. They actually, like, deliver, ashes to the White House, right? People’s ashes. There’s nothing really like that that occurs across Canada, except there is this march that occurs with Michael’s passing.

NT: I think we may have done a die-in. I remember going to one of the demos where we did a die-in and we did chalk around us, and that was pretty powerful. Because of when I was working at Anishnawbe Health, within the first month, I lost like five people. And it was gut wrenching. Because that was my community. I knew these guys. And I'd gone and partied with them in the past, you know? They were in my community. And not being able to do anything, you know? And I just felt like my hands were tied, and like, being gagged. And so I really appreciated AIDS ACTION NOW!, the activists, because it gave us a voice and a vehicle to be able to act, even just marching. You know, it may have not done anything with the politicians? But at least it got the information out and educated people, too. And, from when Pride started having AIDS ACTION NOW! in the marches, at the time they were called marches, in the early '90s. That was also powerful, because of the amount of people that were reached by that information, you know? And to see the numbers too, was just like staggering. It's always been staggering.

GK: So, were you working with Anishnawbe Health during that time period?

NT: Yes. I was.

GK: But that's the—

NT: That's the mid-'90s.

GK: Okay. Do you want to tell us more about that, and what you did?

NT: Well, I worked at an organization, I was the HIV/AIDS Educator. I was very frustrated because there were not a lot of services for us. So I was being, like, radical and sending them to the PWA Foundation and to ACT (the AIDS Committee of Toronto). So I was sending them to ACT, and they were sending them back. And I was kind of like "What are you doing??" And, in particular, especially the Indigenous women. There was this wall that was put up where it was like, "No. Women don't get it." And it was, like, almost yelling at people, going "No, you're not getting this! And, in particular, "Lesbians don't get it." And it was, like: You're totally wrong, because lesbians still have sex with men. Lesbians are IV drug users. Lesbians sleep with other lesbians who have had sex with men who have been in contact with IV drug users. And it's like, you can't tell me that lesbians aren't getting it. I'm seeing it.

GK: Right.

NT: In fact, before I left my job because, I was burnt out. Within two years, I got burnt out because it was such a high demand. One of my clients that passed very quickly was an older heterosexual cis woman whose doctor just said "You have AIDS, go home and die." There was no proper protocol done. There was no education done. There was no "Hey, there's meds that you can go on." And she basically died within six months of contracting it. It was quite traumatic for me. And I had to leave for my own emotional well-being.

GK: Do you have any sense of why ACT would send people back to you?

NT: Oh, they'd said right out. You have an agency called "Two Spirits." And you know I have a lot of respect for what They did in the early '90s. And I have a lot of respect for some of the members who have done a lot of the work. But they were also sending women away. And saying, you know, lesbians weren't contracting, weren't getting HIV. And I was like "No, you're wrong. I know women who are getting it. And I'm sending them to you, and you're sending them back!" So that was like, Okay, I'm gonna send 'em to ACT. And I think that was before PWA happened. And ACT was sending them right back. So it was like this ping pong match, you know, of sending them and of sending them back. It was just, like, holy crap.

GK: Do you know if it, this is only a vague recollection I have, that somehow funding for some of the ASOs – the AIDS Service Organizations – would have actually meant that they didn't get funding to deal with Indigenous people. It's really interesting for us to capture that moment when the white settler dominated AIDS Service Organizations are actually refusing to deal with Indigenous people.

NT: Oh, I know. It's everywhere. It's everywhere. And the funny thing is, I was still going to those demos. But then I started the "Yeah, Fuck You, White Man." Like you're the only ones who are getting AZT and research around the meds and my people are dropping, like flies. And it's becoming more of an epidemic, in the Native community than it is in the settler community. Like, it's transferred over from mostly being Two Spirit men to... teenagers, to housewives, to you know? And I'm seeing this, and getting calls from youth going, you know, having death threats given to them, their cars were being torched, their families were being targeted, because it's gotten out that they were HIV positive and queer. And so their whole lives had just turned upside down, and there's just no services for them, and it was an awful time. And I was only immersed in it for two years. I was still involved afterwards. I was one of the first Indigenous women to be with the Women and AIDS Network, in Toronto. I was part of the advocacy around that as, you know, somebody who was HIV negative. I've always felt that it's my responsibility, and especially in my community, and I still am very vocal to people, and saying "Double bag it! (laughing) Going out to play, play safe!" It's still there, right? But, yes. The cutting out, you know... That's why Black CAP came about. That's why the South Asian AIDS group came about. It was because there were no services for us. We were getting a little bit of funding, but not what other groups were getting. You know, there was a real line of racism that was really evident during that time. It really came out. And it was awful to see, you know, our gay brothers being racist to, you know, other gay men. And it was like, "What are you doing?" This is not just a white man's disease. This is impacting people of colour and Indigenous people.

GK: I'm wondering if you would have ever heard things like I remember hearing a little bit. When the AIDS Service Organizations get set up, like the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT), I was one of the first three employees of ACT, when it was first set up. I didn't stay there very long. But I remember some of the problems from those days. There was almost this notion

that, white, gay men – they would have said “gay men” – need to preserve our “ownership” over AIDS, right? But really it was racialized as white gay men.

NT: Yes.

GK: And I was wondering if you had any comments about that. And, I mean, then that relates to struggles over funding, right?

NT: Well, I always found it mind-numbing. Because it's not just a gay white men's thing, you know? And to think that they had the control over the education, over the funding, over what, you know, Health Canada was allowing, in terms of funding, to happen. I got to the point where I couldn't even go into the ACT building because, every time I would go in there, I would be met with a wall. And I would get so pissed off. And I think, one time, I was actually walked out of the building because I started yelling, and going “This is not right! You need to start servicing people of colour and Indigenous people and native people!” I was treated badly by some of these men. It was appalling because their racism really came out then, it was really evident. And it really taught me a big lesson in that they're not my brothers. It was very sad because the first people that I was in contact with, when I came out as a queer, were gay men. Were older gay men who were adorable, who loved me. Who treated me with such kindness and, gentleness. And then, to start seeing the other side of it was just like a slap in the face. And I told them, “I've been around this since '83, when it was AIDS Cancer. Don't tell me that I don't know what I'm talking about, or don't know the history of this awful disease, because I do.” I've witnessed these men perishing within months of contracting it. And they treated me with such kindness. And then to be treated with such vileness, you know, years later it was shocking. And I understand why the Women And AIDS Network came about, because they weren't getting the services either, you know? And there was a lot of women of colour who were dying unnecessarily because of it.

And when I think back, I just feel so angry that these lives were lost. Because of racism, because of classism and ageism and that whole sort of “ism” thing. And it was like, “Fuckin' hell you're anti-lesbian?” And that was interesting because, just after that, too, was that whole thing of the Dyke Day. And the Dyke March. And the first march that we had, things were thrown at us and people, guys were yelling, it was mostly white, middle class, upper-middle-class men, who were yelling at us that we were traitors, that we were fucking dykes and, like, how dare we do this? And for me, after dealing with ACT and their racism, it just kind of fueled my own anger towards the settlers, and it took a few years for me to start kind of working through that and going, okay, not all white men are like that. I mean, I know, like, Scott and Robin Turney and Tim McCaskell and Kenn Quayle and all these beautiful men who were kind and not racist and saw this shit going on and would call it out. And they gave me that voice to be able to do that too, and stand behind me in solidarity. It was always that solidarity with them. So when I ran into that shit with ACT, it was beyond my scope of being able to deal with it. Being walked out of ACT. “You have to leave now.” Just like that.

GK: That is really horrible.

NT: And it's interesting because when you look back, you know the different jobs that I've had, you kind of start realizing that, this is the plan of the government, too. To separate and divide. And they did a really fucking good job at separating and dividing the queer community at that point. Because even when the AIDS Memorial Wall went up, there were no women's names on there. It's not until recently that there's women's names on there. There was no people of colour's names on there. I remember the first time that they put a Native man's name on that wall. I sobbed. I cried. Because finally we're starting to be recognized. But what I found appalling was this whole playing into that "separate and divide" mentality. And it was like... I can't even explain how it made me feel. But it was always sort of like... This is a medical issue. This is a social issue. This isn't just a white man's issue and "men having sex with men" issue. This is a global issue that was getting out of control because it was being dominated by white cis gay men that were able to afford the medication, whereas my Native brothers were dying within two years because they couldn't afford the medication. And they weren't getting the same services done. I would always think "Why aren't you joining together with other groups of people to work together to combat this? To educate? To, hold the government accountable?" And it was like they played right into it. And same with the Native men who, when the Gays and Lesbians of the First Nations switched over to the Two Spirit, it became an ASO against the wish of the community. It wasn't because we didn't see the importance around the education and the health needs of our Two Spirited men and women who were becoming HIV positive. We knew at that time that if you make it just an ASO, you're going to cut all these services for women. And they did. Because they focused on the health aspect, and at the time Health Canada weren't even giving funding for women who were HIV positive, or around educating women around HIV and AIDS. I hold the government responsible for that part, because I think what they did was they set up that whole system of separate and divide, and they separated by giving funding to ACT, but not giving it to Black CAP, or to the South Asian AIDS Network, or to the Two Spirits or to other groups that were trying to do that education part, right? And they had that opportunity to group together with all these different communities and they missed it.

GK: I did want to ask some more questions related to some of the projects that came out of the Cathedrals. There were a number of harm reduction efforts, videos, various things that—

NT: I didn't know that. (laughing).

GK: —that Tracy TieF, Kenn Quayle, and other people were involved in. They also produced these 'zines.

NT: Oh, yes.

GK: One's called *Jerking Off*.

RC: I think one was called *Coming On*, maybe?

NT: *Getting It On* and *Coming On*, yes. Something like that. Yes, I can sort of remember that. (laughing)

GK: So do you have any memories of any of those things?

NT: I remember the 'zines. I think because I actually submitted some pieces into the 'zine. So I kind of remember some of that stuff. But the videos? Yes. I think that was just before me.

GK: Right, okay.

NT: I lived in Cathedral A, I think, for a couple of years? Yes. I was having sex with somebody in Cathedral B. (laughing).

GK: Okay. So that's how it was organized. You had to be in a different Cathedral. Okay.

NT: And we didn't talk much. (laughing).

RC: That's amazing.

GK: In relationship to that, my partner is Patrick Barnholden, who was the news director at CKLN, which was the Ryerson radio station then.

NT: Yes. I did stuff at CKLN.

GK: And he says that you were around CKLN.

NT: My god. (laughing).

GK: Punam Khosla was also a friend of mine.

NT: So you must have heard of The Rational, "The Rat," in Vancouver. I actually started getting involved in community radio in Vancouver, in the Co-Op radio, as part of The Rational, "The Rat." And I was doing the techie stuff. So I was behind the scenes and... cutting them off when they were saying things I didn't like. (laughing). So then, when I moved to Toronto – I actually did a little stint in Montreal, too, in...

RC: CKUT? [at McGill]

NT: Yes. In CKUT. I did some interviews. And then I started kind of hanging around CKLN because I really missed community radio, and I can't remember which shows I'd gotten involved with. But I was also doing the background stuff. I didn't like being on the mic. Even though everybody's like "You've got such a great radio voice! You should be on the mic!" I was like, "I don't want to be on the mic, I'm very shy." People were, like, "You're shy?" With that kind of stuff, I am. Yes. That's when some of the race politics were starting to happen in CKLN.

That was getting kind of interesting. You mentioned Punam. I've known Punam since Vancouver, too.

GK: Yes.

GK: So. I guess we're moving towards a more recent period. Unless there's more things you want to talk about.

RC: I do have one older question, because I am really interested in this television series called "Toronto Living With AIDS" that was on, late 1990, early 1991. And they actually produced ten videos. They paired an artist with a community organization. And Anishnawbe Health actually produced a video for this television series. I was wondering if you, it was 1990. Late 1990? So maybe it was bit before?

NT: Yes, that would have been Claude.

RC: The artist's name was Ted something but I can't... it's on the tip of my tongue.

NT: Wow...

RC: But it was paired with the organization, so there could have been a lot of people involved, for sure.

NT: Right. Yes. I never got to see that actually, which is interesting.

RC: I'm trying to locate it as well, and I know the York University library has a copy, because it was donated when the AIDS Committee of Toronto got rid of all their archives.

NT: And didn't give it back to the Native community. Sweet.

RC: And Vtape and Trinity Square Video in Toronto were involved in the production and distribution, but Vtape has lost most of it as well.

NT: Right.

RC: They have Black CAP's tape, *The Colour of Immunity* (1990), and a couple of others, but I haven't seen it yet. I was curious if, like, Black CAP's was used to do community education.

NT: It was never used as an educational because I would have had it.

RC: You would have known.

NT: I would have known, and I would have had it and used it if we had something like that. I do know that the Two Spirits had, when I was working there, a video around health issues and a lot

of it had to do around HIV and AIDS and I cannot, for the life of me, remember what the name of it was.

RC: Yes. But it was definitely Two Spirit, not Anishnawbe Health?

NT: Yes.

RC: Anyway. More research for me to do, just because I think it's a very interesting... it was on Rogers Cable? So it's maybe shown on cable television, but also organizations were using the tapes in different ways. So yes, I'm curious about it and not many people remember it or have seen it.

NT: Well, it was during that time, too, there was actually Cable Ten was doing some really cool stuff. They did a series called "Gee, Those Lesbians Are Talented." And they did a segment with me. And it was hilarious because, for years, up to ten years, people were stopping me on the street going "I saw you on Cable Ten!" I was like... "What? Get a life" (laughing).

RC: That's awesome. Local celebrity. If I do find that tape, we'll digitize it and I'll send it to you in case you're curious about seeing who was in it and all.

NT: That'd be great, yes. And if I remember what the other name of the other video is—

RC: Yes, I would really love to know.

NT: It was in the early 2000s.

RC: Okay. The one that Two Spirit did?

NT: Yes. It was part of a research project.

RC: ACT gave 893 video cassettes to York University. So there's a lot of stuff there.

NT: Wow... That's a lot.

RC: Not all of it is Canadian, but it might be somewhere in there. It's just a lot of scrolling.

NT: So shouldn't that be in the Gay and Lesbian Archives? Why has York got it?

RC: I think that with the CLGA they have so much stuff, and they don't have enough staff, time, and space to deal with everything people want to donate? And so I imagine ACT made the decision that York has money and institutional space, and the capacity to deal with large quantities of stuff. The thing about VHS tapes is that they're all deteriorating. So they need to digitize all that stuff and I don't think CLGA has the capacity to do that. So that might be why ACT made that decision. Anyways, if I find anything I will let you know.

NT: That would be cool. That would be cool to see.

RC: Because I'm planning to do more research on that.

GK: Later on you also have some connection with the Native Youth Sexual Health Network?

NT: Yes!

GK: So do you want to tell us a little bit about that?

NT: How did I get involved with them? There is a group that is called the Two Spirit Skill Share? And I had met them just sort of casually at some of the events... And I think I did some... educating with them around cultural stuff? I've been involved with so many groups that a lot of it just gets all murky. Yes, they're doing some awesome work. So they got involved, we started this new group, called the Two Spirit Skill Share. Because we were getting so pissed off with the straight Native community giving wrong information about being Two Spirit, around health issues, just... cultural stuff. And it was, like, we got to take this into our own hands and do our own educating. It sounds like we have to revamp it again because it's back to the "You should be wearing a skirt" and "You should be doing this." Now the Indigenous community has grown a lot and most have unlearned their queer phobia.

GK: No, no, that's fine.

NT: What was the question again?

GK: Well, it was actually about a connection with the Native Youth Sexual Health Network. And that's when you started to talk about the Skill Share. Which sounds really interesting.

NT: Yes, but they actually were instrumental in getting that happening. They're, like, quite the movers and shakers in terms of health issues. They just make me proud. Of their ability to talk about sex, and in the Native community in particular. It's a very taboo subject given residential schools for over a hundred years. And the sixties scoop. And a lot of the sexual abuse that happened in residential schools.

GK: I don't have many more questions, but one I really wanted to get into a little bit with you was, obviously you're an artist? And you're into poetry and music. And you see those as forms of resistance—

NT: Absolutely.

GK: Against colonialism and against all sorts of other things. But you also see art, poetry, and music as being really important as a response to AIDS as well. In terms of people's well-being in a more holistic sense. If you wanted to talk about that?

NT: Absolutely! And one of the things that I've gotten involved with, lately, and over the last four years, has been doing a lot of teachings and educating and mentoring with the youth. And, in particular, a Two-Spirited youth group. And so I started going in and actually doing creative writing workshops with them. And developing their voices, whether they're going to be writers or they're going to be artists or they're going to be musicians or just everyday community members. But getting them to start using their voices in terms of self-determination, in terms of being queer, in terms of being HIV+... and to work on their self-esteem and build up their self-esteem, where they can get themselves off the street and not always drugging and drinking but having a good quality of life. And I found that using writing, teaching them how to write poetry, and the different genres in poetry, and the different ways that they could express themselves, was starting to have a real positive impact. And I see it now! I've given about four different workshops through the years and I see these young people now becoming these young adults who are becoming role models and leaders in the community! Some of them are part of the Soaring Eagle camp. And I think in terms of empowering our communities, it's through the arts. It's through either music or writing or drama or play-writing – I'm also a play-writer. So I really like to push that, because that, to me, it's the soul of the community – of any community – is the arts. And that's where you get the real voices that come out, and the honesty of what needs to be said. And did you hear that when I talked about the Morning Sickness tape?

GK: Yes.

NT: Right. So, in re-hearing that, and even Madge saying, you know, "Nicole, this is fucking brilliant, because the stuff that you were talking about in the early '90s is still relevant now. It hasn't changed." And that actually made me very sad and depressed. I really encourage my young brothers and sisters and nieces and nephews to use art. Use it as a tool to use their voices and to get it out there and be able to talk from the heart. And not just the head, but it's the heart. And I've always believed, for me, that my ancestors come through me. Through my writing. Because some of the things I write about, I wasn't involved with, I didn't know a lot of, information about it, but it's come through my writings. And I've always felt that it's the ancestors who were working through me, through my art, through my music, through writing. So that's one of the things that I like to pass on, especially to the youth. Because they're our future and, you know, we need them to be strong warriors and strong, community members, and world members.

GK: I have a few more questions. But you can also feel free to say anything you want. So one of the things we want to do is to remember people who are not around anymore. So we ask everyone, do you know anyone who died of AIDS during, especially, the time period we're most focusing on. But more generally, too. Whose experience, sort of, you remember or that you would like to have them remembered, because we will include that also in the transcripts that go onto our site.

NT: There's so many names...

When you contacted me, the first person actually that came to mind and memory was Larry. Larry was a young, he was in his mid-thirties. That's who I met in Victoria. A white man who was just lovely. He was very sweet. And, like I said, he had passed within six months. And I remember sitting in ... What the heck was his name? My memory of names is really, really sketchy. But I just remember sitting in the kitchen and just talking about, you know, "What the hell is going on? He's got it, now somebody else has got it" and I always remember Larry. Because he was the first one that I met who passed. And he was one of the first that was recorded too, in terms of the health research. I think, if it wasn't for that little gang of men, that I wouldn't be where I am today, in terms of my radicalness, in terms of my acting out. In terms of my anarchism. And it's funny because they were all quite reserved and they didn't do any demos. So it's kind of funny that that would lead me to where I'm at now and what I've done through the '80s and '90s and the 2000s is from that one point of history in '83. And it always sits in my mind of "I was around before it was given a name..." And a lot of people don't know that, and a lot of men go "Oh, well, honey you don't know what you're talking about" it's like, actually... I've been around it, I've had friends, numerous friends, who've passed from it, numerous community members, you know, and a lot of men that I knew in Victoria are no longer with us. And the sex workers that have passed, there's so many that I can't friggin' even begin to name them. And the amount of Two-Spirited men that had passed is just heart-breaking. All those lives, they never got the chance to get old. And so I've always had that responsibility, like I said earlier, because I'm HIV negative, and I should have been positive. That my life-style, the way that I was, you know, I acted out sexually in my twenties, I was having unprotected sex with men, I was still out as a lesbian, but I had this hidden sort of life on the side, and I always thought that this was my responsibility. That I cannot not say anything, or not educate, when I see the opportunity. Because I'm alive because of those men in the early '80s. It's funny that I would remember a white man. What impacts you and who you end up honouring. A guy named Larry.

GK: That's important.

NT: Yes.

GK: So, another question we ask everyone is as we've been talking about various things, in terms of the questions, has anything else arisen for you that you want to talk about? This is your opportunity to talk about anything you want.

NT: No, I think I should write a book.

All: (laughing)

GK: Definitely! Definitely, for sure.

NT: Well, going back in history, in thirty years, it's just a drop in the bucket, in terms of the world history. But in that thirty years period of time, from the '80s to now, there was a shit-load of stuff we did. Like, a lot of educating, a lot of changing the government and getting funding

for HIV and AIDS, and that came from those lives that were lost, and the demands. And the amount of work that people have put into saving people's lives is just astronomical. And if anything comes out of this, I hope it's an understanding that there's a history, there's a queer history that's happened in the last thirty years that was more than the thirty years before that. You know? And that people are where they are now because it's people like you [Gary] and I, and the work that we've done, that allows them to be able to be trans, that allows them to be able to choose what gender they want to be referred to as, that allows them to have the first ever LGBT shelter for youth that's in Toronto. That's fabulous! Because when I was on the street in Victoria there was nothing. There were no services. There was nothing. We had to do stupid things like go into Saint Vincent de Paul, into the church, and pray to be fed. There were no shelters and we've really come a long way. And it's the work that the radical queers have taken on, and without us radical queers we wouldn't be in the place we are now. You know? And I may not agree with gay marriage, but that was a stepping stone into more rights. I think marriage, as a whole, is stupid (laughing).

GK: You're not going to get any disagreement from us!

NT: It's a form of control. And when the gay community said "We want to be married," like, I remember still saying, "Oh my god, what the hell? We are not like them. I don't want to be like the heterosexual community. I don't want to be part of their system. Because we're not. We're still on the outskirts." And even with gay marriage, we're still on the outskirts, right? It's becoming more mainstream. There's a lot of people who don't want us as part of the mainstream. And I don't want us to be part of the mainstream either.

GK: Right.

RC: Agreed. Thank you, because I was born in 1983. And so I'm here because of people like you, too.

NT: This makes me emotional. I think I might go home and cry. I was actually at a funeral yesterday. For Vern Harper [An important Indigenous activist and elder in Toronto].

GK: Oh, I only knew him a little bit.

NT: Yes.

GK: That's sad. Last time I saw him was at the INAC [Indigenous and Northern Affairs] Occupation, when I was doing some support work there.

GK: Our strategy for how we did interviews was, in each place that we did interviews, we started with particular organizations. And then radiated out from there.

NT: Right.

GK: In Toronto, we started with AIDS ACTION NOW! which, led us to Voices of Positive Women, PASAN, and Black CAP, but didn't actually intersect that much with Indigenous people and organizers.

NT: Interesting.

GK: I would actually say in a self-critical way, that we haven't done as much work as we should have done around reaching out to Indigenous people, but if there are other people that you think we should talk to, we might be able to do it, is all I can say at this point in time.

NT: They're the only ones that come to mind. Though they didn't do much radical stuff, Art and Ed, but they've been around it for a long time. Which is unfortunate that they didn't do enough radical stuff. And the number of us that did the radical stuff, some of us aren't here anymore...

GK: We also have information on the early formation of PASAN, which comes directly out of AIDS ACTION NOW!, but we've been unable to follow it up. We were going to interview, not the current executive director, but the previous one, but we never got to it.

NT: Yes. She's now over at... where the hell is it? Bathurst and Queen, there's a health center there.

GK: But PASAN's history is very important. We've only got how it started recorded, in terms of what we've done so far, and not sort of how it continues. Michael Smith and Julia Barnet were involved in forming it ... —

NT: Oh my god, that's a name. I haven't seen Julia Barnet in years. Holy!

GK: I saw her recently. Julia is one of the people who was really involved in harm reduction work for a long time.

NT: Do you know who is too, I think she works at PASAN. I'm going to have to look through my Facebook because for some reason, I just lost the ability to remember names. (laughing) But she was around, she's been doing a lot of work too.

GK: Okay. That'd be great.

NT: I can send you some names of people that have been around. Yes, the woman even running PASAN. She was, I think she was part of the Women and AIDS organizing.

GK: Who is the current executive director, do you know?

NT: (laughing).

GK: Okay.

NT: He's an older Black man who's been around for decades. He would be really good. And I think he was part of the Black CAP at one point. He would be really good in terms of the history.

RC: Yes, this project could go on for years.

NT: Oh god, yes.

GK: Yes, unfortunately we are running out of money, we can't do everything.

NT: How cool would it be if it was a little miniseries? Or like, a series on TV. You know?

RC: Yes. I mean, like a full documentary could be based on the transcripts. A videographer could do a really—

GK: Yes. What we're trying to do is not so-much to produce a film or a book, but to produce the raw materials so that other people could come and do that. And we want to make that as accessible as possible.

NT: That's interesting. Yes. Very cool.

GK: Okay, do you know about the, oh god... What's Kami's film?

RC: Oh yes, Kami Chisholm does the Queer Toronto Film Festival.

GK: There's another film festival that's on a much smaller scale—

NT: Which I think would be perfect. Yes.

RC: Inside Out has lots of problems. It seems like they care more about making money than anything else...

NT: Yes.

RC: And if they can't make money off screening a film, they won't screen it.

NT: But it's a really well-made film.

RC: There's lots of really great stuff and all the mainstream LGBTQ film fests won't touch it!

NT: I know. Because it's either from people of colour or older people that they don't necessarily like, like this young trans woman – my partner's in this film that talked about coming out to your parents as a trans person. And especially as a brown trans person. And a

Catholic, brown, trans person. They didn't even take that on. It's was like, well for fuck's sakes. Come on.

GK: Yes, that's ridiculous.

NT: I've always had criticism with Inside Out. It's been white male all along, you know?

GK: But it's gotten worse.

NT: I know! Now it's, like, Hollywoodish and, you know. Showing the Kate Johnson film to the world and, because, it had a budget.

GK: Thank you so much. This has been really helpful and wonderful. So really, thank you for coming out.

NT: Oh, you're welcome! Miigwech. For having me. I'm very interested to see the research paper that comes out of this.

GK: Well, people are doing research papers based on this. We are certainly hoping this is used for research, right? And there are a number of papers that people from the project are involved in. But we're not trying to do something like "This is the history of AIDS Activism in Canada" or anything like that. But we're certainly hoping that people will use this to develop work like this.

NT: Let's hope that. Yes, that would be cool. It'd be cool to see a documentary come out of it.

GK: But if you haven't checked out our website, you know, feel free to. That's great. Thank you.

NT: Excellent.