

AAHP
AIDS Activist History Project

Interview Transcript 38
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Interviewee:	Michael Hendricks & René LeBoeuf
Interviewers:	Alexis Shotwell & Gary Kinsman
Place:	Montreal, Québec
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5 February 2016

Persons present: Michael Hendricks – MH
René LeBoeuf – RL
Alexis Shotwell – AS
Gary Kinsman – GK
Jordan Arseneault - JA

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

AS: It's the 5th of February 2016. We're talking to Michael Hendricks and René LeBoeuf. Thank you so much for talking to us.

GK: The first question we start with everyone is if you have any memories of when you first heard about AIDS, or what you might have heard.

MH: I had an ex-boyfriend from Baltimore when I was really young, who became a psychiatrist. He was working in San Francisco. He came to visit us in the mid '70s here and he told us that there was an odd "lifestyle" disease going around in the gay community in San Francisco, as early as '76. And that he couldn't understand what it was, but he said that these people ran out of gas very young. And he thought it was drugs, but he didn't know. We also heard stories about people that became ill after going to the Anvil in New York. By 1980, we started having people here...

RL: One of my best friends, Bernard, he was diagnosed with AIDS in '84 and it was... a shock.

MH: Bernard was living in Toronto when his infection started to show but he spent some time here at the end as well. Like, being the ostriches that the gay community was in Montreal, we all decided that it was something that happened in San Francisco or at the Anvil. That's how we heard about it first.

GK: Just around that, I was one of the first three employees of the AIDS Committee of Toronto [ACT] and one of the things that was actually first said about safer practices was to avoid having sex with people from San Francisco and New York City.

MH: Isn't that amazing.

GK: It was really weird that was said.

MH: So, it [ostrichism] was contagious, that disease!

GK: It wasn't just here. So, that's what you first heard about AIDS and HIV. We could actually ask you, do you remember what types of information you would have been reading in English and in French, that might have provided some information on AIDS and HIV at that point in time?

RL: The first thing we heard was about the gay cancer that they discovered in New York. It was a person that was infected and they didn't know what it was, and they died very suddenly. It was an infection and suddenly the person died. Then, a lot of people start to die and things like that. In Canada, in Quebec it's far. It's New York, so it was not for us. It arrived in Montreal maybe five years after. In '89-'90 people started to talk about what was going on and people went to New York and San Francisco and came back. You would see them and suddenly six months later they were dead.

MH: Or they transformed into the walking ill. By that time GMHC [Gay Men's Health Crisis] existed already. We had access to that. And we knew that the « information » published in the *New York Native* was a lie. There were a number of French-Canadian publications (like *RG Magazine* published by a gay psychologist named Alain Bouchard) that were translating the rubbish coming out of the *New York Native* and similar publications and putting it out here in French (for example, that AIDS was caused by using amyl nitrate—poppers). And, of course, it was all just not true. Instead of reading stuff coming from AIDS ACTION NOW! or ACT [the AIDS Committee of Toronto] or from GMHC, they were inventing their own crap coming out of the *New York Native*, but we weren't involved. We just saw it from a distance. Bernard got sick. He died. And so immediately we thought that was it. Nobody else we knew would be sick.

AS: And do you want to say something about Bernard?

RL: Well, at that time it was a new disease. It was thought to be very contagious, so when you went to the hospital, you have to dress like you're going to the moon. It was a space suit, it was very contagious – “Don't touch anything in the room. Don't touch the patient. Don't do anything.” And they were left in their own filth and it was terrible, because the doctor, the nurses, parents, friends, everybody was afraid of this.

MH: The food was left outside the door.

RL: Yes, it was terrible.

MH: We fed him. One night he wouldn't eat. He was drowning in his own mucus. In retrospect, we realized later, he had PCP [pneumocystis carinii pneumonia]. He was just so sick and drowning, it was very near the end and he wanted some Jell-O. And I couldn't get anybody at the Royal Vic [Royal Victoria Hospital] to find some Jell-O, so I ended up going out... Oh, his parents were there and they had a car, but they didn't bother because they were just too concerned about the shame of it all. I went out, finally found some store where they made Jell-O and were selling it. It was really hard to find, but in a hospital you should be able to find Jell-O. It was all he could eat. It was just awful. He died of neglect. He finally died at home, at our friend Richard Grenier's apartment in the Gay Village. Then, we thought that was over and it would never happen to us again.

GK: But, it obviously did. [laughter] So, I mean, you're talking about the recognition that AIDS and what comes to be called HIV, was a major health problem, but do you have any awareness of when you might have started to hear about people organizing around AIDS as

a more political issue?

MH: Oh, we knew all about ACT UP, because we went down to the...

JA: The centre.

MH: No, comment qu'on appelle...

RL: Le Centre Communautaire?

MH: No. À côté de chez vous... Le centre de convention.

RL: Le Palais des congrès?

MH: Yes, the Palais des congrès. It was in June of '89, it was the Fifth International AIDS Conference and we knew that ACT UP New York was coming. We had read that in the papers and so we went down there to see what they would do. Little did we know, it never dawned on us, that they wouldn't be outside, that they were inside. We never saw anything. What they did was they seized the stage and they put a seropositive person—well, they put Peter Staley on the stage. And the people, for the first time they heard a seropositive person who admitted it speaking, and they turned their backs and left.

GK: When Mulroney spoke we turned our backs.

RL: You were there! You were inside.

GK: Oh yes.

RL: We didn't even know about it.

GK: The plan was to not go inside. AIDS ACTION NOW! did not know that ACT UP was planning to go in, but ACT UP New York City was the life of the party.

RL: So, we didn't know what was going on.

GK: So, you ended up being outside and all the other activists were inside.

MH: Well, no. There were lots of us outside. You see, there was no organization here. There was a few anarchists who had weird thoughts and believed in green juices that you'd drink, and stuff like that. There were a lot of people that were involved in alternative medicine. You know, deadly and dangerous practices. We knew Larry Kramer, we knew all about that, but we just didn't have anybody here as a model.

AS: So, how did that start to shift?

MH: Well, the next question [on the list of questions] is what background are we coming from?

AS: Yes, how did you...

MH: I came as a refugee, an American Vietnam war resister. I was always involved in the '70s in antiwar action. We ran the American Refugee Service. Well, it was like the anti-Vietnam War stuff that was going on in Toronto, but with a smaller number of people because of the language barrier. We had a hostel on Esplanade Street and we could house about seven deserters at a time. We also had Vietnamese deserting from the South Vietnamese army. They would come to North America, officers only, to take training courses and, once they were here in North America, they would take a bus to Montreal. They spoke French, of course. They were more of the bourgeois class of Vietnamese. Those kinds of people. We ran that for years and took care of those people. René was involved in union organizing from... the mid-'80s?

RL: Yes, from the mid-'80s until the end of '89. And it was fun, it was interesting, but I wanted to do something closer to home, to me, closer to my family...

MH: Meanwhile, in '89 and '90 we got involved in CASO [the Coalition Against Systematic Oppression], which was about justice for Anthony Griffin, a young Black man who was murdered by a Montreal police officer, Alain Gosset. We and a few students from Concordia organized the demos. There's photos of that somewhere, probably in the archives. We did that for a few years too, so we had gotten used to anti-police activities. We had gotten used to organizing demos, but it was all pretty much labour union style, you know, old-fashioned fifties, placards and hats and coats, Matachine stuff. We were very straight. René actually led a winter strike. A winter strike in Montreal is like all winter long, and it's like incredibly difficult. And one of the people in the special effects committee painted on the garage entry of the place they were striking, referring to the owner, a woman who was corpulent, "It's all over when the fat lady sings." And the door went up every time she drove in with her Cadillac she would have to see this written on the door. It was quite fun, union organizing, much more fun than things like police and race relations.

But, you know, it so happened that at a New Year's Eve party in 1989-90, one of our friends, Luc Lamy, showed up and I asked him where he'd been. I hadn't seen him in a while. He said, "Having a depression." "Well, that's too bad. Why?" and he said, "Aren't you aware? Everybody here is HIV-positive except you." And we didn't know that. That all of our friends – and we had about twenty-five friends – they were all there and they were all HIV+. Nobody ever told us. "Why didn't you tell us that?" "Well, because you're moral people. You're a couple," which was a complete lie. I mean, at least they knew better than that. And then they gave us attributes and qualities. That so offended us that we didn't know what to do. We had read in David Shannon's column in *The Montreal Mirror* that ACT UP was leaving somebody behind to start a chapter. That person was Blane Mosley.

GK: I remember Blane.

MH: Oh, you do! Okay, you can't miss him. He was the only six foot three Black person in ACT UP MTL, who was really handsome. [laughter] And they were all in love with him, and he stayed

behind. He taught ACT UP 101.

AS: So, did ACT UP just say, “We dictate that you, Blane, stay in Montreal.” Was there some reason that he wanted to stay in Montreal? Did he have a lover here? Did he like Montreal?

RL: I think he liked Montreal. It was a place where a lot of things were happening at that time. The gay scene was very, very active. There were a lot of bars, a lot of places, people were going to the bar every night.

MH: Very social.

RL: Yes, the gay scene was very, very active and lively, so it was very interesting to be here.

MH: But, Blane stayed behind of his own – de son proper chef – of his own desire. I mean it was his decision, not ACT UP’s. And he had met a couple of converts when he was here. The ACT UP NY people were housed with local people, people they knew. Not people in the AIDS movement because there wasn’t any. And when ACT UP New York looked around and said, “There’s nothing here, let’s do something,” Blane offered to stay and start something. He stayed for years. You know, he would go back and forth. He was game for anything. He was an illegal immigrant, so it was difficult to put him on the front line against the police. But, when it came to acting, he was remarkable because... Like this is a typical Blane stunt: one time we attacked the USA Consulate, and he and I dressed up in suits and ties, all fancy clothes, with serious men’s hats. Blane was a giant and he’s Black and beautifully dressed, and he’s walking past the Consulate with this little white midget next to him also in suit and tie and everything. As we walked passed the consulate, all the guards came out to look at these two very odd people (for Montreal). Meanwhile, four people from ACT UP MTL jumped out from nowhere and put a chain around the door and put a lock on it. That was when the USA had forbidden people to enter the USA for the San Francisco International AIDS Conference if they were HIV positive. Yeah, that was in response to that. And Blane was good for that sort of stuff. He drew a lot of attention, and he drew people. But, he was also the repository of ACT UP lore. You probably know he was the chalk boy in New York. Do you know what that is?

AS: Say more about it.

MH: Okay, ACT UP New York functioned out of the Gay and Lesbian Community Centre, which was in an old school building; it was in the basement. They had a blackboard, a huge blackboard, three panels. And so, at Monday Meetings, the agenda would be handwritten there and notes were taken in white chalk, and Blane was doing it. He had very nice cursive handwriting. Blane was from South Carolina, Charleston, he went to The Citadel and, you know, it just didn’t work out for him. He was a giant faggot and a dress up queen, he wore clothes. Blane, it was like a religion for him, ACT UP. He was very popular in ACT UP. People liked him. He knew ACT UP NY well and so he brought us their rules and customs. For example: we met on Monday because ACT UP NY met on Monday. Art Committee met on Thursday because the ACT UP New York Art Committee met on Thursday. As you came in we had a table with documentation just like theirs and it was mostly their stuff. We had a three-minute moment of silence at the beginning. So, that’s what he did, he

transferred all that. His dilemma was he couldn't speak French. In the beginning it was mostly English, but it gradually Frenchified. And, as French became the working language of ACT UP MTL, that excluded Blane. But, he was still there. He was always present. I do know that Jim Hubbard, the guy that made the ACT UP film, when I mentioned Blane Mosley, he said "Do you know where he is, Blane Mosley?!" He was a really well-liked person. People who knew him loved him. He has changed his name and lives under another name now.

GK: But, he's back in New York City as far as you know?

MH: He's in the United States I believe, but I don't know.

GK: So, how does the ACT UP group in Montreal begin to form after the conference in '89?

MH: Well, Blane pulled together a few people. They had announced in *The Mirror* they were meeting in the beginning of January 1990. We went to the first or the second meeting. Because of what happened New Year's Eve, we decided that we wanted to make it absolutely clear that we certainly weren't ashamed of them, and that we had done all of the same things that they had done. And since they couldn't, or wouldn't, or were afraid of being public, we could and we were regularly labeled as being *sidatique*, a vulgar word for being *sidéen*—having AIDS. We figured that was all we could do since we weren't infected ourselves, but that it would help, because somebody had to show their face. And it didn't harm us in our work or anything. We had such crummy jobs, you don't get fired for that.

GK: How did you get involved? The New Year's Eve story. You know, in the first ACT UP meeting, which was held in January 1990, the very beginning of January, do you remember what it was like?

MH: Oh, yes we do. [laughter] There was Kalpesh, Christopher, José, Luc Desaulniers, Blane, Jamie, Glenn, David and about three or four others, mostly English. A few French-Canadians. The meeting started with the three minutes of silence. Kalpesh went loony immediately, "Silence?! I don't need silence! I'm going to have millenniums of silence. I'm going to die!! I want a cure! Let's talk about a cure! Silence?! What does it matter? They're dead!!" Haranguing like that went on for quite a long time until we abandoned the meeting... We eventually voted that it be one minute of silence. [laughter] Compromise. Consensus was achieved although Kalpesh probably went to the bathroom. Kalpesh Oza was from Hyderabad in India. He was a Master's student in organic chemistry at McGill. He spoke fluent English, French, Hindi, and a couple of other languages. And he was a very nice man, but awfully, awfully aggressive, and when he didn't like it, you knew it. So, we left early from that first meeting. We couldn't take it. I mean the fighting was constant. The political correctness was awful.

GK: Can you just come back to tell us who the list of people was again that you mentioned as being there? I just want to make sure.

MH: Kalpesh Oza, Christopher Cockerell, José Sousa—José is still alive. They were the treatment community, eventually. And they all were members of CPAVIH (Comité des Personnes Atteintes du

VIH du Québec) – the committee of persons living with HIV, or infected with HIV. Luc Desaulnier, who was Blane's eternal friend and *accompliment*, and there was Blane Mosley, there was Jamie Marois. Did you know Jamie in Toronto? He's dead now. He died of brain cancer.

GK: I knew Kalpesh when he moved to Toronto.

MH: Oh, you did! Kalpesh was something else.

GK: Yes, I agree.

MH: José, Christopher and Kalpesh lived together. Then, there was Glenn Betteridge and then...

RL: Beaulac *n'était pas là*?

MH: Non, pas encore. Hugh Ballem was there. He was administering ACT UP Montreal at that time, trying to facilitate. That was about it. It was small and it was painful, very painful. We didn't know what we were doing there and they didn't either. We fled. The problem was it was the only game in town, and we were there for a point. It had nothing to do with them. It had to do with us and our friends. None of whom joined ACT UP until much later.

AS: Why do you think it was so difficult so quickly? Usually it takes a while for groups to be contentious.

MH: They all came with their own agendas.

RL: Yes, and there was... une urgence.

MH: Urgency.

RL: There was a....

MH: ...a pressing need.

RL: Yes, there was a pressing need to do something because nothing was being done and people had no resources, nowhere to go, and you have to do something for the people who were existing. We had to do something about that.

MH: When we were carried away by politically correct subjects and things like that, suddenly David Shannon would... Oh! Shannon was there. Yeah.

RL: Yes, I remember Shannon.

MH: Shannon would scream out, "ACT UP! Fight back!! Fried eggs!! [laughter] It was a very strange place. A strange, but never boring environment! Frightening sometimes, but never boring. Were people there living with AIDS? Of course. Kalpesh, Christopher, José were all seropositive and

there were a bundle more that were. It was up to you to say whether you were, but those three were members of CPAVIH and they were proud of it. They talked about it. Not everybody admitted they were HIV+. We went through some painful moments with Bill Morris.

RL: Yes, and there were people who tried to take a place as leaders but some people tried to take a leadership role before they told us that they were seropositive.

MH: Nobody cared about who was seropositive. I mean nobody within ACT UP cared, half of everybody was [seropositive for HIV]. And what was the difference? One thing was for sure. We knew that kissing didn't cause transmission because we had been frenching all the same people, and for a long time. It just wasn't going to be like that. There was nothing to be afraid of.

GK: So, you fled from the first meeting. You must have come back. [laughter]

MH: We didn't have any choice. We really felt strongly about our position on HIV. We wanted to do something about it. They were right, ACT UP, that there was nothing here. It was just anarchists who had vague ideas and were making green juice and stuff. There was no science at all, and they weren't following the ACT UP NY lead at all. And it was obvious that these people, Staley and company, knew what they were doing. Blane had been involved with Staley. He was in the occupation of Glaxo-Wellcome Pharmaceuticals, he knew how to do it and he knew what the treatment committee was about. And he plugged me and Glenn and others with them. We went to New York. We met them. They constantly fed us information. At that time it was only by fax and we would get these great volumes of stuff being printed out, and then we'd photocopied it and circulate it. Most of it was beyond the level of everybody except José, Christopher, and Kalpesh.

AS: Because they had some training they could understand?

MH: Various levels. I mean Kalpesh was a Master's student. Christopher was a literature student and José, I doubt he finished high school although he was doing night courses in pre-med subjects at Concordia by that time. But they became experts in treatment. And from them I learned treatment and went on to become an HIV treatment counsellor. Well, in 1997, after treatment came. In the early days with opportunistic infections, I really couldn't practice medicine. It wasn't for me, but they could and they did. You know, they're the ones that cooked up all our ideas that were treatment-related. So, we had this constant source of HIV-positive people with their problems feeding us with all the problems that we, as ACT UP, had to deal with. They became the brains, we became the brawn, the bodies, the front line. Claire Culhane, who was very active in communist politics here in Montreal years ago, always said that you have to have bodies on the line, and we were the bodies on the line, the picket line.

GK: So, Kalpesh and the other two people. They had a treatment committee within ACT UP Montreal?

MH: They *were* the treatment committee and they also were the treatment committee for CPAVIH. So, it was like, married together. If anybody educated us it was them, and any education that occurred was them. I mean Blane was charming and great for little traditions and three-minute

pauses, but he was like me, he was useless on medical issues. It took us a long time to learn. The learning curve was extremely difficult. I think you see that in the second ACT UP film with the treatment action group - TAG, you know. They were as close as we came to TAG, but they were driving it. It was treatment that was driving action as opposed to action driving treatment. And that's what happened with TAG and ACT UP MTL.

AS: How would they get information about treatment possibilities or updates out? Would that happen in the context of ACT UP meetings or were there...

MH: You mean down there or over here?

AS: Here.

MH: Oh, here. ACT UP NY was in love with publishing. Well, we were too. We ground out great amounts of photocopies and all kinds of crap and distributed it.

AS: And you would translate things?

RL: Yes, we would translate in French and English.

SÉCURISÉXE ACT UP MONTRÉAL

LE SÉCURISÉXE, C'EST PAS SI FOURRANT QUE CA !

- C'est ce que tu fais qui t'expose au risque d'une infection au VIH, et pas qui tu es.
- C'est par respect pour toi-même et pour les autres que tu dois pratiquer le sécurisexe, utiliser des aiguilles propres et en parler.
- La pratique du sécurisexe et l'utilisation d'aiguilles propres te protègent contre l'infection au VIH, les maladies transmissibles sexuellement (MTS), comme l'hépatite B et d'autres infections qui affaiblissent les défenses naturelles du corps.
- Les personnes atteintes du VIH/SIDA doivent pratiquer le sécurisexe et utiliser des aiguilles propres pour éviter de se réinfecter avec d'autres souches du VIH ou d'autres maladies liées au VIH.

SIDA ET VIH : QUELLE EST LA DIFFÉRENCE ?

- On croit que le VIH (virus d'immunodéficience humaine) cause le SIDA (syndrome d'immunodéficience acquise). Le VIH peut affaiblir les défenses naturelles du corps et rendre les personnes atteintes plus vulnérables aux infections opportunistes. C'est ce qu'on appelle le SIDA.
- Le VIH est transmis lorsque le sang, les sécrétions vaginales ou le sperme d'une personne séropositive (infectée au VIH) entrent dans le système sanguin d'une autre personne à la suite de relations sexuelles non protégées ou du partage d'aiguilles.
- On ne peut pas transmettre le SIDA par la salive, la transpiration ou les larmes, car il n'est présent qu'en très faible concentration dans ces liquides.
- Si ton test est « positif », cela veut dire que le VIH est dans ton corps. Cela ne veut pas nécessairement dire que tu auras le SIDA par la suite. **Mais attention : cela veut aussi dire que tu peux le transmettre.**

LE SÉCURISÉXE, C'EST PAS SI FOURRANT QUE CA !

- Tout ce qui ne fait pas entrer du sang, des sécrétions vaginales ou du sperme dans le système sanguin de quelqu'un est sûr à 100 % !
- Cela comprend les massages, l'embrassement, l'excubation, le voyeurisme, le porno, les fantasmes, les câlins, les caresses.
- Pour encore plus de protection lors de la pénétration, utilise un préservatif au latex (il tue le VIH).
- Retire-toi avant d'éjaculer.
- Lave tes mains.
- Lave tes mains avant et après chaque fois qu'un nouveau partenaire les utilise.
- Lorsque tu introduis tes doigts ou tes mains dans le cul ou le vagin de toi ou ta partenaire, sers-toi de gants de latex et de lubrifiant soluble à l'eau. Attends à les griffer.

PÉNÉTRATION ET LATÉX

- Utilise toujours un condom en latex (parfois en fibre animale et un lubrifiant soluble à l'eau (K-Y, Lubrax, etc.) pour la pénétration vaginale et anale. N'utilise jamais un lubrifiant à base d'huile comme la Vaseline ou des crèmes hydratantes, car ils dissolvent le latex.
- Pour encore plus de protection lors de la pénétration, utilise un préservatif au Nonyonon d (il tue le VIH).
- Lave tes mains.
- Lave tes mains avant et après chaque fois qu'un nouveau partenaire les utilise.
- Lorsque tu introduis tes doigts ou tes mains dans le cul ou le vagin de toi ou ta partenaire, sers-toi de gants de latex et de lubrifiant soluble à l'eau. Attends à les griffer.

L'HEURE DU LUNCH !

- On ne sent pas sûrs en tout temps si le VIH peut être transmis par une érection.
- Car la possibilité d'un risque n'a pas encore été écartée définitivement.
- Pour une protection à toute épreuve contre le VIH et d'autres infections virales : utilise une dique (carré de latex) lorsque tu boudes la vulve ou le cul d'une amie ou d'un ami. Un condom coupé dans le sens de la longueur fera tout aussi bien l'affaire.
- Avant de sucer la queue d'un gars, coiffe-la d'un condom, puis divise le tout.

SADO-MASO-DODO

- L'un ou l'autre des sécrétions vaginales ou du sang entre en contact avec une coupure ou une plaie ouverte.
- L'un(e) et l'autre peuvent contenir du sang et le virus responsable de l'hépatite B, alors évite de les mettre dans ta bouche, sur des coupures ou des plaies ouvertes.

COMMENT NETTOYER TES AIGUILLES

- Tu peux attraper l'hépatite B, l'hépatite C, un empoisonnement du sang, l'hépatite B, la tuberculose, le VIH et des MTS avec des aiguilles sales ou en partageant des aiguilles.
- Ne partage jamais des aiguilles, des seringues ou des seringues lorsque tu injectes des drogues (y compris des stéroïdes).
- Pour nettoyer une seringue, remplis-la d'eau de javel 3 fois, puis lave de même avec de l'eau 3 fois.
- Fais tremper la cuillère saline ou sale dans de l'eau de javel, puis rince-la bien à l'eau ; jette le coton après usage.
- Utilise toujours une aiguille stérile pour faire des intraveineux et des petits trous.

CONSEILS SUR LE SÉCURISÉXE

- Ne la brosse pas les dents ni le nez avec le latex.
- Évite de partager avec ta sonde les parties de la sonde qui sont en contact avec le sang.
- Les femmes couvrent un plus grand risque de contracter et de transmettre le VIH lors de leur menstruation.

POUR ÉCHANGER DES AIGUILLES ET OBTENIR DES CONDOMS GRATUITEMENT ET ANONYMEMENT, CACTUS MONTRÉAL 1500, RUE SAINT-DOMINIQUE (514) 644-8849 QUÉBEC : POINT DE REPÈRE 561, RUE ST-VALLIER EST (418) 648-8042 CLSC MÉTRO (514) 934-0552 ET AU CLSC CENTRE-VILLE (514) 947-0644 QUÉBEC : (418) 648-0643 CHENEBROU (418) 530-7432

POUR PLUS D'INFORMATION ACT UP COMPOSE LE (514) 527-2423

MH: Mostly French-Canadians had to read in English. You just can't read science stuff in French only. I mean you can about some things, but there was nothing coming from France. The French culture at that time was very preoccupied with the "healthy carrier." That was a preoccupation of theirs – that you could look healthy and be infected with HIV. They spent all their time talking about that and not about prevention. Prevention was a serious problem. The government here, the Bourassa government, and the Minister of Health, all of his Ministers of Health, felt that any information in French would encourage the growth of homosexuality and drug use. And so we had tons of stuff from AIDS ACTION NOW!, from ACT UP NY, all in English. But we had nothing in French. So the first project for ACT UP MTL was translating everything we had about prevention and bringing it together. And then we got a Montreal cartoonist to produce our flyer. Because ACT UP Montreal always had a humorous side to it, we decided to present our prevention information in comic strip format (une band dessinée), trying to make it as easy to swallow as possible. Once we distributed ten thousand of them at, I think it was, the St-Jean Baptiste Day Parade.

Image source: Michael Hendricks and René LeBoeuf.

RL: Yeah, St-Jean Baptiste.

MH: In 1990?

RL: Yes, it was.

MH: Once we did that there was no excuse for the government not to publish the truth. Once we had done that it was in the hands of everyone. We gave it out in front of schools. We did it wherever would embarrass the Health Minister. Douglas' home phone number was at the bottom of the flyer and you could call him. That's how we did it, you know. Douglas would get the calls and find out what they wanted, and get somebody to call them back. Kalpesh was impeccable in both languages, both with a very heavy Indian accent, but really good in talking to people at a sixth grade level in both languages. So, they would counsel on the phone. We also were in pretty good contact with the world of doctors. Although we weren't very friendly with them, we knew them all. So Kalpesh also did referrals.

GK: So, just coming back to ACT UP Montreal. How in general was it organized? There would be these weekly meetings.

MH: Monday evenings.

GK: And did people decide on the basis of consensus? Was there only a treatment group or were there other groups within it?

MH: Okay. It started out with just treatment/prevention and then grew. First of all, very early on, we created a woman's caucus and that's normal. And then, of course, we had an HIV-positive caucus, and then we had a people of colour caucus. We only had Blane and Kalpesh, and José, who claimed to be of colour because he's from the Azores. It's certainly third world, that's for sure. That was it. No local person of colour. These were all outsiders, non-qubécois. Anybody « local » wouldn't be associated with ACT UP because they would be fingered as HIV+ immediately. Everybody in ACT UP was presumed seropositive and the local communities of colour were not very open to these things.

About a third of the members were women, I would say, or a quarter. Oh, language. In the beginning it was twenty percent French, eighty percent English. And then, eventually, the English were forced to speak French. In meetings, you had to speak in French first, and it made it very, very difficult.

We had no Native people. You asked that question, were Indigenous people involved? No. Obviously, it would be dangerous for them. The taboo was enormous in their community. One person, a Mohawk from Kahnawake, Edward Cook, was involved in Sex Garage and, in 1990, I found that surprising. Yes it's true, there were some young English Canadians that wanted absolutely for it to be the Mohawks and us together. You know, the Kahnawake-Oka thing was going on at the same time. Edward was asked if he would go and explain that we were one and the

same working together, and Edward said, “You’re out of your mind. They won’t see any parallels at all! No, I’m not going to go there and tell them that.” And that was the end of our involvement with Native people. We were already considered to be infected, perverted people and they didn’t need that.

Were there women involved? Yeah, about a quarter to a third of the members in the beginning. Maybe in a big meeting you would have fifty people altogether. A small meeting would be twenty, that was much more common. And to protect people from the bullies in the crowd, we had speaker lists and we worked them assiduously. That was all just the stuff that you get from ACT UP NY. We borrowed everything from ACT UP New York that would make it easier to bring people together, and it worked. It was considered very avant-garde at the time. This approach was called « hyper-democratic ». The only time I had ever seen anything like it was during Occupy. It was very much the same, all about deciding by consensus. Just like ACT UP New York. And it was constant. I mean I said Monday and Thursday, but there was also Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, weekends in which other committees met and did things. And then there was the special effects committee and they did things at night and on weekends.

GK: The special effects committee? Could you tell us more about that?

RL: The Art Committee.

MH: Well, the part of the Art Committee that did things like, painting and spraying and « stickering ». There was one particular activity, I don’t know why we did it, « awareness » I guess, but we would attack Metro cars during the day and cover them with prevention stickers. During those actions, René was known as ‘The Cheetah’ because he had a nose for the police. He could smell when they were coming and he ran faster than anybody else when he saw blue. So, he was on the special effects stickering committee.

AS: You were on the special effects committee?

RL: Yes, I was on the Art committee.

MH: Yeah, the Art committee. We did those things all the time. Art committee, we did real art objects. Special effects, we did silly stuff like that. You know, we had affinity groups. You know what affinity groups are?

GK: Yes.

MH: We had Parents for a Sane Education, which opposed the right-wing school commission over sex education and prevention information. We were putting glue in their locks and stuff like that. During the school commission election, we attacked the home of the president, who lost. He was a very self-righteous Christian, and we got rid of him. We didn’t do it, the public did it, but he had tasted our stuff. And then we did posterizing. Wheat pasting was part of the initiation. Everybody wanted to wheat-paste because you were real then, if you wheat-pasted. Later, much later, in the Lipo-Action time, the younger people introduced me to new wallpaper paste that was much better

than wheat flour paste, really incredible. If we had that we would not have ruined all our clothes! [laughter] But, you know, we did it at night. It was fun.

AS: And so would art things be produced with a particular campaign in mind?

MH: Yes.

AS: So, how would you coordinate?

MH: On Monday it would be decided what art we would produce for the next demo. We had demos all the time, demos and fundraisers, all the time. So, the Art Committee was assigned to whatever was to be done. It was decided by consensus in general meeting and then it was carried out by all the others, everybody had their assignment. It was all very organized. There were never fuck-ups. Rarely was anything late, everything got approved, and phone numbers were always right. I mean they were assiduous people.

AS: Can you talk about some of the campaigns?

MH: We will anyway. Our biggest ones will come up.

GK: Was there a first demonstration that ACT UP Montreal had?

MH: Yes, we kicked off ACT UP MTL the 19th of March 1990. It was the anniversary of Joe Rose's death. Joe Rose would have been in ACT UP if he had been alive and so we dedicated it to him. Everybody was there. We did it at Place...

RL: Complexe Desjardins.

MH: ...Complexe Desjardins at the entrance on Ste-Catherine and we did a die-in. There are many photos of it in the archives. Blane showed us how to do a die-in with the body outlines in white chalk and everything. You know, it was practicing for our future and we'd never done one before. It was pretty cold on the sidewalk, but not that bad for the 19th of March. No police came and even bothered us. We just did it and were ignored by everybody. But, it was the anniversary, one year I think, of Joe's death and we felt it was important to do it there. That's how we got our taste of action, our first taste. But we went on to do lots of other things.

GK: Were there a lot of people involved in this first action?

RL: In this action there was like, fifty people.

MH: Yes, go look at the photos; you can see them all there. They're all lined up at the entrance. They're all over the place. And all of the original ACT UP members are in the photos. Blane is there, Hugh is there, all those people.

RL: Claude Lachapelle (the coordinator of CPAVIH) was there.

MH: Yes, all those people. Now deceased.

AS: Can you say a little about Joe Rose and why it was important to have an action a year after his death?

MH: Well, because Joe Rose was so out. The sub-theme of ACT UP was, of course, we're here, we're queer, get used to it. Joe would have been perfect for that. That was his mantra. None of us knew him. Nobody knew him at all. He was only nineteen, you know, and he had pink hair. He didn't frequent the bars. He became well known by his death, which the community seized on, much to the distress of the Rose family, and made a big fucking thing about it. It was David Shannon mostly, but David was at *The Montreal Mirror* and so he had a big influence on what English media covered. French media covered that well too. It was a hideous thing, and he was murdered by kids, Black kids on top of it, and they were at the DPG [Direction de la Protection de la Jeunesse]. They were desperately in trouble. And it was difficult to make anything out of it, as a meaningful experience, but it was very sad.

JA: I was just wondering when you're planning the demo, Complexe Desjardins comes up, was there a particular provincial ministry in that building that was important or was it just central?

RL: It was central. I think it was because it was a public place. There was a big space just in front.

MH: The sidewalk's heated.

RL: It's heated There was no ice, no snow.

MH: Yes, on the 19th of March!

RL: And it was just in front of Place des Arts, a lot of people, tons of people were there at lunchtime, so everybody was around there on Sainte-Catherine... It's a very central place and there was a huge public place just in front. It was the right place to do that, to be seen. You have to be seen by people. You don't do that in a bar somewhere where nobody's there.

MH: It was a manifestation for Joe. As I said, nobody knew him, but we celebrated his life there.

JA: Oh, that's good.

GK: So, we're moving into talking about campaigns. One of the areas that ACT UP Montreal organized around was the cost of drugs, if you wanted to tell us a bit about that.

MH: Right. Well, you see, our objectives were different than ACT UP New York. We already had a single payer healthcare system in Quebec, different from all other provinces. We have the one that ACT UP NY chose as their model as a matter of fact. It wasn't called « the Quebec model », but that was the model. It's the one that Bernie Sanders is supporting now, you know, single payer. It's

really the best, particularly for the poor and for people that are quite ill. In their research, CPAVIH had come across the fact that cancer patients in Quebec got almost free medicine in order to keep them out of the hospitals. Okay, the healthcare system in Quebec and probably in Ontario works the same. The system pays your medicine if you're incarcerated, in the hospital, or some place, or an institution – you're inside – but once you're outside they don't pay. So, of course, cancer patients want to get into the hospital so that they don't have to pay for their treatments, and when they weren't insured that's the only way to do it. The Quebec government had come up with something called *malades sur pied*, the « walking sick », specifically for patients who had cancer. We wanted HIV+ people to be included in *malades sur pied*. It was great for anybody with a serious disease, a terminal disease – no, a chronic illness. It was to keep them out of the hospital and walking, living at home, and it was particularly effective for the elderly. It was a really good program. You paid two dollars for every prescription, so no matter what it was, you paid 2\$. Now, already AZT [azidothymidine] had been identified as an actor in treatment and it was declared as an experimental drug and therefore it was free, but it was administered by hospitals with university connections. And then, when Dr. Weinberg and company invented 3TC [lamivudine], it also fell into that category. So, our campaign wasn't really about AIDS drugs, the only two that existed, it was about treatment for opportunistic infections.

What we observed was, what CPAVIH and ACT UP MTL observed was, that working people with HIV, normally young men and some young women, would stop working because they had to get on BS [bien-être social] – welfare – to get access to free drugs for treating their constant opportunistic infections. On BS, you didn't even have to pay two dollars at all. You didn't pay anything but you had no money to live on and you became socially isolated. That led to malnutrition, to depression, and to early death, we felt. And so the idea was to keep them up and walking, *malades sur pied*, to keep them busy and integrated in life while still having their medicine. The Bourassa government saw this as just awful, a waste of time and money. They were hoping we would die.

So, we campaigned for three years about that issue. It was endless. Our major theme (MH demonstrates with his hands covering parts of his face) was to portray Bourassa like this, the Health Minister like that, and [Denise] Laberge-Ferron, who was head of the Quebec government committee that coordinated action against HIV, who busily spent all the money on preventing it in little girls in West Island where there was no AIDS threat, like this. We had three huge panels— you'll see them in the photos – of the three of them representing their approach to the AIDS crisis: « Hear no evil » / « Speak no evil » / « See no evil ». In other words, do nothing. We carried those panels down the street for years. We also had a 7-foot tombstone that said, “BouBou (for Bourassa), we will dance on your grave,” taken from the line, “Julie, we'll dance on your grave” by the Chicago Seven. Remember that one? Their judge was named Julius something. They used to cry, “Julie, we'll dance on your grave! Julie, we'll dance on your grave!” We used to have these huge panels. We did tons of different things with them. We also printed two-dollar bills with the Health Minister's face replacing the Queen, all kinds of crap. It's all in boxes at the G & L Archives. We found a lot of it and we sent it all to the archives. The campaign went on and on and on. They never bent. They never even acknowledged what we were doing, but when the PQ beat the Liberals in '95 they quickly brought it in. Not as what we wanted, but rather as an insurance plan, which is the pharmaceutical prescription insurance that everyone in Quebec has now. The province of Quebec

is the only one with a « pharmacare » program, thanks to ACT UP MTL and CPAVIH. Everybody says it's expensive. It's not expensive when you look at it from a global perspective because all of us pay less for drugs, and we're all covered, everybody. If you're rich, I think, the co-pay is seventy dollars a month. If you're on welfare it's free. If you're elderly... Mine is tiny. I think, a thirty-five a month maximum co-pay that I have to pay and then they pay the rest.

AS: Did it feel like that change happened partially because of those three years of work?

MH: Oh yes. We were sure of it. I mean it came immediately. Yes, we knew we had won. Everything else we did was situational depending on the daily news. If you look at the archives you'll find out what we were doing, what was the subject of the day. That was what the community met about. The general assembly decided. Every event was determined by them, and then we just did it. The one thing that was constant was *malades sur pied* and pharmacare, and it remained our principle battle until the very end of ACT UP MTL. ACT UP MTL had actually dissolved by the time we won it, shortly thereafter. You know, it was over.

GK: So, in terms of other actions that ACT UP would have organized or been involved in, there was the memorial park. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that? Was that an ACT UP project, or was it just something that ACT UP supported?

RL: Yes, it was an ACT UP project.

MH: Yes, a project that we started, really by accident, at the end of 1991. Each year during its existence, on the 1st of December, ACT UP MTL had a parade, a march, a demonstration. And it started somewhere in the West and finished in the Gay Village, always. The first year it ended at the edge of the Village at UQAM [L'Université du Québec à Montréal] at the Agora. Then, we decided we were going to move it over into the Village because, in fact, the Village was the centre of the epidemic. When you went, at that time, to Public Health they had a map of the city covered with red dots, one point for each diagnosed case of HIV; the cluster was all around the Centre-sud, the centre south, which is the Village. Also, drugs – just everything that you could imagine. All the various vectors of infection were all concentrated there. And the services were there, so diagnosis was better. People in the suburbs were not getting diagnosed. They were just dying. We decided in '91 to end in the middle of the Village. But, in '91, we had no way to end, so we said, "Well, what are we going to do at the end?" It's boring: we get there and then nothing, everybody just disbands? So, we looked at this little park. It was on the corner of Panet and Sainte-Catherine. It was nothing. In fact, it wasn't a park. It was land that the city had expropriated and were eventually going to sell. They did on several occasions try to sell it and we stopped that, and we declared that it would be Parc de l'Espoir. Well, we didn't call it Parc de l'Espoir. We called it...

RL: *Parc commémoratif des personnes mortes du SIDA au Québec.*

MH: It took weeks to come up with that name and still . . . this was problematic because we were not commemorating that they were dead; it was their lives that we were commemorating. That became a major battle. Nobody really understood the value of this yet, but, boy, we sure fought about it! It went on and on and on. I think we have a picture somewhere of that day. But,

eventually, the park became a motif in everything we were doing. [looking for pictures]

AS: Would there have been a lot of people in that first march?

RL: The first march there was maybe one hundred people.

AS: Oh, it's big.

MH: Oh no, a thousand. C'mon, it was huge!

RL: The first one?

MH: Yes.

RL: Okay. I don't remember that much, but okay. [laughter]

AS: Everything's bigger...

RL: It was always bigger than I thought because I was always in front, taking pictures. I was very close to the people in front, so I could see what's going on (with the police, etc.). It was very interesting because, when we got to the park, there were speakers there, and when the speeches were over, we appropriated that little space, putting up that big, big styrofoam sign, claiming the park. It was long like this...(gestures with arms). It was huge. It was a lot of words to describe that very little park. At our General Assembly, we had decided to use ribbons as an indicator of solidarity like the Americans did during the war.



JA: Dedicated to the soldiers who died in the Vietnam war perhaps?

RL: Yes, we put up some ribbons in the trees in the park but there was some discussion about the colour of the ribbons. Was it supposed to be red? No, we cannot use red. So, finally we ended up choosing black. We put black ribbons in the trees to commemorate the number of people already dead from AIDS in Québec.

MH: Here we are (showing the photo from Dec 1, 1991). This is what it looked like the first day.

AS: Wow.

MH: (Pointing to the sign in the photo and reading): « *Parc commémoratif des personnes mortes du SIDA au Québec* ». What happened was we decided that we wanted to end the demonstration in a significant way so we made these posters to re-name the park – the same cartoonist who did most of our work from the beginning, Pierre Durand, made the poster. Then we decided we should decorate the trees with ribbons and we chose black. Immediately, there was a split in ACT UP MTL over the colour.

GK: Yes, and people actually left the group. [laughter]

AS: Because of the red or black ribbon question?

JA: Because by this point, visual AIDS had started the red ribbon campaign and there was a feeling that you shouldn't have red ribbons because it would be imitating them, or do you recall what the...

MH: (Questioning himself) What were the two sides?

JA: Yes. What was the contention?

MH: Because black was death. That was all. There were 1200 people dead from HIV, so we put up 1200 black ribbons. Red could have been interpreted as the number of HIV+ people in Québec but who knew that how many? Anyway, it would be more than 1200. The others, Luc Desaulniers and Blane, said it should be red because ACT UP NY used red ribbons.

GK: ACT UP New York City had red? Okay.

MH: Yes. And, you know, ACT UP NY could do no wrong, so we should do that. On December 1st, we decorated it. There's quite a lot of photos of the decoration, of what it looked like at the end. It was quite morbid. It was draped in black. The city promptly came the next day and took down all the ribbons, so at night, the ACT UP Special Effects Committee went back. But, this time, because of the fight, the ribbons were no longer black, they were « rainbow », all the colours. It never went red. That was the compromise. Luc came back and Blane came back, and we all got over it. But, we put those up and the city decided to leave them. This caught on for some reason in Quebec, first in Montréal, then in smaller centres and, finally, in rural communities across the province. We would see television reports where, in some place like Saint-Something-or-other, they would be decorating a tree in the town's centre with four ribbons for the four people who died in their village. It became a very significant thing, a way of addressing the epidemic and of mourning publicly and to honour those who had died. But also it was a warning of the omnipresence of HIV. There was even a TV special about ribbons in trees and AIDS in Québec. It caught on, whereas the war things, like the Americans with their yellow ribbons and what not, didn't catch on here at all. This thing caught on and it was a way that you could talk about it. Janet Connors even came all the way from Halifax to put a ribbon up for her husband, Randy Connors, who was a hero in the hemophilia community.

Whatever the reason, it stuck and it stayed. Let's see, although it was by accident that we started the park on the 1st of December 1991, we had events regularly in the park in 1992-93. A film was even shot there called *Médecins de coeur* by Tahani Rached from the National Film Board. It features the Clinique médicale l'Actuel, 'Dr. SIDA' and his gang – Réjean Thomas. It features the clinic's founders, many of whom were deceased not long afterwards. It's a very interesting capsule, and she intercuts the decorating of the trees in the Parc and the installation of the final sign, which was the result of a huge fight in ACT UP MTL to get the right wording, i.e. that the park was dedicated to the lives of these people, and then we made a spelling error. [laughter] Fortunately, Glenn's finger covers the spelling error in the photo, so... I mean, could you believe it? Spelling errors in French never happened to us, but it happened then. [laughter] It was enormously difficult. Well, the City at the time, the City of Montreal, had a democratic system called community government and we had a community council who ran the neighbourhood. And Douglas and I attended council meetings every month and brought the subject of the park up at each meeting. It took us from 1992 to 1994 to get the park legally declared and officially named. The City chose the name « Parc de l'Espoir ». We didn't agree with that name at all because there wasn't, at that point, any particular reason to hope. We didn't know about triple therapy yet, and we thought that name was rather cliché and silly. There was no hope when you got HIV infection, not until there was treatment. And so we just felt stupid, but then the mayor decided to adopt it. It was easier than fighting it. In '94, the mayor was Jean Doré?

RL: Jean Doré.

MH: Oh, yes, it was October 1994 and municipal election time for the City. The mayor appeared in the park with tons of media and installed a plaque made by an ACT UP MTL member. The plaque is still there and is made of rusting Cortland steel; its message was about the park for us. This material was very fashionable for monuments in those days but also very clear in its meaning. Someone actually painted the Cortland steel with silver aluminum paint because the rusting was perceived as dishonouring people who died of HIV. Of course the idea was that it rusted away, wasting away like what HIV does to the body. And, of course, the steel turns brownish red, which is the colour of drying blood.

Then, finally, in 1997, the park was officially recognized, completely rebuilt, and inaugurated, but by then the crisis was starting to ebb. The number of people dying in Quebec was finally descending. There was no more crying urgency to speak out about the epidemic and treatment issues. In the early days when we started putting the rainbow ribbons in the trees, in the spring of 1991, people had started bringing teddy bears, beer bottles...

RL: Flowers...

MH: ...all kinds of stuff to put in the park. An imitation of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington. You know, exactly the same reaction. They had seen that on TV and they did that to remember people. Like, it was a coming out. It was really important because it showed that people cared. The public really adopted it. We had endless activities around it. We had photo exhibits. We distributed petitions and what not. All that stuff is in the archives. We kept copies of it all. Finally, it took us four years to get the park. And then they thanked us, the city councillors. Well, really?

They didn't make it easy and in the end when they got all chummy and nice with us, it was meaningless because it had been so long. By then it ceased to have signification for us. But, the park is there and we did it. There have been numerous attempts to get rid of it. The mafia tried to buy the back half of the park at one point. They bribed the politicians. The corruption at city hall here was renowned. We knew about it then, but nobody could prove it. But, this corruption concerned the park. The mafia wanted to buy it because they owned the restaurant next door and they wanted to make the back part of the park into a terrace. We met with a representative of the mayor and tried to explain. We said, "Do you really want people to drink espressos with all that crying and moaning going on next to them in the park?" At that point, people were having funerals in the park, you know, and meanwhile they're going to sell espresso 10 feet away? "You're just going to have all that happening on the other side of a fence? How are you going to screen off what goes on in the park?"

People would go to funerals and then they'd bring all the flowers back to the park for a second ceremony. You can see those big Cortland steel plaques in the middle of the park: they were for the floral bouquets that were brought from funeral homes. There were tons of them. Getting rid of all the dead flowers was a problem. We used to clean it every Sunday because it was such a mess, and collect the objects that were left there. You would put them away out of respect because they couldn't be left there. Anyway, we took care of it all in the early years before the City recognized it. We did all that. And it finally became the present park, but many people have tried to get rid of it. Not long ago a man named Mario D'Astos tried to get together a movement to eliminate the park because, according to him, it insults people living with HIV — it's so somber and it's all about death. Well, I'm afraid that's what was happening in 1991... Today it's difficult for people to remember what it was like in the '90s. You were there. You know.

GK: Yes, for sure.

MH: Everybody died.

Because of the agitation portraying the park as an « insult » to people living with HIV, and the confusion about its origin and symbolism, in 2009 and 2010, the Arrondissement du Ville-Marie (which includes the Village) organized a « Table de concentration » to clarify the role and the meaning of the Parc in the new millennium. In June 2010, the Table approved the following text that was written on a small plaque and installed on west side of the Parc:

Le cénotaphe du Parc de l'Espoir

Le Parc de l'Espoir a été fondé par ACT UP MONTRÉAL le 1^{er} décembre 1991. Sa création voulait commémorer la vie des femmes et des hommes décédés du sida en témoignage de l'indifférence des gouvernements et du danger que représentait le VIH. Après une lutte politique menée par le militant Douglas Buckley-Couvrette, le Parc de l'Espoir dans sa forme présente a été inauguré en 1997. Le Parc de l'Espoir s'inscrivait dans un mouvement international qui voyait naître de tels lieux de recueillement dans plusieurs des grandes villes occidentales.

La partie minérale située à l'avant du parc représente la mort, symbolisée par les blocs de granite noirs et le béton. La partie jardin en arrière reflète la vie.

GK: You mentioned there was a women's caucus within ACT UP and you mentioned already that there were some demonstrations that related to women and AIDS, but maybe you could just tell us a little more about that.

MH: Well, first of all, Blane was getting the message from New York and in 1990 it was decided by Peter Staley and company, the polit bureau, that AIDS had to be spread to a larger population. It did exist outside of the gay community. It wasn't just the four H's...

AS: So, Peter Staley, you were saying, or thinking about the ways they needed to understand how HIV and AIDS were broader than just the four H's.



Image source: Michael Hendricks and René LeBoeuf.

MH: Oh, the four Hs! At the time in Montreal, HIV was identified as homosexuals, Haitians, héroïnomanes, and hemophiliacs—the four Hs. And ACT UP NY decided that they were going to « straighten » AIDS. They realized that they would never get any reaction from the Reagan government if it was just a gay disease. And so they had to threaten the population. At the time, there wasn't as much discussion of down low in the American Black community. But, of course it was existing. It just wasn't talked about. And it was existing here as well. Young heterosexual women were developing HIV and they never knew where they got it. We decided that here, the emphasis on the gay male part and the drug part of HIV was too much. In Québec, we already had ninety-three women dead in 1991 from HIV infection. And in 1992, we used the same banner but we just put in 147, where the number « 93 » was. You'll see in the photos there. It was always on December 1st. So, we did that stuff around that, but it was left to the women's caucus to do what needed to be done. Prevention was covered in our publications, but it was mostly parvenu English women from McGill who thought we should organize HIV+ women directly. You know, stuff like that. ACT UP was a fashion statement for many of them. They weren't really affected; there was never an HIV-positive woman who was a member of ACT UP MTL. There were many HIV-positive women in Montreal, but they weren't members of ACT UP. They were down low for very good reasons. Especially, if you were a mother, it was dangerous—you could lose your kid. You had a lot of people that claimed to have been involved in ACT UP MTL. Jo-Anne Pickel in Toronto was definitely there from the beginning. She was Jamie and Glenn's roommate, and then there was

Paula Sypnowich. Paula was our facilitator. If you know how ACT UP works, it turns around the facilitator, and she did it and ran it. She was famous for the line... I wrote it down that famous line of Paula's...

JA: "I'm not your mother, so don't be rude?"

MH: Yes, that's it! That's exactly it. You got it. "Don't be rude to me. I'm not your mother."
[laughter] Because it was mostly boys and she ran it. Paula is still in town. I called her, but I think she must be out of town. She lives here. She didn't call back, but we'll get on it if you want to interview her.

GK: Yes, we would like to.

MH: At the end we'll talk about follow-ups.

GK: Yes, for sure. So, from what I gather there wasn't a lot of concrete organizing around women and AIDS issues, even if it was raised as an issue.

MH: There was no way to really organize around it. No woman in her right mind wanted to be public about it at that time. Women's organizations, I could point you to women's organizations and people that survived. They had their own magazine and many, many of the HIV+ women here were African and immigrants, and for them it was like absolute taboo. I mean as a treatment counsellor I knew some of them. One woman told me that she kept her daily treatments under the floorboards in the closet with the shoes on top of it. I asked her why? She said, "You're not African. When my sisters and my family come to the house, they go everywhere in the house because there are no limits. It's not like white people, Europeans. There are no limits and they're there to make themselves at home and they'll find it, so I have to keep it there." It was that difficult. I mean the kind of things that happened to women were staggering. As a treatment counsellor, I met a number of women who were in advanced HIV infection and nobody ever tested them.

JA: Wow.

GK: Right.

MH: Yes. A woman who came to CPAVIH for counselling—a giant woman—who once worked at the post office—told me she was dying in a suburban hospital when she met a young man, she said probably gay—who was a nurse. He was on stage... What's a stage?

JA: An internship?

MH: Yes, a residence. Something like that, you know, practicing. And he said, "Have you ever had an HIV test, madam?" She said, "No, what's that?" He suggested it, the nurses did it and that's why she was dying. By the time I met her, she was able to walk up three flights of stairs and she told me she couldn't even get out of bed when she met that young man who told her what it was ... And he wasn't a doctor.

AS: And if he hadn't tested her...

MH: Yeah, he was gay and he knew about those things. We're talking about the suburbs and she was a woman.

AS: Yes.

JA: So then, if I may, by that year... That was?

MH: '91-'92.

JA: '91-'92. So, by that point had the suburbanization, or the de-homosexualization of AIDS...

MH: The greening of AIDS.

JA: ...the greening of AIDS, had begun by that point, even here?

MH: Yes, we did it. They did in Toronto too. You all had that experience, huh?

GK: We certainly started to organize around other things. I was not in Toronto at that point.

MH: They did it. It was done, but ACT UP definitely did it consciously. It was also because women were not on the treatment agenda. You know all about Peter Staley and that. I mean they had to be... Here, women weren't running the treatment agenda. There was a little bit of research being done in Canada, but nothing really and little about women. We did what we had to do and we already had the medical system in Quebec that ACT UP NY wanted for the USA.

GK: So, we're moving into other areas that ACT UP might have been involved in. Was there any organizing around HIV-positive people in prisons that might have been occurring?

MH: Every August 10th is International Prisoners' Day, so we would do something about access to prevention materials and treatment for HIV+ prisoners. Strangely enough, I just heard somebody on the CBC yesterday reporting on what's needed in prisons. It's all the same things that were needed twenty-five years ago – needle exchange, information, basic information about how HIV is communicated, and... Well, sharing needles was the biggest thing, and sex – condoms and needles. Réjean Thomas, who is Dr. SIDA in Montreal – he's a big deal – the founder of a big HIV/Hep C clinic, and his gang, who are the subjects of that film I talked about, would take us out to Archambault, which is a horrible federal prison in Laval, and we'd meet with the « lifers ». These are murderers – they're awful people – and male. We'd try to AIDS educate them. They weren't interested in that. I mean their objectives were totally different, but we still tried. And we did regular demos . . . at least once you'll find photos of me being hung from a tree in front of the office of the CQCS [Centre québécois de coordination sur le sida], the Quebec government's AIDS coordinating committee. I'm in a prisoner's striped uniform. One of the leather queens had a really good leather harness, so we put the harness under the prison costume attached to a rope

which was tied to a branch of the tree. Meanwhile, Glenn Betteridge is dressed up in a size 14 Lily Simon dress posing as Madame...

RL: Laberge-Ferron.

MH: ...Laberge-Ferron, who was running the CQCS. He comes out and he's speaking to the media with cameras rolling and I'm standing there on a chair next to this tree with the rope around my neck, while he's speaking saying that there's no AIDS in the prisons – nah, nah, nah, nah, nah – like this (demonstrating Glenn's gestures as Mme L-F). He then pulls the chair out from under me and I was left hanging from the tree branch. Then some woman walking down the street starts screaming, "Stop that!! Stop that!!" She thought it was real. [laughter] The photo of me in the stripped prisoner costume hanging from the tree made it to the *Gazette*, which was really good. Not many media would show that photo. We did some media activity every year in August about HIV and prisons, but we're talking about a period of four years.

GK: You already talked about taking the pictures of being in front of the demonstrations, but is there anything more you wanted to say about that? Because, clearly, that was one of the things that you did.

RL: Yes, but I would speak later on. You asked about a picture, the photo... Because, what was interesting we do a lot of fundraising. I created many photo exhibitions to get signatures on our petition for the park. These pictures were really important because the manifestations, all the things we do, are very visual. It was like theatre and circus at the same time, so when people were in the bars and we're doing fundraising, we'd say we did that (pointing to the ACT UP photos). And lots of people had never heard of us or only heard a little bit about us, but didn't know what we were. So, we'd show them the pictures and say we did that. Things were different for each exhibit, and we were always looking for new people with other, original, ideas. It was really important because it was interesting first to show what we were doing, and then to try to recruit. We had lots of tracts (flyers) and things like that for young people to see what's going on and to interest them. It was a very fun period because people were very interested in the fundraising activities (the drag shows) and the exhibition and things like that.

AS: Had you already been a photographer?

RL: I was working as a lab technician for about ten years at that moment, so I had access to everything. It was very easy for me to do, take pictures and do big enlargements and things like that. It was very easy for me to get access to that.

AS: I think now everyone can take a picture with their phone, so we forget that it used to be that you would need to bring a camera.

MH: Used to be? It's not that long ago.

AS: Yes. I used to develop photos and you needed to have all the equipment to make them.

RL: Yes, it was in that time.

JA: I'm really interested in fundraisers because they're so hard when you have these very specific populations. And, like you say, for prisons and for AIDS in prison that's the hardest fundraiser of all, I think. Can I ask about the fundraisers?

MH: Sure.

JA: Do any come to mind?

MH: Well, they were all the same.

JA: They were all the same.

RL: But, one was different. It was a place that was not very legal and policemen arrived... Comme une descendre de police.

MH: A police raid.

RL: There was a police raid there.

MH: Where were we? Crisco?

RL: The Crisco Club, oui. It was an underground place and we were having a fundraiser there when suddenly there were all those policemen. They were checking if there was anything illegal going on there, but it was okay because it was a legitimate photo exhibit — with a permit. It was one of the first ones where we have lots of pictures because we had just done a lot of manifestations and things like that – demos. So, there was a lot of new images to show people. « ACT UP culture » was kind of new for them, especially for the young gay people who were there.

MH: In ACT UP MTL, we never took money from anyone. We always raised our own money. At first, we charged 1\$ admission on Monday nights like ACT UP NY did. But the drag shows became so popular we didn't have to collect money from our members. Quebec is like Ontario and New Brunswick, or Nova Scotia, in that nobody gives money. You know, the state should pay for everything. But, they will pay five dollars to see men get dressed up in ladies clothes, so we organized amateur drag shows. We had lots of them with different themes; once we celebrated Purim!. You've seen the photos upstairs. You saw how bad the drag was with the beards and everything. You know, it was just so awful that... [laughter]

GK: That they would pay for it.

MH: Yes, people would pay for it and they were all the same, variations of the same theme. Every year we had the World Ball for Unity, which Blane founded when he got here. Trophies were given. We gave the photos and negatives to the Archives as well as our trophy because we won one year. The trophies all looked like bowling trophies. Just really ridiculous Canadian trophies, big ones

like that (indicates 3 ft tall with hands). It all was inspired by *Paris is Burning*. We called ourselves the House of ACT UP. One time, in one hot competition at the World Ball, I think it was the first or second World Ball, whole teams of people came out in great costumes. There was one group of people, maybe twenty of them, that were really good. A beautifully choreographed number, everything, beautiful costumes, make-up... We were sure we were going to lose. We couldn't possibly win against them. Well, you saw what it looked like. We were wrecks! [laughter] But they kept taking drugs... The show dragged on and on before we got to parade to get voted on by the judges. Meanwhile, this group kept dropping... They were sniffing... It was the date rape drug. What's it called?

JA: Ketamine? Rohypnol?

MH: No.

JA: GHB?

MH: GHB [Gamma Hydroxybutyrate]. They were doing GHB and they got so daffy when they got on stage they couldn't perform their number or even walk straight... [laughter] We won! We won beer and a trophy! We started throwing around lots of ACT UP MTL's counterfeit two-dollar bills with the Minister's face instead of the Queen's. I was drunk and I pulled up my skirt and showed my panties, stuff like that. It was just an awful, drunk, and stupid thing, but we won the trophy and got the door.

JA: Thanks to a photo developer fluid. [laughter] It's a big circle.

GK: So, was ACT UP able to bring in a fair amount of money from these fun fundraisers?

MH: Oh yes.

RL: Yes, because the bar was giving us a part of the benefit of that.

MH: We got all the door—the admission fee, was normally \$5 per person.

RL: All the door there, and people gave donations because we'd go around giving condoms and things.

MH: We sold t-shirts for \$20 or \$25.

RL: We were selling t-shirts and... Comment qu'on dit les macarons?

GK: Buttons?

RL: ACT UP MTL buttons! Little stuff for people, not so much money, but we were raising money.

MH: We gave all our stuff to the archives, the left over t-shirts and everything.

RL: Yes.

GK: Great.

RL: It was nice.

MH: And one of our members, Richard De Luca, produced our own version of « Silence = Death »—« Silence = Mort »—sold it for twenty-five bucks. ACT UP MTL never had money problems. We worked at it. Every meeting had a part about what's our next fundraiser and how is it going to be better or different from the past to get the people in? But, it was mostly just silly gay stuff. And lesbians loved it too. They would get dressed up too. There were dykes doing it.

AS: Did it feel like... I mean, it's also nice to go to parties with people you're organizing. Was it part of the comradeliness or friendliness of it all?

RL: Oh, yes.

MH: First of all, at that time in Montreal, gay bars and lesbian bars banned the opposite sex. No women in gay bars, no men in lesbian bars. All of them barred anybody wearing funny clothes, including men wearing women's clothes and stuff like that. So, there wasn't anything we could do. That's how we ended up, all of us, at Sex Garage because we couldn't socialize among ourselves, ACT UP people, because everything was banned to us, so we had to invent our own spaces. Of course, Pierre Viens, who founded Club Sky, was always open to us, it was always open to women, it was always open to drag queens. And so Sky became our natural home, where we did most of our fundraising, so Pierre really paid for ACT UP MTL.

RL: Yes.

AS: Was he involved in ACT UP?

MH: No.

AS: Can you just say what Sky was?

MH: Sky was a bar. Does it still exist, Sky?

JA: It's been renovated beyond recognition, but it was always on Alex deSeve and Sainte-Catherine, and it was, I think in this period before the reno, it was a brick wall and back room kind of bar, right?

MH: Yes, with a pool table.

JA: Right.

MH: That's the old Sky when Pierre had it. It was the original Club Patriote. It was a boîte à chanson, a very famous French-Canadian institution. Somebody bought it, some mafia people, and they ran it. Pierre became the manager and he was very open to us. He was very friendly with Douglas, so we kept it that way.

But, *really* the best place for us to be together was the weekly Sex Garage. It had other names too. It wasn't always Sex Garage. Every week they'd change the name. Did we do other things? Well, we did endless information tables. I mean there was always an ACT UP table at anything, university things, school things, anything that we could get invited to. We were going and doing exactly like ACT UP New York. Resembling quite a lot Jehovah's Witnesses, you know, with ties and dressed up, all the stuff. We did it all the time. We ran table after table. It was amazing the number of fundraisers. We also did Christmas dinners. We were big on food, because of the losing weight and wasting being a symptom of advanced HIV infection, we were big on food. We did Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners at CPAVIH for hundreds of people. I mean huge turkeys, we roasted two turkeys in our home and huge hams in other people's homes and then we served all of this. ACT UP MTL had a kind of social service side to it. The more bourgeois members did those things and they enjoyed it.

It even produced the nutrition project, which started at the brewery. What was it called? Ekers Brewery, which was one the locations for Sex Garage. It was a huge space. Like a rave, but before there were raves, they were called « warehouse parties ». They had lasers and stuff like that and big sound systems. The same guy, Nicolas Jenkins, who ran Sex Garage on Beaver Hall Hill was running the party that night. I was there and I had all the usual ACT UP stuff. A young man approached me and said, "What can I do about HIV?" And I said, condoms, safe sex... "No, I already have it. What am I going to do?" And I said, "There isn't any treatment known, but nutrition will help." He said, "Have you got anything on nutrition?" I had some obscure things from ACT UP New York in English, which were quack shit, you know, nothing, and nothing else. So, I said, "You come back in a month and I'll have something." I found a nutritionist, a dietician, Michelle Cossette, who had written her Master's thesis about nutrition and HIV which was published. So I started using that, but it was so difficult to read and it was written as a Master's degree in dietetics at the university in the Faculty of Medicine, so it wasn't really for ordinary people. So, from that we decided to create a pedagogic program – « Healthy Eating Makes a Difference/ Être mieux en mangeant mieux, » with a resource book and a video – in English and French. This dietician I knew who worked as a science reporter on TV news, Sheila Murphy, was willing to do the research and the script as well as star in a video where we talked nutrition, all about HIV and nutrition. And then, at the end, we put in all kinds of extra stuff you needed to know about HIV treatments. I mean you can see where it is just from looking at what the treatments were at that time. We had ddI [didanosine] at that time. I had forgotten that! [laughter] This is by 1995. It took me a while to do it. It took a few years to do that. Teaching eating and healthy eating was a real big part of our mission. ACT UP Montreal did stuff like that.

AS: And you translated that whole thing?

MH: Oh yes. Well, we had a federal grant for it from Health Canada. It was published in French and English by the Canadian Hemophilia Society who administered the grant, but we ran it. It was all

our work yet we received no credit for it because, of course, you couldn't have gotten money for ACT UP.

GK: Right.

MH: But, that was the kind of stuff we did. The video was showing how to eat and what to eat, and interviews with HIV+ people saying "Yes, I'm eating better now and it's helping." Ron Farah, the founder of Ça Marche, Montreal's AIDS walkathon, is in the video, eating his mother's Lebanese cooking.

GK: That's really neat. So, ACT UP did lots of things.

MH: Tons of things. Every week was different. It was constant.

GK: That's great.

MH: Queer Nation?

GK: Yes. So, in many cities there was a Queer Nation that emerged out of ACT UP, or had some relationship to it. What was the situation here?

MH: Well, you know, Queer Nation came out of a pamphlet written by members of ACT UP NY entitled *I Hate Straights*. We split over *I Hate Straights* because...

GK: Okay, tell us more.

MH: ACT UP: Blane was bringing us the word from New York and the word was one and one was made with the word, and all that... just like old time religion. And then Blane was confronted with *I Hate Straights*... I mean it was not accepted by the ACT UP general assembly in New York, but it was a subgroup of ACT UP that published it and distributed it that year at New York Pride. We all read it and laughed like nuts. We all read it at night with a flashlight [laughter] because we weren't supposed to—ACT UP NY did not approve it! Straights were supposed to be our friends. We had just started greening AIDS to get them in and now we were hating them! A group formed here with four or five people and they had a little Queer Nation thing. The active people were Doug Coleman. You know Doug Coleman?

JA: Yes, the late.

MH: And Peter Dubé, the writer.

JA: Yes.

MH: They were the spark plugs.

JA: Wow.

MH: And you can interview them anytime you want. They're still alive and still here.

JA: Doug passed actually a year and half ago.

MH: Doug died?!

JA: Yes, I'm afraid so. Sorry about that. I thought you knew.

MH: No, I didn't know.

JA: Yeas, there was a memorial.

MH: I didn't think anything could kill him.

JA: I know he fought and, I think, it was his liver that took him in the end. Yeah.

MH: Peter Dubé's still alive.

JA: Peter's still very much alive.

MH: Yes, and he could tell you about it. Since they've squabbled I've never mentioned Doug to Peter. [laughter] I mean, a true ACT UP story.

JA: Peter was at the memorial.

MH: Well, I'm sure! After Doug was dead it would be fine. [laughter] We had many of those in ACT UP. As soon as somebody died everybody said he was their best friend, but they had horrible fights over whether we should have a moment of silence (one minute or two minutes?). It never ended.

GK: So, the Queer Nation group had very little to do with ACT UP.

MH: No, it was called Queer Nation Rose after Joe Rose, but also pink which is 'rose' in French. And it existed for a while. It served its purpose, which was to wake gay people up about straight people. You know, it wasn't wrong. We read it, like I said, under our covers with a flashlight.

GK: One of the things you described in one of the emails that you sent in response, to these questions, was just how many of the people that you knew died during this period of time?

MH: All of them.

GK: And obviously, this has a major impact on people. I don't know if you want to talk about that. You don't have to, but if you want to talk about what that was like for you. I mean I remember being in Toronto during the early 1990s and like, forty-five people that I knew died during that period, so it has an impact on you.

MH: In '89 we had already lost Bernard. He died in '86 and we decided that was it, and that nobody else would die from HIV in our inner circle. We were twenty-five who knew each other from 1973...?

RL: Yes.

MH: ...when we had our restaurant, until then. And they were still alive. They weren't showing signs of infection. I mean it wasn't obvious that anybody was having any health problems. They are all dead. The last one died December 1st 1995. It wiped out all of our social network and all of the collective memories of those people. When we rehearsed for this interview, when we read the questions, we said that that would be what we would talk about. Bernard started it; Luc finished it. Luc Lamy was a well-known film producer. He produced a number of Michel Tremblay/André Brassard and Denis Arcand films. He died on December 1st 1995. And then we had a second wave of dying with the people from ACT UP MTL that we'd met. These were new friends that we'd met after 1990. Like, Bill Morris for example, toute cette gang, like Kalpesh, Christopher...

RL: Jamie...

MH: Jamie. You know, everybody that died... Douglas was our spark plug. They just died. In fact, when we talked about it, we realized all the good ones died. The best ones died.

AS: One of the things we're trying to do because we can't talk to those people, we always invite any particular stories you want to tell about someone or things that they were... It's not necessary, but we have a section that is memories of people that we can't talk to.

MH: Douglas?

RL: Oui, Douglas. Je pense Douglas...

MH: He was one you had to remember. I think the anecdote we should tell is 'sunshine activist.' [laughter]

AS: And what was his last name?

MH: Douglas Buckley-Couvrette. You'll find his name written all over the text.

RL: The park is dedicated to him.

MH: Yes, the park is dedicated to him. He really was the driver on the AIDS memorial park project. I just sat there and watched him do it, but he was determined to get that. Little did we know, Douglas never told us he was infected. He kept it until the very end.

RL: At the end, yes.

MH: One time we were demonstrating—the Liberal Party had a convention at the Palais des Congrès. We had all the paraphernalia for *malades sur pied*—the big portraits of Hear/Speak/See No Evil, the grave stone, the big banners, the cartoons, and everything. It was on the weekend. So the previous Monday night, Douglas harangued the members screaming that he was tired of « sunshine activists ». You know, these people who just came out when it was fun, but here it was wintertime and the demo was early on a Saturday morning in January. It was going to be difficult, but everybody was going to be there because he was fed up with « sunshine activists ». So, come Saturday morning at 9 AM in -25 degree C weather, almost all of our members were there. These people were there because they had enormous respect for Douglas—he was a model militant and always ready to go to battle. It was a bright sunny day, but fucking freezing cold and, for once, Douglas didn't show. He was hung over. He got drunk the night before and didn't show. [laughter] That's Douglas! And that's how he got his ACT UP nickname, « Sunshine »—like René was « Cheetah »! But, Douglas drove ACT UP MTL like you can't imagine. He was always present. He gave his life to it. He cared about it and he cared about people living with HIV, and he wanted to win big. And he did.

AS: Had he been an activist before he got involved?

MH: I don't think so, no.

RL: No.

AS: So, he actually came into it through AIDS activism.

MH: He had a stepbrother who died of HIV in Ottawa and he was there for the horrible death. Then, he moved to Montreal and he found ACT UP MTL. We were a couple months old at that point. We needed big bruisers and he was a big bruiser, a big boy, and he spoke English and French fluently. He was very useful for us. He became our porte-parole, our spokesperson. He was very photogenic. He was good on TV and, you know, he could speak in sound bites. Shannon was much shyer and didn't like the media. Douglas adored it and was very happy being our spokesperson, so we used him a lot. In the photos, you see him all the time. Here's Douglas at Elizabeth Palacio's « funeral » in the park [looking at photo] Where is he? There he is. Elizabeth Palacio was a woman from El Salvador, who, coming up North illegally, got raped by a coyote in Mexico and was infected with HIV. But, the rape produced a baby named Jimmy, who was HIV free and a nice little kid. Because she had HIV, Canada refused to accept her. So, here's Douglas in the AIDS park with two caskets that one of the members made, a big one and a little one, and, in the photo, he's haranguing the crowd and the media. Then, we picked up the coffins. Douglas was a big man, he could carry Elizabeth's coffin alone, and we marched several blocks away to Immigration Canada. They weren't ready and the media was with us. As he barges into their office with the coffin, with the cameras rolling,



Image source: Michael Hendricks and René LeBoeuf.

followed by someone carrying the smaller coffin, Douglas says, “We’re just bringing in Elizabeth Palacio to be deported.” [laughter] You should have seen the faces on those people! We never met Madame Palacio. We met her lawyer. We had read about her in the paper, that’s all. She didn’t want anything to do with us. However, she got her Canadian residency papers. She died eventually from HIV-related conditions before treatment came. Jimmy survived and lived with her sister, who was here already.

GK: That’s a really nice story.

MH: Those were the kind of things Douglas, aka Sunshine, did and, you know, we’d want him to be remembered for that.

GK: Yes. Well, that sounds good.

AS: And David Shannon, who was also...?

MH: He’s alive.

GK: He’s in Toronto. We have to track him down.

MH: He’s apparently still in form. How did we deal with all that? Well, it was a wakeup call for us. We suddenly realized that gay people didn’t have any civil rights at all. We never even thought about it. We weren’t gay liberationists, we were socialists. We thought that the revolution would bring freedom for everyone, so we never bothered with any of that shit. We weren’t involved until HIV came along. And then we were only involved in the AIDS part, until Sex Garage. But, at that point, ACT UP MTL had to bifurcate. Because, just as we were totally inept here in Quebec, in Montreal, on the AIDS question, we were also totally inept on gay liberation. There was nobody; there was nothing. You know, a few knitting circles and what not, stuff like that. Nothing serious. The big work had been done in the ‘70s by a small group of people who had changed the Quebec Charter of Rights and Liberties and then everybody sat back, including us, and said, “Well, that’s done. Let’s just wait for liberation.” And, of course, it didn’t come. And then, with Sex Garage, we were forced to take it on... ACT UP MTL was forced to do something about it, so... we did.

And this forced René and me to wake up about our rights. From Sex Garage and what we saw about dying in the hospitals and the way that the lovers of gay men dying from HIV infection were treated—the emptying of the apartments, when « the family » would leave only the mattress while they’d take everything else—as the lover was at the hospital in the waiting room, because he wasn’t allowed in the hospital room with his dying lover because the family didn’t approve of him. We woke up to those things and we learned more about it because of Sex Garage. Thus we ended up getting involved in the marriage battle. And, after that, then we got involved in the struggle for dying with dignity, something we knew about from helping our ACT UP friends die. So that’s how we dealt with Douglas’ dying, all those people dying—we just did more.

GK: So, you started to talk about Sex Garage and you’ve talked about ACT UP’s relationship to it. Maybe you could talk a bit more about that?

MH: Okay. What led to ACT UP MTL dissolving... How long did ACT UP MTL last? It started on January, around the 5th or the 10th in 1990 and it fizzled out in 1993-94. There are some references to it. I mean we were recognized still, we existed long enough. Douglas and I would show up for things, and a few other people. We certainly did remain active around the park... It took forever to get the park named and approved of, so we kept a façade going. But, it had actually died in '94. It died because seronegatives insisted that seropositives be in front, otherwise it was going to turn into a seronegative bowling thing. You know, that it would be a club for, I don't know, for us and not for them. How could we determine what were the needs? They had to be there in front, but they were dying from HIV infection, the effects of advanced HIV infection. They were worn out. Many people with untreated HIV infection can finish with dementia, and that's what happened. A number of our leaders became demented. They lost it completely. I mean Luc Lamy, the film producer, was a brilliant man but was completely insane at the end, confined to his home. It was just horrible. But it took the wind out of all our sails. We just couldn't do it anymore. Douglas was not admitting that he was seropositive, so he couldn't lead and the others were just not there. And so we ran out of leaders. We ran out of a caucus of seropositive people that could help. We didn't have the critical mass to sustain constant action. So, that's how it ended. It just faded away, really.

RL: Oui, c'est ça.

MH: Very painfully, because of the dementia. I mean terrible scenes. They accused Douglas of terrible things. Nobody knew he was sick. They accused him of being a seronegative that was trying to run their lives. He never said a word. I never understood it. Did you understand it?

RL: No.

MH: Why didn't he tell us? I don't know.

RL: He didn't want to.

MH: It's his business, but still... He could have done it differently but he didn't. Okay. The raid was in July 1990 at Sex Garage. Sex Garage was a party. Well, it was a continuing party. It happened every weekend and ACT UP MTL members went there. The weekend before the raid, which was around the 16th or 15th of July 1990, the previous weekend René and I had been there. Most ACT UP MTL people went there. For some reason, we didn't go that particular Saturday night. At the time, I thought this place is not going to last. Nicolas was economizing on his locations. Had we been at the Ekkert's Brewery where there were huge toilets and space for rent-a-toilets, port-o-potties, it would have been ok but he didn't have any on Beaver Hall Hill (the site of Sex Garage that evening). And so the men were pissing outside and leaving the toilets on the inside for women; there were only two bathrooms in the place. And so they were reserved for the women and there was the long line of women, always. The boys went outside to pee. And that drew the police and they raided. Around four o'clock on Sunday morning, René and I were awakened by a phone call, "Get us a lawyer. Some people have been taken in." And we got a lawyer for the next morning, on Sunday morning, but there wasn't much we could do. They got out, anyway. It was

Sunday and Lucy, who ran a lesbian bar called « Standing » on rue Ontario, west of St-Laurence, contacted us. She'd been at the party and witnessed the raid. Lucy said, "Get all the ACT UP people down to my bar this afternoon. The bar's closed. We'll have a meeting and decide how we are going to respond to the police." So, we met there and we decided to have demos and ACT UP immediately decided to form an affinity group. A logical, typical ACT UP reaction... Because you couldn't do it in your own name because it would dirty the name of AIDS with gay questions. So we invented LGV – Lesbians and Gays against Violence, *Lesbiennes et gais contre la violence*. It worked in both languages. And it allowed us not to use the ACT UP name.

We invented LGV that afternoon. And we went down to demonstrate in the Village that evening—Sunday evening. And the police showed up. There were a lot of people. We were blocking Ste-Catherine Street at Beaudry Metro station, but it was Sunday night, with not much traffic. The police showed and said, "Listen, open the street, continue to demonstrate. Open the street and the police executive will meet you tomorrow, Monday, at noon at Police Station 25." So, we moved to the sidewalk and declared a Kiss-in for Monday at noon in front of Station 25... Oh! And we activated the ACT UP MTL phone tree. They don't have them anymore, phone trees, but we had a phone tree. We got hundreds of people to show up in front of Police Station 25 on a Monday, when they should have been working. It was very surprising to see so many people were there on a weekday.

Douglas went up, like Martin Luther, to the door of Station 25 and *bang, bang, bang* on the door. They wouldn't open the door. And when they opened the door a crack, they said, "Go away." Douglas responded, "We're supposed to meet with Mr. Saint-Germain, the Chef de Police." "No! Saint-Germain's not here! Get the fuck outta here! You want to be arrested?" At that point, sharp shooters showed up on the roof. And so our people were like, "Really? This is something!" [laughter] This was new for us, so what do we do? We were ACT UP so, first, for the media present, we all French-kissed each other with long, wet kisses, and then we sat down in the middle of the street at the corner of De Maisonneuve and Saint-Marc. It's a very important intersection in downtown Montreal; about 250 demonstrators were there. It took the cops a while to get together a so-called riot squad but they showed up eventually, about four o'clock.

I had been beaten by the police earlier that year at a student demonstration on St-Laurent, on the Main. There were student problems in those days too, and I sat-in with some students when the cops sneaked up on us from behind. I was in the back of the sit-in and they started beating us from the rear. So I knew what it was going to be like, the beating. I had already had sore ribs. I didn't want that, so I withdrew. But, Paula Synnowich stayed, David Shannon stayed, Douglas Buckley-Couvrette stayed—three of the most prominent ACT UPers stayed, sitting on the macadam at the front of the crowd, facing the riot squad. They became the heroes of Sex Garage.

Because, Ann Shatilla was there from CFCF (the local CTV) with a camera—the media were there for the kiss-in. Since ACT UP's media coordinator had announced we'd have a kiss-in in front of Station 25 at noon, everybody in Montreal's media corps was there to see a silly bunch of faggots and lesbians kissing each other as a response to the raid on Saturday night. The kiss-in went over well and then we sat down, and the media stayed. Ann Shatilla filmed constantly. The best footage of what happened at the Sex Garage police riot, is at CTV in their archives. You see it in various

films, used over and over again. It was very important to us, that film, that footage, because we used it later, much later. Anyway, once the police began beating people, most of us retreated. But forty-eight people stayed and were beaten, arrested and dragged into the police station. Edward, the Mohawk kid, was beaten in the groin and had a ruptured testicle, but the police wouldn't call a doctor until after the media left. The media left around six o'clock because there's nothing you can do after six with the media. Only then was Edward taken to the hospital. The rest of the demonstrators were released during the evening.

For ACT UP MTL, it was Monday evening, so there was a general meeting, of course, as we were living on ACT UP New York time. We were all at the Gay and Lesbian Community Centre and, as they were released, they came one by one down to the community centre with the City's left-wing politicians who showed up as well. We decided that we had to do something, so we officially voted to found LGV which went on to produce *La Table de concertation [des gaies et lesbiennes du Québec]*, which in turn produced the *Comité sur la Violence*. And the *Comité sur la Violence* was four people whom you see in a photo dressed up as characters from the *Wizard of Oz* with Roger Leclerc, as Dorothy with the red shoes, Douglas as the Wicked Witch of the West, me as the Straw Man, and a CSN union representative, Elizabeth Neve, as the Tin Man. The role of the *Comité sur la violence* was to get to bottom of a series of gay murders that was occurring in Montréal at the time, and, eventually, to negotiate with the Commission des droits de la personne in order to obtain public hearings into the violence and discrimination done to gays and lesbians in Quebec.

So, ACT UP MTL ended up doing exactly what they didn't want to do, which was to be gay liberationists. The last thing they wanted to do was that, and we ended up doing it because no one else did it and we were the principles involved in Sex Garage. Everybody saw Shannon, Buckley-Couvrette, and Sypnowich being beaten on TV. I mean Sypnowich was on crutches from having been beaten the night before during the Sex Garage raid. So, she's on crutches like this (imitating Paula) and they beat her anyway. I mean it was awful. They dragged Tara Parkinson into the police station by her hair. It was on the cover of the *Gazette*. It was just horrible. And so that's what happened, but it was the crucible. Richard Burnett, the journalist, calls it Montreal's Stonewall. In a way, it was because it was a crucible from there. Linda Dawn did all the stills shooting. You've seen the photos, I'm sure, by Linda Dawn Hammond. She shot that night at the raid and she stayed with us all the way. But, really, most of the people that got involved in all of this stuff were not at the party. Many people say they were beaten up and arrested that day. I don't know. We don't know who was in there. Paula was in the front of the packed women's cell for some reason and she couldn't see who was in the back. And Douglas was inside too. From what he saw, it was mostly ACT UP people on the boys' side. On the women's side, there weren't many ACT UP MTL people, but there were some. There were a lot of people arrested (48) and beaten. It was quite something. It became a crucible that led to the audiences in 1993 before the Quebec Human Rights Commission on discrimination and violence against gays and lesbians in Québec, and from that came all the rest of the changes that occurred concerning gay and lesbian rights in Quebec. So, that's how it happened.

We've got the photo of the first Sex Garage demo. On a Sunday two weeks after the raid, we had the first demo that started at City Hall and went up St-Laurent, turning on Sherbrooke and ending in Parc La Fontaine. It was there in the Park that Puelo Deir organized a party for the Sex Garage demo participants—you know, dancing and music and all that while local celebrities spoke to the crowd—the usual stuff of a protest party. From that experience, Puelo got the idea to found Divers/Cité, Montréal's Pride Parade. So, that's how our Pride came out of the Sex Garage raid. All of these things blossomed out of that moment. It was really not what we expected. René took this photo (pointing to the photo of the demo assembled behind a wide black, ACT UP-style, banner at the corner of St-Laurence and René-Lévesque), the iconic one representing Sex Garage: white lettering stating "NON to homophobia and lesbophobia." Lesbophobia wasn't a word in French before, but now it was. There's Jo-Anne Pickel (from ACT UP's women's caucus) in the front. You'll see the same banners as in the ACT UP MTL demo photos. The difference between ACT UP MTL and the response to the Sex Garage raid? There was very little. It was the same people using different disguises, that's all. Many people claimed to have been in the Sex Garage movement, but it was very small and really was mostly people who became members of the Table de concertation and the Comité sur la Violence. So, maybe maximum of twelve to fifteen that stayed all the way from Sex Garage to gay marriage.



Image source: Michael Hendricks and René LeBoeuf.

GK: You did mention previously that after all of the ACT UP stuff is over that you do start to do work as an AIDS treatment officer. Maybe you could tell us about that.

MH: Well, immediately after ACT UP folded, we all started moving toward HIV/AIDS services, that is, those who had anything to offer or who were interested in that side. I didn't want to work anymore as a systems analyst or anything. I didn't want to do that because I was bored, and I was already old. At first, I went to work at ACCM—AIDS Community Care Montreal, which is Montreal's seminal AIDS group. It's the only one that retained the original model. It still has the same model today, you know, as we had in those days. It's not for any one group of people. ACCM offers all of the services. Like, wrap-around support. I worked there as the Administrator. Then, a job came open in the Treatment Section at CPAVIH. I had already been working for a while as a treatment advisor at COCQ-SIDA [La Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le SIDA] in '97-'98, doing research for them. And so I was getting pretty good at what combination therapy was and how it worked when I was asked to come to CPAVIH. I got fifteen dollars an hour for thirty hours a week, and I did HIV and Hep C treatment counselling plus AIDS 101 for group

presentations (kids in school and what not) as well as counselling the newly diagnosed and people whose treatment had failed. The newly diagnosed dossier was eye opening, because of the wide variety of clients I counselled, but I had already known so many people by that time that were newly diagnosed, I was used to what it was like to be “newly diagnosed;” I didn’t think that the end of the world was nigh. It wasn’t like being an AIDS treatment counsellor when Kalpesh was doing it because I had something to offer. He had nothing to offer but aspirin and creams for the rashes, and stuff like that—treatments for the opportunistic infections. I had significant molecules to offer. It was a very interesting experience and I did that until I went to Stella. In 2002, I left CPAVIH and went to Stella [Stella, l’amie de Maimie] where I stayed for ten years.

GK: Do you want to tell us what that was? We’ve only heard a little bit about Stella.

MH: Oh! Okay. Stella is, it still exists, an organization founded by and for female sex workers. It was founded by Claire Thiboutot, a woman who had at one point in life had been a stripper but who was working at Public Health at the time. Claire founded it and then she hired Karen Herland to be the first director. Karen lasted about two years. Then, Claire decided to take over the director’s chair and she ran it for years. It became really a stellar organization. And, like that insane ACT UP preoccupation with publishing, Claire was a constant publisher. We produced volumes and volumes of print materials. Guides on HIV, and the rights of sex workers, etc., etc., etc. I worked as Stella’s receptionist. When Claire hired me, she told me that because there were comments that the place was French and female only, they were discriminating. So she hired a gay male Anglophone as the voice to answer the phone. With my accent in French everybody knew I was English, and they would still say to me... I would say, you know, “Stella, bonjour. Est-ce je peux vous aider? Can I help you?” And they’d say, “Do you speak French? Do you speak English?” “Can I help you?” [laughter]

GK: So, after ACT UP fades away, what’s your sense of what happens with AIDS organizing in Montreal?

MH: We still did it. When lipodistrophy became a problem, we organized Lipo-Action, which was supposed to agitate for treatment. But, I didn’t have the heart for it anymore. I’d had enough. Enough people had died. I needed something else. That kind of in-your-face activism didn’t continue really — it died out until recently when the younger generation of AIDS activists in Montreal started doing it again. Actually, most people went into services just like I did. Although, I did organize Lipo-Action on the side.

GK: Can you tell us a bit about Lipo-Action?

MH: Lipo-Action was about bringing consciousness to the fact that lipoatrophy and lipoaccumulation were serious problems. There was a pharmaceutical company in Montreal that had a drug that could be used for lipoaccumulation, but not for lipoatrophy. Still, if these things were possible, it meant that we had to do something. But no one in the “official AIDS world” would admit it. For the Ministry of Health, lipodystrophy was a secondary effect of HIV infection. But that wasn’t true. It really came from certain ingredients in the treatments, particularly AZT and others in its class. Along with the pharmaceutical companies, nobody wanted to admit it, so we had to

make it public. We did. It took us a year to make it public. But, even the AIDS establishment—COCQ-SIDA's direction—really didn't want us to bring all of that stuff up. They were afraid... It was like that crazy stuff in the beginning of the epidemic in Quebec about how talking about prevention would encourage homosexuality or drug use. The government and the "official" AIDS community were afraid HIV+ people would stop using HIV drugs because of lipodistrophy if we told them the truth, but that wasn't what we had in mind. What we had in mind was to wisely choose your combination therapy and to monitor your situation, etc.—struggle to get better treatment. That was what Lipo-Action was about. It lasted for a few years. It died around 2005, I guess. I don't remember now.

GK: René, before you have to go I was wondering if maybe we could get you both to respond to that question—Michael you talk about this in one of the emails—was that dramatic impact that ACT UP and the ACT UP activism had on your lives. I wonder if you want to share any thoughts about that.

RL: Just after ACT UP we were asking, "What are we going to do next?" We wanted to be involved in something. We were looking around—this is okay, this is done. And we decided to go with the same-sex marriage. We did that in 1998...

MH: '97.

RL: ...'97. [laughter] We thought we should do something for ourselves now because we did things for everybody else, so we should do something that's more for us. Michael and I, we were ready to do that. We were ready to do it, but we knew nothing about wedding stuff, nothing about lawyers, the law. We didn't know anything. We were like novices. We didn't know anything, so we decided to get involved with that. We started that.

MH: Well, first, we tested it. We didn't know if everybody was on the same wavelength as we were about marriage... By that point, we had arrived at the conclusion that marriage was the only solution for HIV-positive people that were dying. We learned that marriage makes it possible at the end to tie up all the little pieces of life, and, for divorce, it also helps. We knew that people did care about these things. During the audiences in '93, people circulated this poster (pulling out a copy) —here's the colour version of it [pulls out the colour version showing two men, one in a wedding dress, the other in a tux]. There were people that cared about these issues but, it was far from our reality at that time. We were doing police violence and Sex Garage. I mean, during the Human Rights Commission audiences, we showed the film that Shatilla shot at the Kiss-in, showing what heterosexuals were doing to us. We didn't really care about marriage.



Image source: Michael Hendricks and René LeBoeuf.

So, for Divers/Cité '97 we built this tent. (Shows photo) And you couldn't see what was going on under it. The slogan on the banner is « recognition of our relationships » but it's not marriage yet. And the two couples... There's Douglas and his cousin pretending to be a couple. [looking at the photo] And there are a couple of lesbians, also a fake couple, over here. And there were some borrowed children that are with the lesbians, like this little kid over here. Behind them is a wedding cake, but it's all under the tent and you can't see that as it's coming down the street. The



Image source: Michael Hendricks and René LeBoeuf.

tent was about thirty feet long. Once it came abreast of the people on the curb and they could see the scene under the tent—this was our test—how would these people react to it? Actually, everybody along the curb for the whole parade thought it was a great idea. They cheered wildly. You know, it was all fun. The kids were particularly lovely, and they turned out to be a great selling point for marriage. So we decided right then and there at Divers/cité 1997 that we would do this. If the homosexual and the straight population was ready for that, we would do it.

But, you know, we've often been asked in interview, "What was your forty years together like?" We met in 1973 at a New Year's Eve party and we've been together ever since, so it's forty-what now? Forty-three years? And we moved in together in '76, right? We always say ACT UP was the best years of our lives. It was so much fun. I mean as sad as it was, the funerals we went to, all that shit, those things. It was like being on a sinking boat. I mean why not drink? Because, it's over. I mean we were all...

RL: Doomed.

MH: It wasn't easy at all. Yet it was the best years of our lives, right?

RL: Mm-hmm.

MH: It sure was funny. We knew a lot of people who were in other aspects of AIDS organizing—and if you're ever interested in that we'll speak to you about it.

GK: So, some of the things we say towards the end of the interview is, are there other things that you wanted to talk about that haven't yet come up?

RL: No, we've talked about everything.

MH: I think we've covered it all! Well, it was a very diversified. It was very primitive. We're talking about really, very basic helping people. Particularly, the women's group that ran *Du Tête et du Coeur*—from your head and your heart—which was a magazine that Suzanne Desbien published. And the women that went there, I mean it was the bottom. There was nothing else that could have happened to those people worse than what had already happened. They did their thing, but they

did it separately and they did it discretely. Our role was to be public and to make noise, and we did that. And we did it quite well, I thought. But, a lot of other people did other things, you know, with audiences that were difficult. Like, drug users and what not.

AS: Well, we usually close... I mean you've mentioned some people. If there are other people that you think we should talk to.

MH: In Toronto, Glenn Betteridge, Jo-Anne Pickel, David Shannon. In Montreal, Paula Sypnowich for the women's angle and for what's it's like to run an ACT UP meeting with a bunch of nasty boys! David Shannon should be reminded that he once announced that "This ACT UP is a gay chowder and marching society." [laughter]

AS: We'll remind him of that.

MH: Yes. It was exactly what it was and you could also mention the fried eggs too—"ACT UP! Fight back! Fried eggs!" This was the way he described it.

GK: That's what I thought the slogan was though. [laughter]

MH: If you'd like to meet with José. José speaks French and English. Here is who he is. He's in town and still alive. There were several parallel movements, which is unique to Quebec in the sense that we didn't develop institutions for and of live care. We had little tiny groups, houses that we set up here. And those houses, the people that ran them are still around. It was called the Montreal Model at that time. It was much more friendly than your bigger institutions where people went to die. It was very community based.

I would meet with Suzanne Desbien here in Montreal. She speaks English, French, and Spanish. She really knows the women's dossier, but I haven't talked to her about it. I think you'd be better cold calling her and I'll give you the information. That's it. That's the ones I can think of.

RL: Michelle Blanchard.

MH: Michelle Blanchard, probably, if you're interested in the Montreal Model... It's Madame Michelle Blanchard, who still administers one of the houses. But, they've changed and evolved. They're now more like rest stops. They put you... You know, you head into bed, they bring you in there and tune you motor and change your oil, and they get better. She went from running a hospice where people die to... She's got another building, which is a supervised care for people that are quite ill. Most of the people, her clientele is made up of people that already were having functional problems. And there's a whole network of them. Roger Leclerc founded one called *Chez ma cousine Evelyn*. It was for people that were living on the street. I'll never forget the first week. Roger came and I said, "How's it going?" and he says, "You know, one of the people... We have only nine spots in the house. It was difficult to get chosen to live there." It was an ancient convent, an old convent, but a tiny convent, and real nice with the big room with the long table for the meal and all that crap. Like, a real convent. He said, "One of the gentlemen that has been invited, he sleeps on the floor. He won't sleep in the bed." Those were the kind of clientele that you get in

those places. People that are not able to live autonomously, and we still have them. Those places go on and HIV is part of it.

Isabelle Montpas is another one. She runs one that's been there since then, Amaryllis. You know the flower, the Amaryllis? Amaryllis was founded originally for people coming out of prison that were dying. They were dying in prison from HIV and they let them loose because it was the end of the sentence, and they would go there. And then it developed, it bifurcated and started taking in people who had social problems, and it still exists. It's people who are not easily integrated into the health system. But, she's been doing since the Maison du Parc. Originally, there was something called CSAM – le Comité sida aide Montréal, I think it was called. And it was run by a woman named Sylvie... Sylvie claimed to have an MBA. After the investigation of her embezzling, she did her Master's at Joliet, a women's prison. It was not her first time of doing that, passing herself off as a competent... Nobody checked her resume and she stole a lot of money, but she also founded the Maison du Parc, which is one of these houses. She named it after her brother who died of AIDS and she didn't even have a brother. It was all made up.

JA: Oh my god. Wow.

MH: She was a very clever confidence person. Isabelle was the employee there.

AS: And then she went on to do that.

MH: Yeah, now she's got Amaryllis. She's had it for seven years. I don't know how anybody could do that for seven years quite honestly. It's really hard, you know, because those people are sick.

So, those are the kind of people who you should get in touch with, I think, that are survivors. Like I said, the best people are gone.

GK: This has been really wonderful. We want to thank both of you for participating.

AS: Thank you so much.

RL: It's a pleasure.

MH: Yes.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]