

AAHP
AIDS Activist History Project

Interview Transcript 2014.013

Interviewee:	Anita Martinez (with Eric Smith)
Interviewers:	Alexis Shotwell & Gary Kinsman
Place:	Halifax, Nova Scotia
Date:	July 10, 2014

July 10, 2014

Persons Present: Alexis Shotwell – AS
Gary Kinsman – GK
Anita Martinez – AM
Eric Smith – ES

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

[A CONVERSATION WITH ANITA MARTINEZ AND ERIC SMITH. This interview used Anita's photo album of people involved in the PWA Coalition as central to the discussion. A number of the photos are included with this transcript.]

GK: Anita so, you got involved in the PWA Coalition?

AM: I worked at Bryony House (a shelter with support services for women and their families).

GK: Okay.

AM: I was an activist obviously. And I had come out... I shocked myself, I came out in '85.

AS: You shocked yourself! [laughter]

AM: Yeah. It was, "Uhh! I've got six kids and was married four times." I thought, "Ah. I'm doing really good. I don't think I can do that again." And I'm still, "Uhh!" The same with my birthday; I've got a lot of birthday stuff in there. When I turned fifty, it's like, "Wow." Anyway. So, being an activist... When I look at it, it's just kind of like, it *happened*. And Craig was like... I think Craig was in the office that day that I went for some reason. I forget what it was because I remember going up the stairs to the place that they had at that time. It was kind of over the...

ES: On Gottingen Street across from where Rumours was.

AM: Yeah.

AS: And people are estimating between 30 and 500 stairs. [laughter]

AM: Yeah. I would say so. It would take me a while to do it now. [laughter] It's like, "Go ahead on, Eric. I'll be up there in an hour or so." It's because we'd go to the men's bar occasionally. It's like, "Go ahead! I'll see you there." [laughter] Yeah, and that's the way it was – those stairs. And then you turned a corner and there was J.J. a lot of time, not always. Once I got there the first time, as soon as I walked in... I walked in with my camera and started taking pictures with Craig. And not because I wanted to, I had my camera and he was there. And that might've been what I was in there for because somebody wanted something documented, I think, or I wanted to document the issue. That sounds more likely, because it was pissing me off, some of the comments and stuff. So, I

wanted to, you know... “Don’t make any decisions or judgments until you know.” So, I had to go and I had to say, “What can I do?” And Craig was there. Craig was something else.



Anita Martinez, “Photo - Halifax - Craig Roberts,” *AIDS Activist History Project*, accessed August 25, 2015, <http://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/532>.

GK: Do you want to talk a little bit about Craig?

AM: Craig Roberts, oh my god. He was such a ham. I had no idea ... And he’s sitting there and he spotted the camera. It’s like his eyes got ‘waahhh.’ “Oh, I got some ideas,” he said. “I’ll show you.” Rumours was across the street. So he said, “Oh, okay, take a couple here.” And I think I took some in the office. And then he said, “I got another idea! Lets go over to Rumours.” “I think it’s closed,” I said. “No. No. I can get in.” So, we went in the front door and he was just wandering around. He said, “Lets go in the women’s washroom.” We spent a lot of time in the women’s washroom. And it’s like, “Okay, I’ve been married four times and I’ve known a lot of jerks in my time. But this was totally different. I’m in the women’s washroom with a guy that I met in an office and anybody else would’ve run for the hills,” but it’s like, “eh.”

AS: Here we are.



Anita Martinez, "Photo - Halifax - Craig Robarts at Rumours," *AIDS Activist History Project*, accessed August 25, 2015, <http://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/533>.

AM: And it was okay. It was so lovely to have somebody really want their picture taken, and I made the best of it! He was so happy when I brought those pictures back to him, because you had to pay for those. So, it took me a while to get the pictures back to him and he was just ecstatic. He was like, "Ohhh! Look at this!" He was something else. So, and Joanne Bond is a friend of his sister's. She was the one that sang, I think, at his memorial. Yeah. And I was out there when he was buried. He was buried over by the, what do you call it, the Titanic, over there.

ES: There was something about Craig... You got this impression that for a lot of his life it had been very negative because the smallest things, like giving him these pictures, it was like you had presented him with a thousand dollar check. It was just like, the smallest thing would please him so much.

AM: Yeah. On the one hand, he was a royal pain in the ass. But on the other hand, he was delightful. He was just like, "Wow! I'm alive!" and "I'm excited about life!" and "I like that!" and "I'm looking good!" He was something else.

ES: Yeah, there were times when he was being annoying. It was like driving for six hours with a little kid in the car. "Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" But when he was not being annoying, he was wonderful.

AS: So was he one of the early people in the Coalition?

AM: Yeah.

AS: And was he a Nova Scotian?

AM: I think they are Nova Scotian. I think they are. The Robarts... Was it Robart? Not Robart but Robar. And I think they are. I might be wrong, but I think they are a local family and a large family. I might be wrong on that too. It's what I can recall. I think that they are.

GK: So, you also came to take other peoples' photographs in the Coalition.

AM: [laughter] I don't think I put my camera down. Yeah, I did.

GK: Is that sort of how you participated in the PWA Coalition?

AM: Yeah. I'm not a real good speaker, and you don't want me to sing.

ES: Maybe we do. [laughter]

AM: No, I don't think so. Yeah. That's how I could contribute and get to know some amazing situations.

ES: Well, I might add a little there. There was also, and I'm never sure how to say this, there was also a stabilizing aspect to Anita being there. I mean J.J. being in the office was full of energy and could make anybody laugh, no matter how bad they felt. Anita has this down to earth quality where you can talk to her – and I don't want to overstate this – but there's almost a little bit of a motherly thing there. She doesn't show it, but it just comes off her naturally, and I think for a lot of the clients of the Coalition that was really important. A lot of them had been kicked out of their families and to have somebody who was maybe a little bit of a mother looking over you to make sure you weren't doing anything too bad, I think, a lot of that for them was a bit of a stabilizing thing.

AM: Because a lot of times in a lot of situations, especially today with the younger ones, being a woman and being kind of middle-aged at the time, it may have prevented a lot of people from saying or doing things that they weren't quite comfortable with, with a mother figure or, like today, a grandmother. After a while, people got comfortable... I don't think they thought I was judgmental in any way in that. I think I just wanted people to be with me, like "don't judge me until you get to know me." And I think that's kind of where I was. But it took some people a while. I mean, gay men just say what they think. And that's – hey, at least you know where you stand. You know where you are. You know where they are. You know where everybody is in the room... But at first it was a little trying because nobody knew exactly what to say or how much to say. And so, after a while it's like, "She's okay. You can say whatever."

ES: And she's the kind that will listen to whatever you want to say, but she won't pry. She might say, "How are you doing?" or "What's going on?" and if you want to open up, she'll listen for hours. I mean, God knows some of the stuff she's listened to with me. But if you say, "I'm okay. There's nothing wrong," then fine. She won't push you. And I think a lot of people appreciated that too,

because, especially in the early days, if you knew you were infected, everybody and their dog: “How are you doing? How’s your health?”

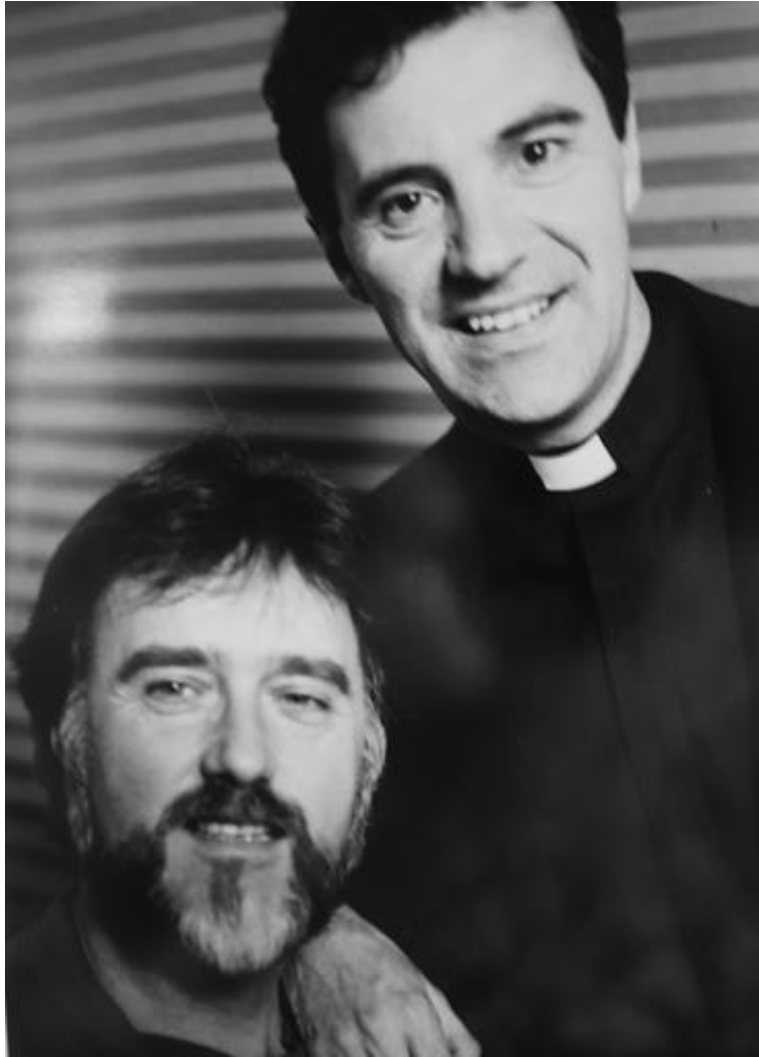
AS: Yeah. “How are you *really* doing?”

ES: And a lot of them were people who didn’t particularly care. They just didn’t know what else to say.

AS: And sometimes you just don’t want to have to go into it necessarily.

ES: Well, yeah. And I mean, in those days a lot of people were sick. And it’s like, “actually I feel crappy but I don’t want to talk about it.” So, you just say, “Yeah. I feel fine.” Anita was great at that. If you said, “...” that was it.

AM: “Let’s get on to something else. Let’s talk about sex, baby.” I had a fiftieth birthday party in 1989, I think it was, and it was a ‘shock’ birthday party, not a surprise birthday party. I did not know it was happening. But it was over at Veith House, and over the period of a few hours there was over 300 people there, but the first seven of the people from the AIDS Coalition – Persons With AIDS at the time – they were there. And actually, Father Mike was the first one. He could *dance*. So, he danced the first dance with me and we just glide around on the dance floor. But I didn’t know a lot of men in the “regular” world, and all of a sudden all of these feminist women saw all these men and nice looking guys too! It was going right off the edge. But back to the old way of life! So, and nobody knew. None of that went on. There were a lot of people there and nobody did anything behind your back or none of that. And so yeah, Raymond was there and Fred was there and there was about seven or eight. Mike – of course, Father Mike – and another Bob, Bob Petite, I don’t know if he was there. But anyway, it was quite something overall. It gave me a good reputation – all these nice looking guys. Yes!



"Photo - Halifax - Father Mike McDonald and Bob Petite," *AIDS Activist History Project*, accessed August 25, 2015, <http://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/571>.

GK: Do you want to tell us a little bit more about some of the people you just mentioned, like Father Mike?

AM: Oh, Father Mike was something else. I can't think of anything right now, except he was a terribly good dancer. He was great. I really liked him. You knew him a little bit more personally than I did. [to ES]

ES: Father Mike... I think, in a lot of cases he felt that he had to try and justify himself because he was a Catholic priest. And the two things certainly don't go hand in hand. How can you be a Catholic priest and end up being a gay man with AIDS? Within the community, I think there were some people who judged him because of that, probably quite a few. I mean, he was easy to get along with but I think in the back of a lot of people's minds, you know there's just something a bit more out of the way than the rest of us. Yeah, he was really active until the end.



"Photo - Halifax - Father Mike McDonald," *AIDS Activist History Project*, accessed August 25, 2015, <http://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/570>.

AS: When did he get involved? Or do you remember what was going on?

ES: It is probably '89 or '90, before he became involved. And obviously there were some issues with the church. He was no longer allowed to do most of the things a priest could do. But obviously the counseling part, he wasn't to do it. He could certainly do it. And I mean, for people like Craig that would've been important because Craig still had very deep Catholic views. Having said that, the Church – the leadership of the Church in Halifax – was always very good to Father Mike. Even though because of his situation he had to have most of his work taken from him, they still went out of the way to make sure he was looked after, especially at the end when he was dying. You know, it wasn't unusual for the archbishop to go and sit with him for several hours at a time.

AM: He died in New Brunswick, didn't he?

ES: Apparently, there's a Catholic hospice or something out there that the Church runs that he was at. AM: Yeah. He was quite something – amazing, amazing. And another person that kind of entered a room and calmed it down. I might be wrong. But is that your sense? I was at some of the meetings, quite a few of the meetings- why was I was there? Anyways, it was supposed to be all HIV. Why was I at meetings?

ES: Well, the board meetings, but they were also open meetings.

AM: Okay.

ES: Father Mike, and I assume it was because of his training as a priest, when you're debating something you want to go after the government for, Father Mike would lower the temperature and get people to debate it without swearing at the government or whatever so you could calmly do it.

AM: He had a knack.

ES: And I'm sure that comes from his training as a priest. He was certainly as vociferous as us on a lot of the issues, but again, his background, you learned how to do things more diplomatically than the street protests.

AM: Bob Petite is very similar in that respect.

GK: Bob was one of the people on the Advisory Board.

AM: I think so, yeah.

GK: You mentioned Raymond.

AM: Oh. Oh yes.

GK: If you want to talk about him.

AM: Raymond's something else. He was a dancer ... I've tried to look into a little bit of the background of his life before he came. There was two guys that were dancers previous. But Raymond was, he was amazing. He was a kind, gentle, sweet soul – really sweet soul. That's my version. Yeah, he was quite something. Unfortunately, I didn't get to know him a little bit more. He ended up at Morton House for a while.

AS: What was Morton House?

AM: Morton House was the place they opened down on Brunswick Street, which became a clinic later. It's now beside the Youth Centre.

AS: What happened at Morton House? What was it?

AM: It used to be a place where people in advanced situations would be able to go there and live there. Peter Wood I believe ended up there. They had a kitchen in the back that they cooked their own food and stuff like that. And people would bring in donations, and sometimes there'd be meetings in there and parties in there – you know, like meeting parties.

AS: Right.

ES: Actually, there was another AIDS group in the province, CARAS – Church members Assembled to Respond to AIDS – and they were the backing behind getting the funding for setting up Morton House.

AS: And did they also help out there?

ES: Yeah. They did the fundraising. Basically though, the people who lived there were expected to run it on their own. Most of it was a common area, except for everyone had their own bedroom. And usually the meetings, the group meetings, usually there would be someone from CARAS to facilitate, but it was expected that the tenants would work out any problems on their own. That's how people went through there.

AS: How many people lived there at a time?

ES: I think up to six. And it was named after Frank Morton, who was one of the original board members of the Coalition. And he was, before he died in '89, the longest survivor at that time.

AM: He was a teacher with a partner in the Valley. He had a bad story too. His partner, I guess, died before him. They lived in the Valley [the Annapolis Valley]. They had their own home and everything. And when he died... Frank and I were exactly the same age, I think to the date, and so we spent a lot of time together. There are some nice pictures in there of him, and really dumb ones too. I don't know why I put in everything. Anyway, when his partner died and he was devastated, the family of the partner came in and wiped him out – including the house. They just took everything. They cleaned the house right down to the dessert dishes. I mean, they just took everything.

AS: All the traces of his partner.

AM: Yeah, just came in. They owned the house together and he ended up with... He wasn't poor as a church mouse or anything, because he was a teacher, but he also was HIV-positive. And I thought that was so wrong because they had been together for quite some time. And he has a sister – Frank Morton.

ES: Barb.

AM: Yeah. I need to write that down because she was an active...

ES: Actually, if we talk about AIDS education in Nova Scotia, I think credit needs to be given to Frank. Everybody talks about Eric Smith's story ... Frank was actually doing some public speaking before, but it was not publicly advertised. The groups he was going in to talk to knew he was coming and knew his situation, but there was no publicity around it. But he was actually out there doing some education before anyone else.

GK: Was he the first person in the central group in the PWA Coalition to die?

AM: There were a couple before him ... There were three or four before him.

ES: From the original board members, he would've been the first. Then Fred. And then Dale and Bruce.

AM: Wow.

ES: But there were others ... I'm never sure what word to use, 'clients' is not the word I want, but other people who were there more for the socializing that died before.

AM: Yeah. I was sent over to the hospital to see Frank. I was so glad I did. I was honored when they said, "Would you like to go over and see Frank Morton?" I'd heard about him and for them to ask me. Wow, because I was just doing things right off the wall at that point. People were going, "What in the hell is she doing here again?!" And I don't usually barge in where I'm not wanted, but it was a situation where they did, they didn't, they did know me. They didn't ask any questions. Like, maybe J.J., "You're here again?" because that would be J.J. He still says the same thing. All the pictures that are on the wall of the early people of the original Coalition – it's not called the Coalition now – but on the wall there's some blue matte, framed pictures, and I did those. I guess, after I did a couple they went, "Well, maybe. Okay, lets send her over and see what she does over with the Frank Morton thing." And I did. They didn't have a lot of money for that kind of stuff and it's not something that anybody thought of, I don't think at that time, to document. Everybody was just in basic survival mode. Every time you turned around there was crap. It was awful.

AS: So, Frank was in the hospital and did people think he was dying then?

AM: Oh yeah. I think so.

AS: And so they said, "Go. Take pictures."

AM: Yeah. I don't think he left the hospital.

AS: You'd never met him before?

AM: I hadn't met him before and I was very honored and he just made me... "Come on in," you know. And when I left he gave me a big ole hug and it was great but I don't think he left that hospital at that point. No. Well, the fact that we were the same age almost to the day, we just got along really well almost immediately. So, that was good.

GK: So, the PWA Coalition actually started to ask you to take photos in particular?

AM: They did. Yeah. Like, "Well, since you're around here..." You know, there was a lot of volunteers. I'm just the photographer volunteer. They would ask different people to do different things according to what they could do. Lets see. We were both for a while... He was on that side, and I was on that side, and it took a while for Eric and I to connect ... I think it might've been Hazen's (Eric's partner) thing then.

ES: But I think one of the things in the early days at the AIDS Coalition – the original AIDS Coalition – we had a policy of, when people died their picture went up on the wall. Now, I haven't been into the current Coalition for a long time. The last time I was in, they did still have some of them up.

AS: And their picture would stay.

ES: Yes. Although, it got to a point once the two groups had joined that it sort of became political as to whose picture went up. If the people in the office knew you well and were friendly with you when you died, then your picture went up. And it was the same, we had a policy – if someone died, then there was a candle lit for a day. And again, that policy got screwed royally when the two groups joined because some people would still get a candle lit for a day; some people wouldn't even be acknowledged, other people – because they were friends with staff – would have a candle lit for three days. So, it became very political. But those were some decisions that were made in the early days as to small things we could do because for a lot of people that had died there was no public acknowledgement of what they died from. We had a couple of cases where we actually used black roses when families had funerals, and we would sneak the black rose in. And I don't think anybody ever twigged to what was going on. It was not something that had really been in the news – you know, using the black rose to signify an AIDS death. But those were small things that we did and that was certainly one of the valuable contributions that Anita made was her ability to do great things with the camera.

AM: Well, I was a bit insane. I am. I'm still doing the same thing. I've got all these pictures. I've been talking with Laurie in here. My daughter came up from Texas and she said – and looked around – “Is there anything in this house that's important to you?” And we actually talked about it, just in case I croak. “What would you...” I said, “My photographs.” She said, “Oh my God, you've got millions of photographs.” So this is great. And I love it when someone comes along and is able to use some of the photographs or all, I don't care. Take them away and make sure that they're where they're supposed to be, whether it's the archives. I've got some feminist women's stuff in the archives here, but there's nothing for the gay-lesbian-whatever community. And I've been invited places that – I mean, the transgender camping trip. Invited to places that, wow. And allowed to take pictures, whatever.

AS: Yeah. Amazing.

AM: I don't put stuff up on Facebook unless somebody says, “Please put it up on Facebook. I don't care. Whatever.” But usually I don't like it.

ES: Well, just as a side note, last year Anita was Grand Marshall at the Pride Parade. And of course the interesting thing is usually it's the Marshall who gets their picture taken. Not this one. You go with her anywhere and she's says, “Oh wait. I want to take a picture,” which for me is a chilling thing because I don't like having my picture taken. [laughter] However, the next procedure is with her fishing through her pockets to choose which of four or five cameras she's going to use. But yeah, it was rather interesting for a change to see the Grand Marshall not being the one being in most of the photographs.

AM: You know what, I don't think anyone, even for the video, nobody took my picture. Well, they took my picture, but as far as where I was sitting and stuff like that in the Parade, they got everything else but. I was in this little Volkswagon, like this bug, and right at the front of the parade and all the video and everything that's ever been shown started after I went by. [laughter] But yes, I've got so many photographs.

ES: Once the parade finished, we went to the community fair trying to look for Anita, thinking that she would be off somewhere with people. No, there she was standing in front of the bandstand taking pictures of whoever or whatever as going on onstage. [laughter]

AM: Rouge Fatale said something that was just absolutely amazing. So, I had to go up on stage. And they said, "You don't have to talk. We'll talk and we'll introduce you" and stuff like that. And so, I get up there and I did say a few words ... So, I said a few words and then I got off the stage and Rouge followed me off the stage and he said, "I am so honoured that you're in our community." And I thought, "Wow, that's pretty nice!" Because, being the Grand Marshall, it's like, "Why?"

ES: Rouge Fatale is one of the top drag queens in the City.

AM: Yeah. Rouge is funny. Anyway. I'm better behind the scenes, behind the camera.

ES: But part of the choice of Anita for Grand Marshall, there were two things behind it. First, it was in recognition of seniors in our community, but it was also a recognition that, despite the fact a lot of people did the protesting and the screaming, there were a lot of people in the background doing the stuff that never gets commented on and never gets appreciated. And since she came to the Coalition – in what '88? Twenty-six years ago. I mean, she's certainly been documenting the community since then.

AM: Well, I've been allowed. That's a pretty big honour to go around with a camera. I mean, there's been a few people that would like to punch my face off. But to me it's been an honour that people just go, "Yeah, she's going to take my picture. Who cares?" So, on my gravestone, if I ever have one it'll be the biggest one, it'll say, "I've got pictures." [laughter] Anyway. But the fact that everyone knew. As we were talking, I was writing because it says, "Do you have any suggestions on other people we would like to talk to?" or "should talk to?" I started writing and I went crazy. Like, it got right out of hand. And same with, "Do you know others?" Yeah, I do. Glen Walton, even though he's not HIV, not that I know of - and a lot of times, I wouldn't know whether they were or not, they were there and they were people and that's all that mattered. Michael or Michel Lecoursière, Hazen – that's another story in itself. Raymond MacDougall, Alan Ready, Craig Robarts, Glen Walton, Bruce Hare... Bruce Hare, have you talked to him at all?

AS: No.

ES: Miss Vicky.

AM: Ron Lee...

ES: Some of those are people who were in the book. Bruce Hare – Miss Vicky – is one of the longest running drag queens in Halifax and has single-handedly raised more money for AIDS organizations in the province; was the instigator for Manna for Health – the food bank for the PHA community.

AM: I've got really good pictures of Bruce – as Bruce. And now with digital, I've got amazing pictures of Miss Vicky down at the waterfront. We're going on a cruise and she's like still raising money and it's all about the AIDS issue today.



Anita Martinez, "Photo - Halifax - Bruce Hayre," *AIDS Activist History Project*, accessed August 25, 2015, <http://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/539>.

ES: Bruce has this ability, for the AIDS Walk, to stand on a street corner and stop complete strangers and say, "I'm going on this AIDS Walk. Will you please sponsor me?" This is why. I don't know if anyone's kept a total but certainly probably over \$200,000 dollars he has raised just himself as one person... And that probably doesn't involve the shows he's put on, drag shows that have taken in money.

AM: Yeah. I agree. I mean, it's insane to see him up there all gussied up and everything... What was the name of that place where David Moon lived? Cabbagetown? They opened up a bar in the

basement over on Spring Garden Road. It used to be the Dairy Queen. It was Swenson's at one time, right beside that. And I think it burned down eventually.

ES: It was Cabbagetown.

AM: Yeah. So, in the basement they opened up another bar for a while and David Moon who was the sorcerer or whatever. He was there and that's why I got the good pictures of Bruce there. Nice. He's all gussied up and everything in his man clothes [laughter] ... I don't know how I got into these places. I was in places that, I don't know, where angels fear to tread.

AS: So, have you always been a photographer or did you sort of come into...?

AM: Yeah, since I was about eight years old. I won a contest for the Lion's Club, what do you call it? 'Halloween something-something,' they used to put on big concerts or something to keep us off the street. And I won a contest and I won a camera ... I've still got that baby... This is not about me. I got a camera and I started. It's insanity. It's not, "I'm going to be the best photographer in the world," it's just that I'm trying to capture all those moments that to me are important in life. Why I did it? I've never known why I'm actually doing it.

ES: But then you took some courses, didn't you?

AM: Yes, of course. You know, to see if I could learn stuff and thank god because I learned all about digital. Am I ever lucky there, because... If everybody in the world couldn't have a computer, I wasn't going to have one, you know? Yeah. Well, here I am and thank god for computers. And the same with Eric, it's like you're similar. Like we've often said, "What are we doing? What are we going to do with all this stuff?" It's probably keeping us alive and excited about life. He does all the political stuff, and I'm the insane photographer and I've got all these photographs. It's like, what's going to happen if we go onto our next journey in life without... Where's all this stuff going to go?

ES: She's covered the whole history from the original Coalition. I mean, Raymond and Hazen, and those people who have gone now. Up until the characters who are sort of in the front of the community nowadays.

AM: Yeah, and I don't even think I know any of them except for the guys who kind of run it. There's so much political infighting that you kind of don't want to be tarnished with it. And you don't know exactly what to say to this one because you like this one, and you like that one but you... Yeah, used to be working together for a common goal and "let's work this out together" and they gather. Then that second one came in when it became a political hot potato type of thing, where people could make money off of it. Typical. I think that's when it kind of got tarnished.

GK: What exact moment are you referring to with this second one coming in?

AM: We all seemed to be working together for the same goal for each other, and all that stuff. Like, right now... If somebody came and realized that they were HIV-positive, where do they go? And what happens now? You don't hear anything. And when you do hear something it's this person

talking about that organization and not in a good way. So, you just don't know exactly where to go. I mean, the people are still the same out there and they're still vulnerable. If I'm feeling that ...

AS: What are they feeling?

ES: I think it's that whole issue of, originally, there was a cause everyone was fighting for, where now it's, "I'll get involved to see what I can get out of it." I mean, this is off-topic but it's certainly what we're finding with the organizing for Pride the last few years. It's not one cohesive group organizing Pride; it's factions with their own agenda.

AM: Even internally they're fighting. I mean, badmouthing. I was so involved last year, it's like, you didn't know who to talk to. This one would say this and that's... I learned to shut my mouth and take the pictures, shut my mouth and take the pictures.

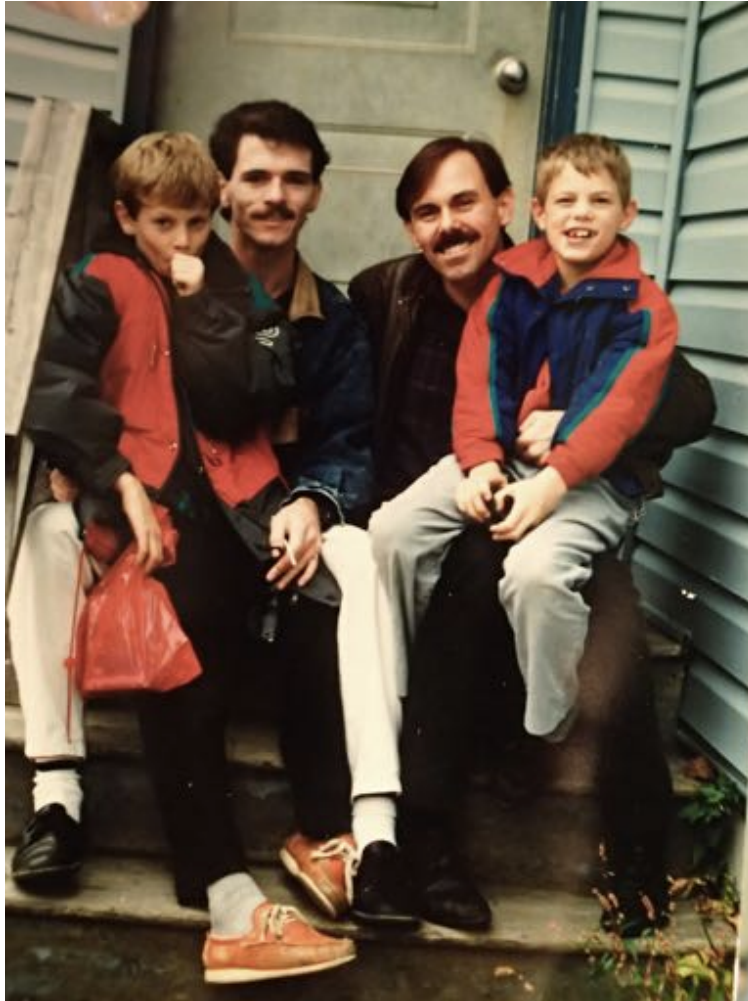
GK: Sometimes the pictures can capture more.

AM: Oh believe me, you should take a look at some of those eyes – mmm, mmm, mmm. Yeah.

GK: So, maybe one thing we could do is... We're mostly focused on the period from '86 through to '96. You've mentioned a couple of other people that I don't think you've talked about. And I'm also aware that talking about people who are now dead is sometimes difficult, so you shouldn't feel compelled to talk about people, but you started to talk about Raymond and didn't say very much. And Hazen is another. Peter Wood you mentioned.

AS: Bruce and Dale.

AM: Yeah. Bruce and Dale was something else. They were tight. Dale was a really good singer. I think he had a sister if I'm not mistaken. And Bruce had the kids and they lived... You lived in that area too at one time. [to ES] And I would take them up to the Valley and go to pick up the kids and stuff like that. One thing that threw me and made me feel really bad was, and at the moment I hadn't understood it... Was it Bruce that went off? Was it Dale died first, right?



“Photo - Halifax - Bruce's children with Bruce (Davidson) and Dale,” *AIDS Activist History Project*, accessed August 25, 2015, <http://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/577>.

ES: Uh huh.

AM: And I can't remember exactly the dates on this. It was during the time that Dale was in trouble that Bruce, I think, was infected – the brain was infected. Do you remember? He got odd. And it threw me. Like, this is the man that he loved and they were really, really tight and then all of a sudden Dale is ill and he's barking. Like, he's angry. It could be the way that people handle that situation too, but I think that he had just gone off and something had affected his brain. I think somebody told me that, if I'm not mistaken. What was your take on that? Because you were kind of close to that whole group.

ES: Yeah, we actually lived in the same house. It was unfortunate at just the time that Dale was most seriously in need of help, Bruce was having his own health issues.

AM: Uh huh. And we didn't know that at that time, or I didn't.

ES: Yeah. And I mean, it did strike everybody because they were the kind of couple who you only have to spend five minutes with and you know they had found the partner that they were meant to be with; without them even talking about each other you know, just the interaction. It's like, "okay, this is meant to be." So, I think a lot of people were surprised at how, because up until that time Bruce had been very involved with Dale's care, how suddenly there was this change. And it took a while for people to realize that actually there were problems with Bruce.

AM: It did me. Yeah. There's sometimes I'd be with Bruce and sometimes I'd be with Dale, and then there would be a time when I would be going someplace or doing something with Bruce and he would be running Dale down. And me with a counseling background, I'm trying to lighten it up and you couldn't lighten it up. You just couldn't lighten it up.

AS: Right, because there was something else happening.

AM: And I didn't know that. I didn't know.

ES: I think, what threw some of us is we weren't sure if it was a health issue with Bruce or if he was looking at Dale and seeing, "Is this what's going to happen to me?" and was not able to deal with that part of it. So, it took a while to figure out.

AS: Right. Or if he's angry that, "You're leaving me, and how can you?"

ES: Yeah, there were so many possibilities of what could've been going on. And again, when you get into brain infections, it takes a while before you actually realize simply because there's no outwards signs that there's an illness. So, you do look at all these other things first.

AM: Wasn't it at the point, when that was happening, that the family kind of entered a little bit more than usual?

ES: Yeah.

AS: Dale's family or Bruce's?

AM: I think it was Dale's family, if I'm not mistaken – sister, maybe other parts of the family. I don't know exactly.

ES: I think there'd been an estrangement there because, I believe, Dale came from Newfoundland, again, from a Pentecostal or one of the, for lack of a better term, from a right-wing fundamentalist background. And I think, there'd been a fairly deep rift in the family. Again, we saw in so many cases people felt alienated from their families. When the crisis came at the end, his family did manage to come around somewhat.

AM: Some would pull themselves together. Some had been totally supportive. Michel Lecoursière was one of those people. His family were amazing. Amazing. For a while there was a person chosen to be a buddy, like a buddy system, to the people with HIV and I was chosen to be Michel's

buddy-type thing. There was also another couple that he lived with – a female couple. But his parents were amazing.



"Photo - Halifax - Mike Lacourciere," *AIDS Activist History Project*, accessed August 25, 2015, <http://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/576>.

AS: And who was he? Was he involved with the Coalition?

AM: He was around the Coalition. I don't think politically involved. I don't think he was.

ES: No, he was more for the social contact. He was one of the first ones we set up a buddy system with. He wanted to die at home. And towards the end we had to have a schedule where someone was there all the time. And the last while, again it was more morphine, you had to be able to administer morphine drops and that kind of stuff. With Michel it was actually a bit dangerous, because he had this really bad habit of – just as you were about to squeeze the drops – would say some scandalous joke, would have you almost in tears and you're thinking, "Oh my god, did I squeeze too many drops?" [laughter]

AM: He was up and down too. I think he was ordinarily, before he got infected. I think, way before that he was up and down. Like sometimes, he'd be just this friendly... And then there would be

other times when he was like “Raarr!!” You just didn’t know sometimes what you’d be walking into. So, he was up and down. And I think his parents told me that was his thing. Today, I think it’s probably a different diagnosis, whatever. Did you see him that way?

ES: Actually, all the times I was there, and I was in the day before he died ... I never saw those rough spots. He was always sort of a bit of Quebec ‘bonhomme’ about him, sort of almost like a lumberjack look. But even when you were having a serious conversation, there was sort of a twitch in the corner of his mouth, so you weren’t quite sure how much to believe what he was saying, or he was trying to yank your chain.

AM: Yes. Exactly. But you know, I’m thinking as you go through the books page by page, I think there’s actually a note from maybe Dale’s sister or something like that. There’s a lot of stuff. I didn’t realize there was so much stuff.

GK: You’ve got tons of stuff there.

AM: Yeah. So, you could go page by page and there’d be a couple... Yeah, it’d be a lot of stuff. There’s a lot of stories. There’s so many stories there.

ES: But yeah, Michel, he wasn’t on the board. He was more there for the social aspect. Raymond was on the board.

AS: Raymond?

ES: MacDougall.

AM: He was a dancer.



Anita Martinez, "Photo - Halifax AIDS activist Raymond MacDougall," *AIDS Activist History Project*, accessed August 25, 2015, <http://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/406>.

ES: He's the one who had some acting abilities and had the headshots and quite the looker. I think there were a lot of ladies who were kind of upset that he was gay. But he sort of got into the politics of it. So, he and Hazen had been a couple when they lived in Ontario. They moved down here because Hazen and his family were from Cape Breton. By the time he moved down here, they were not a couple but they were still the best of friends. Raymond was usually very quiet. I don't know why, there's something in the back of my mind that says he was somewhat associated with Buddhism...

AM: I think he was. Yeah. There was a couple, a few people that were involved because in some of the movie pictures, there's a number of Buddhist women that are very involved in that.

ES: But there were times when Raymond could throw that off. And again, this is when you get into the political stuff. He could be quite vociferous.

AM: Yeah. He was good though. He was really good. I think with Raymond, it's the first time that I had... I never knew about Kaposi Sarcoma until I met Raymond and through him, he was the first

one that explained all that to me. And it was good, the more knowledge you have, the more you get to understand what the hell you're dealing with.

ES: I remember the last time Raymond was in hospital – the day before he died. Hazen was also in the hospital with pneumonia, and I remember getting him in a wheelchair and taking him down to Raymond's room to say goodbye.

AM: Yeah, wow.

ES: Yeah, that was one of the rougher times.

AM: Yeah. It was the worst of times, it was the best of times. That was so true, because one minute you'd be dancing at a masquerades ball and the next day you'd be saying goodbye to somebody in the hospital.

ES: I remember that scene with Raymond and Hazen because Hazen died like, three months later. And I know while he was trying to say goodbye to Raymond, probably the biggest part of his mind was taken up "Am I going to get out of here this time, or is that going to be me in a couple of days?" Yeah. It was really difficult.

AM: Yeah. The eighth floor of the hospital, I remember it well.

AS: But you knew that Raymond was dying.

ES: Yeah. We knew that. That's why, I had to explain to Hazen that within a day or two. And Hazen shouldn't have gotten out of bed, but he determined that he was going to go and say goodbye. So, I took him down.

AM: That was quite something. Yeah.

GK: I don't know if there's any other memories. If you'd like to look at some of the pictures too.

AM: Yeah, let me just take a look here – Craig Robarts, Glen Walton ... The movie. Yeah. What was the name of that again?

ES: "Life After Diagnosis." Glen Walton was the, I always get mixed up, director, producer,

whatever. AM: Yeah. And they're National Film Board. Was that the National Film Board?

ES: I think it may be.

GK: Okay. So, we'll look into it.

AM: And then there's Dineta. It was a TV, CBC maybe – "The Fallen Angel".

GK: It was called “The Fallen Angel”?

AM: I think it was “The Fallen Angel,” yeah.

GK: And it was CBC?

AM: I think it may have been CBC. I might be wrong, but I’m pretty sure it’s CBC.

ES: Yeah. They did that kind of stuff, because they did a couple of me. I remember the first one was showing the beginning of October ’87. Basically they were down home for a week following me all over the place.

AM: I’d like to see some of those again.

GK: We’ll try and find them.

AM: That would be nice. I wonder if they would release them now.

GK: Sometimes they don’t, sometimes they do.

ES: The “Life after Diagnosis” one should be, because it was funded through Health Canada.

GK: I’m pretty sure I saw “Life After Diagnosis” but it was so long ago.

AM: Yeah, and I loved that movie, Torch Song Trilogy.

ES: I found “Life After Diagnosis” really embarrassing. Glen Walton put me on the spot with a question he asked me.

AS: What did he ask you?

ES: I had said something... We were talking about people not getting tested and I said, “Well, one of the issues I think people have is they’re afraid if they test positive it means they can’t have sex anymore.” And I said, “That’s definitely not true” and Glen said, “How do you know it’s not true?” And I go, “Hehehe” (and raised eyebrows) or something stupid like that. [laughter] And he’s just sitting there. At the premiere when that comes on, the place just erupts in laughter and I think, “You surely could have expressed it somewhat better.”

AS: But then did anyone come up and be like, “Here’s my number.” [laughter]

ES: Actually, I was already beating them off with a stick. It’s amazing how you suddenly become much more popular when you are somewhat famous.

[Looking at the photos]

AM: Bruce and Dale lived in this small apartment.

AS: This was their apartment over on...

AM: Cornwallis.

AS: Spring Garden or?

ES: Their first apartment was on Cornwallis Street. There were three floors. They were on the first floor; when they moved up to the second floor, Hazen and I moved into the first floor. When they moved up to the third floor, we moved up to the second; and when they moved out, we moved up to the third floor. The owner of the building was great. When Dale and Bruce moved to the second floor, he asked them if they knew of anybody else with HIV who needed a place.

AM: Oh wow, because everybody had a hard time.

ES: So, we were extremely lucky. There were never any issues about that.

AM: But there were around town, because there were some stories about that. I don't have the details or know anybody right now who would know the details on that, but there was a lot of discrimination of course. Dinetia Johnson's story of the rubber gloves was typical of that.

AS: Can you tell us about Dinetia?



"Photo - Halifax - Dineta "The Fallen Angel" (CBC)," *AIDS Activist History Project*, accessed August 25, 2015, <http://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/544>.

AM: Dineta Johnson... On her record, in the hospital in the Valley, she had AIDS written across it. So, every time she had a headache or anything like that, they said, "Oh, here. Take two aspirins." They wouldn't touch her. This one time she had passed out. She had a temperature and she had a bad headache. Again, they gave her aspirin and she ended up back in the hospital again. She couldn't take it anymore. They put her in an ambulance and sent her down to the hospital. By the time she got here she was gone.

AS: They sent her from the Valley to Halifax?

AM: Yeah, from the Valley to Halifax. She died.

AS: She died?!

AM: She had meningitis. She was only 31. She had three children and somebody swooped in almost immediately and took the three kids. Two of them for sure went to foster homes. I don't know what the third, the youngest, Andrew, I don't know where he went at all. But what happened was her father took the two oldest ones right away and poisoned their minds so bad – "Dineta was a prostitute; she was no good; blah blah blah blah" ... So, I'm on Facebook a couple of years ago and I ran into Kimberley, the oldest, the daughter – remember her, Eric? – and then she had a son. The daughter, who initially wanted to hear more about her mom, didn't want to hear too much. And then the boyfriend that she was with at the time, they broke up, but the mother called me, and she said...

AS: The boyfriend's mother?

AM: The boyfriend's mother, that she broke up with, called me and said Dineta's daughter, Kimberley, was so badly wrecked from what her father, [Kimberly's] grandfather, had told her about her mom, and none of it was true. It was terrible.

AS: Oh, that's awful.

AM: Because she loved the kids more than anything. So, she was poisoned and ultimately kind of destroyed, and the next son down, I'm pretty sure he's either dead or he's in jail. I was watching him on Facebook and some of the stuff that was coming... It was bad. It was so awful.

ES: Was it a Pentecostal family?

AM: Yeah, Jehovah's Witness

ES: And she was infected the first time she had sex.

AS: She was a virgin.

AM: She was a virgin. That's how I met her. I worked at Bryony House. We went up to the office upstairs and we talked about it. Remember? [to ES] It was facing South Park Street... She said that she was calling the doctor and she wanted me to be there with her. And so she called the doctor and I'm pretty sure it was Doctor Fraser at the North End Clinic. She called him and asked him what the results of her blood test was because she was kind of attacked... She was on her first date in town. She had left her family, her Jehovah's Witness family, and broke out, and she was like 21-22.

AS: She was young.

AM: Yeah. She broke out of the family and came into town still a virgin. So, she went on her first date. And it was I think was with an African Canadian/American. Anyway, she went on her first date and while she was on her date... She went to the bathroom... She had a couple of drinks, that's got nothing to do with anything, but she went to the bathroom and on the way to the bathroom, and it was a relatively new Sheraton Hotel then, on the way to the bathroom from the hallway or something, someone dragged her into a bedroom. They opened the door and just grabbed her and dragged her in. She didn't report. She was so embarrassed and she blamed herself, so she didn't report. But something was going on with her about a month later... She was with somebody that was beating on her or something – a new boyfriend – and she ended up at Bryony House. Anyways, so she knew something was wrong. She just wanted to be sure that she was okay, went to the doctor, got all these tests, and she said the doctor told me to call. She called and they told her... Now, this was at the height of the fear and the scare and the horror, and this doctor – I'm pretty sure it was Fraser at the North End Clinic – told her over that she had HIV, over the phone. They didn't give her any backup, nothing, not a thing. And I think at that point she was going with somebody from Africa, a young Black man from Africa. So, it just went from there.

ES: Again it shows you the religion thing. Her first sexual experience and because of that she was branded by her family as a prostitute.

AM: Oh yeah. And actually, at one point later on, she did kind of work the streets... I mean, it was like she got pretty desperate, but that's got nothing to do with the whole issue.

AS: No.

GK: My memory from what Eric told me is that she's the first HIV-positive woman that comes into the PWA Coalition.

AM: I think so. And I thought that she was my first contact with the Coalition, but it wasn't. Thank goodness I knew about the Coalition because she had heard that it was all men down there. And pretty well, you very seldom saw a woman – it might've been somebody's wife. Brenda Richard (an Advisory Board member), didn't come around too much. She was involved. So, I knew some of the people by then. So, when this happened I called immediately, I forget who I talked to, and then they asked her to come in and she was accepted like that. I think it was the best thing that ever happened to her. And many other people that I heard over and over again say, "I never had friends until I came here."

ES: I remember her telling that story. If you get to see the video, “Life After Diagnosis,” she says in there about how she wasn’t sure what to expect walking in because she knew the reputation of the PWA Coalition as a gay men’s organization. And so, she walked in and within a minute Fred Wells had given her a hug, and she said it was the first time anybody had touched her like that since she tested positive. And of course, it broke down all the stereotypes that she had right away.

AM: Yeah. I mean, I don’t really think she knew what day it was when she got into town. She learned a lot in a short period of time.

AS: And then she got involved with the work.

AM: She got involved. She started speaking out. It took her a while because she was kind of shy at first, but the more she was accepted she started speaking out and travelling with some of us.

ES: She was very good at doing the personal story. She wasn’t the type to want to be involved in the organizational and that kind of policy stuff; that wasn’t her thing. But she realized, and it took a lot – well, it does for anybody, but especially from her background – it took a lot of courage for her to say, “Okay, I’m going out and I’m going to tell my story.”

AM: Once she did it though, she was so proud of herself.

ES: I think it’s important to emphasize the fact that she was the first woman that came to the Coalition. AM: As far as I know. I think so.

ES: She was.

AM: Yeah.

ES: Because several times I have referred to her case and I’ll talk about the first women to come into the Coalition, and everybody automatically says Janet Connors, and I say, “No. Janet Connors was several years later.”

AM: Yeah, for some reason, Dinetia’s story has gone underground and I don’t know why.



"Photo - Halifax - Dinetia and Guitar," *AIDS Activist History Project*, accessed August 25, 2015, <http://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/543>.

ES: Well, because she didn't do the public stuff. She didn't do the media stuff.

AM: But there was a movie done about her life, or a video.

ES: Yeah, but the general public didn't see that. They only see what's on television news and that's why Janet Connors, because she was the first woman who did the television news kind of stuff gets remembered.

AM: Yeah.

AM: She had a hard time getting a job to begin with, not because she was HIV. She was just young and she didn't have a lot of experience or schooling and stuff like that. And she had been sheltered with the Jehovah's Witness thing.

AS: She was in the Valley, you said?

AM: Later she lived out in one of the fishing villages, I can't remember.

ES: Down on the South Shore, I think.

AM: Yeah. I can't remember which one right now. So, she eventually got a job at one of the nursing homes in Spryfield or Fairview? One or the other, it doesn't matter. So, because of the film – "The Fallen Angel" – that was done by CBC, somebody at the nursing home reported that she was HIV positive. Or she had AIDS, was what they came out with. And so, they hauled her in and said, "You're going to be fired if you don't wear gloves... I mean, you've got to wear gloves constantly. As you enter this place, you wear gloves until you leave this place." Three weeks later everybody in the place had scabies but Dinetia. [laughter] So, they all should've been wearing gloves to begin with. Duh! When she came home... She was devastated when they were talking about it, and they talked about her for a couple of weeks. Every time she would come home... She was staying with me for a while. And every time she'd come home, she would cry and stuff like that because people would make smart-ass remarks, that she was working the streets and whatever.

AS: Do you know how the CBC found her to do this documentary or this movie about her?

AM: Probably through the Coalition, I expect.

ES: I think the Coalition.

AM: Yeah. There was not that many women coming forward. I think what happened was Dinetia was with somebody from Africa... Well, that's kind of a prejudicial statement, but that's where it sounded like it came from with her. Very unusual. That issue never came up before or since. And I think there was more to the story, because Dinetia ended up at Bryony House and I think the guy told her after you know he became close to Dinetia. She met him on the streets. He was really nice. And once he did it, he told her, "Ha ha ha..." and that's when she came to Bryony House. So, it was very short... Yeah. What are you going to do?

GK: Do you know if she had any particular problems with medical professionals here because they would've been looking at HIV infection in terms of men and not necessarily understanding it in women?

AM: Yeah. There wasn't much here. Her doctor here was Anne Houston, just amazing; North End Clinic – amazing woman. Amazing. But once she went to the Valley, that's when she started having problems... And the fact that she had children... I mean, Kimberley... None of the kids were infected. She took every precaution there was. She was very, very careful. She wanted children more than anything else in the world. That's when she was straight and she was new, and that's all she wanted was to have children and raise them her way, instead of the way she was raised. Dinetia, when she started talking about that I said, "You know, chances are... blah blah blah" and we talked about it and she decided that's what she was going to do. So, we respected that decision and it turned out alright. But once she moved to the Valley with those kids it was terrible. She never got treatment. I wish I had been up there because I would've gone with her and taken pictures... She said "AIDS" was written right across her file. I remember her saying that... Well, I was at the birth of her babies and... Oh, I've got some pictures. Yeah. Some pictures aren't in there.

So yes... She couldn't have the babies in the Valley. She had to have them here in Halifax. So yeah, what are you going to do?

ES: She was lucky in that when she asked for the test, they tested her. There were a fair number of women who did not get tested, who asked to be tested and were told by doctors, "No, you're not in a high risk group." There were women who were not officially listed as having AIDS until after they died, and it was determined in the autopsy simply because their doctors would not have them tested, because they didn't fit into the high risk groups. So, in that respect Dineta was lucky in that going to North End clinic, a lot of community-based clinics tend to be up on the issues and know the ups and downs, so they would've been willing to test. Especially in the rural areas, you've got some 50 year old woman who's happily married, at least supposedly, and lived there all their life. They go to the doctor and say, "I want to be tested" and the doctor of course says, "What kind of nutcase are you? Why would you need to be tested?" without thinking, "Okay, maybe she's done something that she's worried about or maybe she worries that her husband has done something." It was quite typical that women weren't tested.

AM: The other thing that some of the doctors used was, "You know, it costs us money to do this test. Do you really want to..." It won't cost the people themselves, but it's a cost to us, so they would give them a like, "Do you really need that?" And I mean, sometimes you're too embarrassed to say, "Oh, what I did..." and about their husbands.

AS: There was also some times where people... I mean, this is more the sort of things that I've been reading and thinking about, and from interviews that were done in the States, where there were all these things that would present in women that would be signs that, if they were HIV-positive, they were progressing into AIDS... that weren't on anyone's radar. So, if you're getting a lot of yeast infections what does that indicate? And if doctors don't read that as, "Oh, maybe we should test you," then it's invisible to them. They just think, "Oh, you're getting a lot of yeast infections. Have some more cream." But actually it's immune related...

ES: I think that was an ongoing battle in those early days in that the signs of disease were taken from men, and that was what a lot of the rural doctors were doing. They were saying, "Okay, you don't have Kaposi's Sarcoma. You don't have pneumonia." Exactly what you said. "Okay, it's a yeast infection. That's not on our list, so it can't be that." I think that's always been an issue in the health care system, is the under-value that's put on women's issues. It's always been an issue. It showed up again certainly when drugs became available, even though the testing was always done on white men. It's a vicious cycle in the health care community.

GK: I wouldn't mind glancing at some of your pictures. I saw some pictures of demonstrations. I love pictures of individuals, but I actually like pictures of...

ES: He's the one out carrying the signs in demonstrations.

AS: [looking at photos] This is Pride.

GK: This is a Pride march.

AM: It depends on what year; I'm probably focusing on a lot of the AIDS...

GK: There's a NSCAD [Nova Scotia College of Art and Design] contingent.

AM: Yeah, I would probably be focused totally on a lot of the PWAs and the gay...

GK: There's the Lesbian and Gay Youth Project. These are great pictures. They're wonderful.

AM: I mean, they're pretty crudely put together.

GK: This is really how I remember... I was at a couple of early Halifax Pride ones in early '90s.

AM: Yeah.

GK: This is sort of what I...

AM: And you can see... At one point, you can see the bag on somebody's head.

GK: Yes.

AS: This one with the "If not now, when?" Do you remember what that is? Was it an early Pride?

ES: It was one of the first Pride marches, before it was a Pride March.

AM: And you can see the paper bag on somebody's head on that.

ES: Because you remember the first ones, we assembled down by Rumours.

GK: Yeah, it was across the street from where...

AM: By the drugstore.

ES: In that little tiny field and we came up on Brunswick Street, as opposed to Barrington Street. So, that was one of the first ones.

AM: And the police were like, beside themselves.

GK: It's been great. Thank you very much both of you for providing some real insight into what was going on.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]