

AAHP
AIDS Activist History Project

Interview Transcript 69

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Interviewee:	Valerie Scott and Ryan Hotchkiss
Interviewers:	Ryan Conrad; Gary Kinsman
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Persons Present: Valerie Scott (VS)
Ryan Hotchkiss (RH)
Ryan Conrad (RC)
Gary Kinsman (GK)

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

GK: We are here interviewing Valerie Scott. So the first question we ask everyone is “When do you first remember hearing about AIDS, and what did you hear about it?”

VS: I heard about it from the media. And it was portrayed as a gay disease that was affecting gay men. It was called GRID [Gay Related Immune Deficiency]. When I first heard about it, it was tiny little reports. Then, about a year later, it exploded. And they soon began... it was not just gay men, it was Haitians, and hemophiliacs were getting it because of the blood supply. And then they started with the sex workers. We weren't getting it. But they assumed that we would and that we would be real vectors of disease, and that this would be the end of western civilization as we know it. But we, sex workers got on it. I knew something had to be done. That's why I took it upon myself to walk into the AIDS Committee in Toronto and say "Someone has to do something about this, we have to get political and get information out." And we sat there that afternoon and made up a pamphlet. AIDS Committee of Toronto paid to print them all off, I handed them out on the street. I finally managed to get Peggie Miller's phone number. Peggie founded (the Canadian Organization for the Rights of Prostitutes), in 1983 – I joined in 1985. When I first called Peggie, she asked me who I knew. And I didn't really know anyone. So she thought I was a reporter posing as a sex worker. She said she imagined me with some little bob haircut. And finally through channels in the gay community, it got to Peggie that, no, Valerie is actually a sex worker. Or "prostitute", as we were then known as. And I joined. Shortly thereafter I became a spokesperson. And I decided that I would devote myself to this cause, whole-heartedly, for one year.

GK: (chuckles) Only one year.

VS: (chuckles) Yes. And that was thirty, thirty-four years ago? Yes. Some things, you don't realize how big they are until you are already in it.

GK: Right. So maybe just to step back to some of the things you have told us a bit about. So, when you went into the AIDS Committee of Toronto office, you were working as a sex worker but you had no contact with any groups?

VS: I was working indoors.

GK: Okay.

VS: And I didn't have contact with other sex workers. In those days, a relatively new way of working was to put an ad in the classified section of the newspaper. So I ran an ad, for seven days, in the *Globe and Mail*. And it read something like, "Petite brunette seeks ...musician" (laughing) "Seeks generous gentleman. Please reply to box number..." because you had to, everyone did it that way. This was prior to internet and computers. I don't think the *Globe* allowed phone numbers in personal ads. So clients had to write you a note. Some would write almost novellas, but mostly it would be a short note with their business card. Well, I received ninety-three replies. I tossed the ones with poor grammar. Reasoning that they would not have a good enough job to afford my fee. Unless it was obvious that English was not their first language. And it was great. I would meet a new client in a public place first, usually a restaurant. I would always carry a copy of the *Globe and Mail*. That's how they would recognize me. And then we would go back to either his hotel or my place. Because it was so laborious to get to know a sex worker, once a client found you, and he liked you, a typical client would stay with you for three to five years. So you could run an ad, once maybe twice a year. It was great. And you had all your regulars.

You had your Wednesday afternoon at 2pm. Your Tuesday evening at 7 pm. Your Thursday afternoon at 4 pm and so on. It was a very stable way of working. But I didn't know other sex workers because of that. So when I went into the AIDS Committee of Toronto and had the pamphlet made, I went out on the street.

GK: Right.

VS: Now, the funny thing is... girls on the street, they knew safe sex. They'd been using safe sex since, I don't know, the fifteen hundreds? And so we mostly talked politics. In terms of STI knowledge, sometimes a sex worker would have a blind spot. For example, I remember talking with this woman, and she knew all about the different STIs, how to prevent them, everything, but had never heard of syphilis. Knew all about HIV, gonorrhea, hepatitis, chlamydia... So it's not as though she's going to be contracting or transmitting syphilis, but it was an odd little blind spot. Mainly we talked politics. They knew safer sex practices.

GK: So when you would have walked into the AIDS Committee of Toronto office, you were working as a sex worker, but did you have any previous experience in any sort of organizing around around feminism? Around anything?

VS: I had a little bit. I was the treasurer of the Canadian Association of Burlesque Entertainers. I was a dancer, a stripper, for almost seven years. And I got tired of the traveling. I would see my apartment one or two weeks every three months. So that's why I went into sex work. Well, I wanted to *be* a sex worker since, like, I was four. I know that's an explosive statement, but how it came to be was my mother stayed at home. She was a stay-at-home mum, and back in those days, in Moncton, New Brunswick, mothers kicked their kids out in the afternoon and would say "Go play!" And you'd be, like, "But

Mom, no.” Then you’d find your friends up the street and begin playing. It’s in the middle of the winter and it’s getting dark and your dad is coming home, but by now you’re engrossed in building a snow fort. And so your mother’s: “Dinner time! Come on!” “But Mom. C’mon, five more minutes, five more minutes!” you didn’t want to come back in. Your hands would be so frozen, your mom would have to take your boots off... I went to school when I was five. But I stayed at home with mom until then. When it was raining mom would let me watch tv in the afternoon, and what they mainly played, were old westerns. There were only three channels.

I *loved* the saloon girls! I *lived* for those moments! The rest of the movie, the cowboys running around, killing each other, was very boring. Now, I was around four. I probably wasn’t really following the plot. But I knew that those saloons looked *interesting* and I knew the contrast was the cowboys’ wives. When they showed them, they were always in some rundown shack on the outskirts of town. They were overworked, they were wearing rags, basically. They had squalling babies everywhere. They had to do what their husbands told them to do. That was not going to be me. I was going to be a saloon girl. Now, I didn’t know anything about sex, or that it even existed. So, in a way, you could say I wanted to be a sex worker since I was four, except I didn’t know about the sex part. (laughing) And when I grew up and found out about sex, I thought “Hmm... Now I understand why those saloon girls were so popular... And, yes, that’s okay. I still want to be a saloon girl.”

GK: So after you were handing out the pamphlet that the AIDS Committee of Toronto produced, and you got to meet more sex workers on the street, is that when you heard about Peggie Miller and CORP?

VS: And that’s how I got connected in with CORP, eventually, and one of the first things we did was go to Ottawa to speak at a parliamentary committee hearing on Bill C-49. I wasn’t out yet, so in transcripts it says “Julie”, and that’s me. But I barely said a thing. So I came out a couple of weeks later. And *then* there was a big conference being planned in Toronto, at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

GK: I was imprisoned there for a long time, so I’m quite familiar.

VS: I hear you. A huge conference. And the organizers didn’t want CORP to speak at this conference. They flew in Margot St James from COYOTE and they had some very good speakers, but they kept *lying*—well they’d tell Peggie one thing and they’d tell me another thing, thinking that we weren’t constantly on the phone with each other, which we were. And I remember one evening, they had a planning session and they wouldn’t even let us in. Peggie and I *forced* the doors open. And I had all these cassette tapes and I took them out of my purse and laid them on the table and I said “Paula [Rochman], you’re telling me that you, that for some –” I even forget what it was about, but it was a lie. There were several, which were all

denied. “I have the tapes right here, would people like to hear them? You’re telling Peggie another thing.” So we kind of forced them to let us speak. And it was the first conference I’d ever attended in my life, let alone spoken at. It was weird because Peggie was, the night before, trying to get all this political stuff in my head, and so was Chris Bearchell, and... Ryan said “Just speak from the heart. You’re not going to be able to be politicized with all of the politics of feminism and prostitution and gay rights and history in an evening. It’s not possible.” So I did. And I spoke at it. What a wild conference that was, I mean, it was explosive at times. So, yes. A book came out of that. And then the very first television interview I ever did was with Barbara Frum.

GK: Really?

VS: On *The National*. This is in the days, remember, no internet. The news was not fragmented as it is today. Everyone watched it. So of course, I had to come out to my family. My parents, my friends. I was terrified., just terrified. I was afraid I would lose my family, I was afraid I would lose my friends. I didn’t lose my family and neither did I lose one friend. Lots of, you know, judgmental stuff. But I got politicized so, even now, when I go back to New Brunswick (chuckles) my family doesn’t like to raise stuff about sex work or LGBT rights, because they know that I will just run with that, because I think that the reason people don’t understand is because they don’t have the right information or enough information. So I figure it’s my role to give them information, even if it takes two or three or four hours. So my family doesn’t like to bring anything up for fear that it’ll be another three hours of listening to me talk about sex worker or LGBT rights.

GK: Before coming back to CORP, and your involvement in it, you sort of started to talk a little bit about this already in terms of the pamphlet you produced with the AIDS Committee of Toronto and the sex workers you were talking to on the street already knowing about safe sex but, maybe, if you could comment a bit more on the notion that sex workers are safe sex pros and they were already doing this stuff? And sort of the vantage point that gave you on the AIDS crisis.

VS: Okay. What happened with the media. They love death, and they want to talk about sex. The media loves to talk about sex, but they don’t want it to be anything good. They want to have some moral twist on it. So, 1987. I can’t remember exactly how many interviews per week that I did, but I’d say it was an average of two– Danny Cockerline, Ryan and I were the only ones who were out, at least out on TV – and they were all about prostitutes and AIDS. I defended us for an entire year. And we did marches. We did lots of things. We produced pamphlets, we... and I remember, once, I think she was a fourth-year student and she came to interview me. Students are important. I always am open to interviews with students. And her entire line of questioning was about the decriminalization of sex work. It was refreshing! That was the only interview in 1987 that I ever did that wasn’t about defending sex workers around the AIDS issue. One. So trying to blame sex workers for spreading

HIV/AIDS was a big story for the media. And it really was a non-story because it wasn't happening. It was a massive non-story, but defending sex workers was tough and difficult. For example, there was a huge meeting at City Hall, in the rotunda of politicians and lots of speakers. Danny was there, I was there, Ryan was there, lots of sex workers, most of whom were not 'out' but they were there, because of what was being discussed – and they were serious about this, this was not a joke – was forced testing gay men and “prostitutes”, as we were known as. I don't recall if there was forced testing for lesbians, or not. *And* then, for anyone who came up positive, to quarantine them. They hadn't worked out where to quarantine them, or anything of the details but the idea of that. And that's what the meeting was about. To vote on that for the city of Toronto. So this was really serious stuff. And we spoke. And it wasn't going well. It was looking like the city of Toronto was going to vote for the forced testing. Then Doctor Philip Berger spoke. He was eloquent. His logic was flawless. And Phillip Berger was the first AIDS doctor in Toronto. And I remember seeing him on TV at least once a week, reporters asked him “Aren't you worried about getting AIDS?” and he'd have to say, for the umpteenth time, “Well, no. Because I don't have sex with my patients.”

GK: (laughing)

VS: But his logic at this meeting was just beautiful. And you could *see* the faces of the councillors. You could see their minds changing as to why this would be a very bad idea. And he won the day, Philip Berger did. He is a great, guy. He's retired now. He's not gay. As he says, he's married, mortgaged, and all of that, but he was a real activist, gay rights activist, and sex worker rights activist. He did important work in an underfunded clinic in Africa. I don't believe he received the kind of recognition he deserves. He should have received the Order of Canada.

RC: Actually, I have a follow-up question. I just know, when I was going through the collection for CORP at the University of Ottawa, there was a specific mention of a case, I *believe* in 1987, where the police claimed that a prostitute they had arrested was HIV positive.

VS: Yes, I remember that.

RC: Which turns out not to be true, later on –from the documents, it seems that it was a lie that the police had produced to create a fervor.

V.S. Typical police tactic. Because there *was* one, later. Maybe it was '89? And she truly was HIV positive. But again. Here's the thing: She was using safer sex. So she wasn't transmitting it. Media didn't care. They made a big to-do, you know. And there were, I don't remember the exact numbers, but there's something like eight or ten soldiers in the United States who claimed that they became infected with HIV from seeing sex workers.

Upon further questioning it was revealed that the majority of them were gay. But they couldn't say that, because of the United States army.

GK: So, were you going to link that question to the formation of CORPRL?

RC: Well, I just know that *that* arrest in particular, when I was looking at these documents, Chris Bearchell had written a letter on behalf of CORPRL, where it was allies who were joining the fight as non-sex-workers to support sex workers because of this particular arrest, and the lie, by the police, that she was HIV positive, to create an environment where sex workers were seen as giving people AIDS, right? But that's the one, unique moment where I know anything about CORPRL as opposed to CORP.

VS: Okay. Well...

RC: I don't even remember what CORPRL stood for right now.

VS: I don't either. We would make up these names. Because we were trying to settle on a name for the, like, "Prostitutes Safer Sex Project" or "CORPRL." CORPRL might have been, for a while we put together an organization of non-sex-workers who supported sex workers, because the other big story in the media, in those days, too, was that sex workers were taking over the street. So we had home-owners in Parkdale and Cabbagetown who were ready to go out and publicly say "Yes, I'm a home-owner and I have no issue with prostitutes on my street" to just take a little bit of the wind out of the sails of the Residents' Associations who were against us. And they would use anything they could against us. I remember the head of a Residents' Association in Parkdale saying "You literally cannot walk down my street because of all the used condoms." Unbeknownst to him, I lived on his street. I ran a brothel on his street. Across the street, three doors north. He didn't know. That's how discrete we are. But the only time we ever saw a used condom on that street, and Ryan and I, remember it, because we marveled at this. It was garbage day, there was a green garbage bag, and obviously a raccoon or a dog or something had gotten into it. There was an orange peel, a tea bag, and a used condom. So the head of this Residents' Association going on about how he literally cannot walk down the street because of all the used condoms and then, two minutes later, talk about how we're spreading AIDS. Which one is it? So, yes. Sloshing your way down the street in fishing boots because... (laughing). So that's what CORPRL was trying to fight against.

RC: Yes. From the documents I've looked at, that makes perfect sense.

VS: But it didn't go anywhere.

RC: Yes. It fizzled.

VS: It kind of fizzled out. It was a very good idea but, yes.

RC: But that explains it. That's really helpful to know.

GK: So maybe we could just go back to CORP again. What did CORP basically do? And how was it organized? Like you were a spokesperson but was it a member based organization? Did you have meetings?

VS: The whole idea of CORP was to work toward the decriminalization of sex work. How CORP began was one day Peggie was sweeping her floor, listening to the radio playing in the back ground, and the police were on. There was going to be a public police meeting the next day on how to get rid of the "prostitutes" on the street. She decided then and there she was going to go. And she was going to speak. So she went, she arrived early, and she'd never been to a meeting like this before. So she noticed other people going up to the clerk and putting their names on the list. And that's what she did, she went up and explained that she was a sex worker and wanted to speak about enforcement. Because she'd just been busted under the Bawdy House law.

GK: Right.

VS: They're focusing on "the street" and then they're busting people for Bawdy House, too. So she really wanted to talk about that, the whole picture. The clerk gave her some bureaucratic mumbo jumbo as to why she couldn't speak, but a reporter standing nearby overheard this, and he thought this would be *very* interesting. So he asked, and he took Peggie aside, told her the correct jargon to use, and she marched right back to the clerk with the correct jargon, and he very reluctantly put her on the list. So, when her name was called, she was not hesitant. Media reports were that she spoke with passion. I asked her, later, "What did you say?" and she said, "You know, I couldn't remember ten minutes later what I said, I was just so focused in the moment." And, of course, flash bulbs – because, back in the day – flashbulbs are going off from reporters: "Oh my god! A whore is speaking!" And she was in the newspapers the next day. But instead of cringing about this, she just rose to the occasion. And she told me that she heard that the federal government does not have to listen to individuals, but you have a much better shot if you're an organization. So that's when she decided to begin the Canadian Organization for the Rights of Prostitutes. I'm not sure how she connected with Chris Bearchell of *The Body Politic*, but she did. And Chris helped Peggie navigate the machinations of all the politics. And, yes. CORP was born. And it's still here, it just has a different name.

GK: So, when you became the public spokesperson – I assume Peggie was sort of like "I'm tired of being in the public realm all the time" –

VS: That's what she said.

GK: I think I actually remember her telling me that, too.

VS: Yes.

GK: So that's why you became the public spokesperson. But, aside from fighting against Bill C-49, what was CORP doing? Was it doing bad date sheets...?

VS: We weren't then. We were having meetings, we were doing... mainly it was media and speaking at universities. To get the word out that we weren't spreading AIDS and about decriminalization and why it's so important. That was our focus. Also connecting with other organizations. For example, we were the first sex workers' rights organization to be in the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, and we connected with other feminist organizations. And that was really difficult. Some of them were very good, but others were... they viewed us as... "Well, they're women, but they're our dirty cousins."

GK: Maybe we could come back to Bill C-49, and CORP's organizing about it. But also, in the interview I did with you in '86, it's in *Rites*, you talked about how male sex workers were also affected by Bill C-49, and maybe you wanted to talk a little about that?

VS: Yes, I do want to talk about that. Bill C-49, aka the "communicating law", which was a law to deal with outdoor, street-based colleagues. And how that came about, a street-based colleague in Vancouver, by the name of Deborah Hutt – challenged the old Soliciting law, and took it to the Supreme Court of Canada. The court agreed with her and they decided to use the Oxford dictionary to figure out what "soliciting", the "nuisance of soliciting", what that really means. So, the Supreme Court said it means that "a sex worker must be pressing and persistent." We don't work like that. In other words, you pretty much have to put the potential client in a headlock. And so it effectively gutted the Soliciting law. Because the penalties for the Bawdy House law were so onerous, sex workers began working on the streets. This was because legally speaking the street was safer. Not everybody, but lots and lots of people. Women and men. So Residents' Associations formed and the police still arrested sex workers for Indecent Act In A Public Place. But because the 'acts' or car dates took place in secluded spots many of those charges were thrown out of court. The police could have ticketed sex workers for noise or litter, even jay-walking. Like, they could have done all these things, but they were tickets. Not criminal code charges. So they didn't. They decided, across the country, to do nothing, and say to the media over and over and over again, "There's nothing we can do, our hands are tied." So this is why Residents' Associations formed and lobbied the government. Pierre Trudeau was Prime Minister at that time. When he partially decriminalized gay and lesbian sex, he used the Wolfenden Report from the UK. A lot of people don't know about that report, half of it was about sex work! But, I think – just what I think – that he wanted a Canadian study done because of what was happening in Canada. So he commissioned the Fraser Committee, as it is

commonly known, On Pornography and Prostitution. Peggie spoke, when the Committee was in Toronto. Wrote a beautiful brief, spoke at that. And I did not yet know Peggie, but I went there to try and meet her, and she had just left. But I was talking with a nice man there, and he became a regular client, so someone got something out of the Fraser Committee.

All: (laughing)

VS: And then the Committee came through with its report. And it recommended, in a nutshell, – it was the largest study ever done on prostitution in the *world* at that point – and it suggested heavy law for the street and loosening up the Bawdy House law to allow, I think it was up to three, sex workers to work together for safety and for sharing of expenses, out of their own residences if they wished. They wanted to severely limit the Living On The Avails law because, as it was written, it was illegal for a sex worker to send her mother a birthday present. Her mother could be charged with “living on the avails.” Not that they would do that, but what they would do is arrest anyone’s boyfriend. It didn’t matter if the person had their own employment or not. And we could be arrested, if we worked together, for living on each other’s avails. Which I was guilty of, Ryan was guilty of, because we worked together. And I answered the phones, because Ryan had a deep voice and if Ryan answered, clients would often say “May I speak with one of the women?” So, by doing that, by booking the calls, I was living on Ryan’s avails. It’s called “Controlling/ Directing”, that one section. The Fraser Committee recommended that the Avails law be severely limited so as to not capture innocent conduct like that. Alas, Pierre Trudeau went for his famous walk in the snow and decided to retire. And that was in February, the walk in the snow, and by June he’d retired. A federal election was called. Brian Mulroney of the Progressive Conservative party won it with a majority and, to gain a few extra approval points, he threw us under the bus, and brought in the heavy law on the street. Not liberalizing Bawdy House, not changing Avails at all. So the law, the new law, for the street, Communicating, meant that all sex workers, men and women, in public or any place open to public view, could be charged and receive a fine of \$2000 and/or six months in jail. But also our *clients* could be charged. This was a first. And I remember us, at the hearings for C-49. There were these feminist organizations there *praising* the new law because *now* the *clients* could be charged. And we’re saying “No! The law is... Equal oppression isn’t *equality*. That’s not what we’re going for here!”

Prior to this, to the Communicating law, we had a lopsided law where it was only the sex workers who were charged. Now we had a law where the sex workers and the clients were charged, and this meant that we could no-longer work on well-lit streets with lots of passers-by, or work together. Prior to the Communicating law – and I went outside and I worked for several months at Church and Wood streets. That was my corner. But I shared my corner. And it was great. Because we would work in pairs, in trios, sometimes there would be four of us. And one of the things we would do is, when a client cruised by and motioned one of you over, and so you’re talking, you’re arranging, negotiating the deal...

One of your colleagues is writing down the plate number in full view of the client. So he knew someone had his plate number, knows the make of his car, and knows what he looks like. That was an incredibly effective preventative measure for violence. After the Communicating law came in, if we worked in pairs we'd be busted within the hour. Because we were visible. We couldn't be visible anymore. So all of a sudden, everyone's working down on the poorly lit streets, down on Eastern Avenue in more of an industrial type area. CORP began getting phone calls about women missing. You know, "I haven't seen my girlfriend, my colleague, for three days. It's unlike her." And women began going missing, women began getting beaten and raped, because the predators figured out that we wouldn't go to the police. We were terrified of the police now because they they had a new law, that they enforced with zeal. It didn't take long for the predators to figure that out.

I want readers to know that the majority of clients are good people and are not predators in any sense. And those clients feared being charged so they began cruising in poorly lit out of the way areas of the city. A lot of people think that we experience violence in our daily work lives. Almost like: Get up, shower, get ready for work, go to work, get beaten and raped, come home, walk the dog, make dinner. No. Sex work isn't like that. But when you set it up to allow predators to do whatever they want with us, and almost tell them that it's desirable to do whatever the hell you want with sex workers, then it's going to happen. The predators will come out to play. That's what happened. And you know, there's Robert Pickton in Vancouver, but what people didn't talk about is the many many missing and murdered women in Alberta. And all over the country. And it is still happening.

So we had the "equal oppression" law, better known as the Communicating law, then when we did the big Charter challenge, *Bedford, Lebovitch, & Scott*. Once again the Supreme Court of Canada agreed with us, and once again another Conservative prime minister, Stephen Harper – rewrote and introduced a worse set of laws. So that now the sex workers on the street aren't going to be charged – mostly – but the clients are the ones to be charged. It's gone from lopsided to equal oppression to lopsided again. When are they going to get it together to decriminalize this? I mean how many twists and turns does this thing have to go through?

GK: Right.

VS: See, we're not sure if we should be using the legal system again. Because of what happened. However, I think the legal system is a good way to go, because otherwise we never get anywhere. I mean, really, the way federal parties have long looked at us is the NDP view us as victims, the Conservatives, despite their recent rhetoric, view us as villains, and the Liberals – with the one exception of Pierre Trudeau – try and ignore us as much as possible.

RC: The current Trudeau government is definitely doing that. The Liberals voted en masse against Harper's C-36 and now they have a majority in Parliament and they don't do a damn thing.

VS: Right! Right. Even though they have a lot of solid backing to decriminalize sex work. They can use the Fraser Committee, several federal reports on sex work from the 1990's and early 2000s that state how the laws were causing harm to sex workers. They can use all of the studies that we used in *Bedford, Lebovitch and Scott*. The ruling from our application judge, really all of the rulings right up to the Supreme Court of Canada's December 20, 2013 ruling. That's some heavy artillery. Furthermore, quite a number of properly conducted research studies outlining the harms that the Orwellian named and themed 2014 Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act cause have been published. They can have a meaningful dialogue with sex worker's rights groups. And they can use common sense and reason. You know we don't want to see anyone forced into this business either. Sex workers are in the best position to find and know who is trafficked. Not religious fundamentalists and carceral/prohibitionist feminists who have purposely conflated all sex work with trafficking, and who are finally admitting that they are against all sex work. New Zealand decriminalized sex work in 2003. There is ample empirical evidence that can be used from that country that decriminalization is the best way to go.

Also, the Trudeau government can act on their own resolution that they voted on and passed in April, 2018 at their Halifax convention. I have a copy of it right here.¹

WHEREAS:

- the current *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*, which prohibits the purchasing of sex, does little to protect sex workers and instead pushes them to work underground and in dangerous conditions;
- the current prohibition of buying consensual sex work does not address the underlying issues that make sex work dangerous, but rather creates a climate that makes sex workers unlikely to work with the police and be involved with more serious crimes;

BE IT RESOLVED the Liberal Party of Canada repeal the 2014 *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*, begin a consultation period with those in the sex work industry and advocacy groups, and move to decriminalize consensual sex work, and the purchase of said sex work, for those over the age of 18;

BE IT RESOLVED the Liberal Party of Canada consult not just with those involved in the sex work, but with surrounding communities to ensure that these changes ensure the safety and wellbeing of these surrounding communities and their families;

¹ Liberal Party of Canada/Resolution passed on April 21, 2018 at Party's convention in Halifax.
https://2018.liberal.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/1650/2018/03/2018_Liberal_Policy_Resolutions_2.pdf

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that along with decriminalization the Liberal Party of Canada should look to address the true problems facing sex workers by working to increase their access to sexual health clinics, counselling and improve their relationship with local authorities.”

GK: They're not going to do much.

RC: They won't do anything until the Supreme Court makes them do something.

VS: Pierre Trudeau - it was just partial decriminalization of gay and lesbian sex, removing just parts of a couple of laws, but it allowed the road to full decriminalization of gay and lesbian sex and lives to be built.

GK: I would have a slight disagreement, but—

VS: Okay! But you're a lot further ahead than we are.

GK: I understand that. But it's interesting just to come back to the Wolfenden Report? Because that's, of course, what the '69 criminal code reform was based on, as you said. And, both in England and here, the only parts of it around sex workers that were ever implemented was to clamp down on street sex work.

VS: Yes.

GK: Right? None of the other proposals that was in any of those reports was ever moved on. Which was to open up more space in the so-called private realm, because the big distinction in that report was “public vs private.” So everything was supposed to be repressed in public, which is why the numbers of charges for queer sex actually go up after '69, they don't go down. They actually intensify, the bath raids happen—

VS: Right. All that nastiness.

GK: We don't need to get into this discussion. Maybe where we could go next is to actually track out a little bit more the history, coming out of CORP, in terms of specific safe sex work for sex workers. Because I think that's an area where there is a fair amount of unclarity, I know different names got used, but first of all CORP tried to initiate safe sex work. CORP initiated some safe sex work, using various names, and eventually, somehow, Maggie's emerges, right? So I know there's also a separation in there at some point.

VS: Well we had to, because, *CORP* was a *blatantly* political organization. We knew we would not be able to get government funding. So Chris Bearchell, Peggie Miller, I decided to set up a board of directors. We knew we had to do that. Peggie and I knew nothing about

setting up a board of directors, but Chris Bearchell knew a bit about this. And we hand-picked our board, we had some good people on it. Doctor Philip Berger. And we had lawyer Peter Maloney. We had Eilert Frerichs, who was a minister for a church. Poor Eilert. At meetings I would ask him, “So Eilert, you still working at the church?” As if it was a job, right? For him, it was a calling. And with a somewhat pained look, he would, reply “Yes.” (laughing) Poor guy. He was so sweet. And we had June Callwood, very well known in political circles. We had, oh, some others that were very good people whose names I can’t remember right now, but... And with our input, they put together the bylaws and all of the, you know, there were many meetings at Chris’s house, and different people’s houses. So... We weren’t sure what to call it, and June Callwood liked names of people, like, non-threatening names. So we called it “Maggie’s” after Margaret [SPORE] who founded BEAVER [Better End All Vicious Erotic Repression] or CASH. [Committee to end Street Harassment]

RC: She started BEAVER and then she had to change the name to CASH when she got more feminists on board, because they thought the name BEAVER was—

VS: Beaver was considered too raunchy. I really don't think others should be dictating to sex worker rights groups. Whether it be about policy or the group's name!

RC: —more offensive.

VS: So that’s who Maggie’s is named after. But before then, we had started Maggie’s as the idea, no office, no funding, except for a phone line that was in my living room, and I paid for. We would get condoms and lube from the city of Toronto and the AIDS Committee of Toronto. Ryan and I would go out and do this, no pay, just do this and talk politics. And we began seeing a need for needles with some of the sex workers. But it was illegal to hand out needles and even once Maggie’s did get the funding and an office, they couldn’t pay for those. Because it was illegal. This was prior to needle exchanges anywhere in Canada. So Ryan and I would, with our own money, would go to Starkmans Medical Supply and buy boxes of a hundred needles. Every week, buy a couple of boxes. A box cost twenty-five dollars and change. And we would hand them out. And we even, because it was illegal for people to be carrying needles, right? So we even had it set up where, you know, it’s Parkdale mostly where this need was. We would put them in various discrete spots in the women’s washroom of different bars and the sex workers would know where to look. The owners of the bars and restaurants had no idea (laughing).

GK: Wow.

VS: So, that was neat. Handing out condoms and stuff... One night, Ryan and I were out, and the cops were really harassing us, even though we had little laminated badges that we didn’t wear but... we dressed like sex workers. We didn’t dress like social workers. And so this, I guess, annoyed the police, and they almost charged us, but didn’t, with “prowling by

night.” We’re handing out *condoms* and lube as far as they know. They don’t know anything about the needles. And by now we’re paid by the city of Toronto to do this. Or *via* the city of Toronto. But, nope! They were right on us. I was smoking a cigarette and the cop is parked across the street and he ordered me to come over. Now I know he’s gonna hit me with jay-walking. And I said to him, “I’m going to the light.” And I did, and I waited for a green light, and I went to his car. I put out my cigarette and put the butt in my cigarette pack. He was not happy. Hence the “prowling by night.”

GK: What does that offence actually mean?

VS: Well, it’s really against burglars.

GK: Okay, that would make sense.

VS: It’s after ten p.m.

GK: Yes, okay.

VS: And if you’re lurking around a neighbourhood for no good reason.

GK: So it’s like, almost, vagrancy.

VS: Yes. In a way. Except—

GK: With more intent. You’re a more intent vagrant. (laughing).

VS: (laughing). Right.

GK: That’s a weird charge.

VS: Those were good years. Lots of talking with sex workers and we’d go to conferences. Ryan and I went to a big conference in Melbourne Australia. Met everybody there! Then we went to Sydney, and there were, people were, sex workers “Well come stay at my house,” and we’d come, and then others would say “Ryan and Valerie have been at your house for four days now! They’re coming to my house!” They were just lovely! And we went to the brothels. And I worked in a not-for-profit, collectively-owned brothel in Sydney for two weeks. It was fun! And one of the clients... You know, back in the ‘80s, before the internet, and even today. People have stereotypes about people from other countries. And a common stereotype about Canada is the wide-open forests, Mounties, and polar bears. And igloos. And so, I’m lying in bed with this client and we’re kind of getting into the sex part, but we’re talking a bit about Canada because he’s interested. He’s never seen a sex worker from Canada and so the typical stereotypes about the polar bears and igloos... and so he very gently, and I can tell he wants me to go down on him, and he said, “Show me some of that

Mountie hospitality.” (laughing) I wasn’t sure whether to beat him up, burn down his garage, or open his mail...

All: (laughing)

VS: “Mountie Hospitality.”

GK: Yes, you can really think about that in relation to the Mounties, for sure. Maybe this is the time to talk a little bit about the Montreal AIDS Conference and the sex worker activism there, which is documented in *Our Bodies, Our Business* (2016), but do you have any memories about that?

VS: That was a wild conference! We were fed up with being blamed for AIDS and for our gay colleagues, all of the politics and stigma. Like, develop some medicine! That’s what you guys are supposed to be doing! Instead of these silly studies that assign blame to various different groups of people. They didn’t even know what they’re talking about. I remember that conference someone actually was funded... I think it was Puerto Rico or somewhere, to study whether people like to have sex with the lights on or the lights off. This somehow had something to do with HIV. It was insane. So we called them out on all of this. And we went in to the plenary sessions and we’d get up and we would ask tough questions and they could not answer them. It seemed like every AIDS activist and sex worker rights group in the world was there. All the Australians were there. Thailand was there. COYOTE. CORP. And some groups from Europe. And... we were all angry. So we decided to do actions. And it was just nice to be with everyone, you know, and we would do these actions. They had this floor where all of these pharmaceutical companies and condom and lube companies and whatever else they could possibly throw in there under the AIDS banner... all these booths set up. And I thought “Pfff... They can sell their stuff and we’re all outside here. We sell safer sex. Why can’t we go onto that floor? Why can’t we have a booth?” So I discussed this with Danny, and he said, “Let’s go in there, and just do it.” He was game! So we told everyone else, and they agreed that this was a pretty good idea, and we did it! And we went in uninvited, just waltzed in. We did tell the media out front that we were going to be doing this, and they were there in droves! And Danny and I began: “Safer sex for sale! Get your safer sex here! Fifty dollars for a blow job!” and, you know, I mean, I said fifty dollars because I figured we were conferencing for ten, twelve hours a day. I’m not going to be able to spend a good amount of time, like a half an hour at least, with a client, to talk with them and give them a proper blow job. That’s why I said fifty dollars, as opposed to a hundred and fifty. Reasonable. Right?

GK: (laughing) Of course. Very reasonable.

VS: Anyway. ACT UP and AIDS ACTION NOW! were there, and they were *acting up then*, and at the protests were so much energy.

GK: Were you there at the taking over of the opening session? I'm not sure if you were or not.

VS: I wasn't there for that. I deeply regret missing that protest.

GK: That was incredible!

VS: Yes, I've seen some footage.

GK: The sex worker activism was really quite incredible.

VS: Yes. And while we were there, representatives from WHO – the World Health Organization – came over, “May we talk with you?” “Yes! Let's get a table!” We had a meeting! Just like that. That's how things could happen in those days. It wasn't email back and forth, this and the other thing. Let's have a meeting! These very senior people from WHO. And we explained important points to them about how the HIV/AIDS epidemic was being used against us. They had good tough questions that we could easily answer. Because we had been living with this discrimination. We weren't social workers. We also had some pretty tough questions we asked them.

GK: So you mentioned Danny Cockerline was there. I wonder if you'd just tell us a little bit more about his involvement.

VS: Oh, Danny was great!

GK: I mean obviously Danny's was an incredibly dynamic, energetic person, right?

VS: Yes, he was. And smart. A lot of people don't know this, but he took courses – I believe it was at Ryerson. I could be wrong on that – in epidemiology. So he had some background in this sort of thing. But he knew how to do things with humour. The homophobia, when he'd be doing media... It was... Anyone else (laughing) would not have been able to cope. But Danny would do it with grace and humour and intelligence... and could get through all of that. Get to the point. No one else could do it like he could. He was good in organizing, and he was good in groups. He didn't let the petty stuff get to him. Because there's always petty stuff in groups, like, left wing, or right wing... Personality differences and things like that, that people would let mole hills get turned into mountains for no good reason. Danny could always keep his eye on the prize. But not just that. He would also know how to defuse situations. So yes. He's very much missed.

RC: I'm curious as to how, when the Prostitutes' Safe Sex Project happens in name, Danny is, I believe, the “employee” that is involved there?

VS: Well, he was working at – paid by – Maggie’s. Prostitutes’ Safe Sex Project was part of Maggie’s, I guess you’d call it a community of Maggie’s or something. And he designed and produced some very nice pamphlets. We all had a hand in writing the text for them. I remember one day, CP24, it was City TV back then, and they got ahold of one of our pamphlets and they thought the language was much too risqué for a pamphlet like that to be publicly funded, even though they knew that these pamphlets were for sex workers not

RC: children, right?

VS: –to be handed out in evangelical church basements.

GK: Right.

VS: They were on the phone with me all day long wanting an interview and I said “Yes, yes, yes,” and I let them do their research and I knew I was going to get them at the very end, but I thought “At least they won’t be harassing someone else.” And I said to them, at the very end, “That pamphlet that you’re talking about, just so you know it was privately funded.” And I could prove that the money for that particular pamphlet came from a donation, a person who donated money to Maggie’s. They worked their hearts out all day on that story only to drop it like a hot potato.

RC: That’s great.

GK: Do you have another question around Danny? Ryan has a particular interest in Danny.

VS: Everyone does. I remember one CORP meeting... Oh, you would have loved it. It was one of the best CORP meetings we ever had. We did, you know, all the politics and everything. A few of us hung back just to socialize and I don’t know what happened. Then we all decided to have sex with each other, and that was just one of the best meetings...(laughing)

RC: That’s amazing! Well, I’ll just share a quick story that didn’t end as well as that one. Maggie’s had a men’s sex worker drop-in last Wednesday that I went to. Apparently it’s the first time they’ve done anything like this in many years, in terms of working with men who sell sex. And there were some old-timers there who were like “Oh, yes! I came tonight because I wanted to see where the new space was because I haven’t been here since 1996.”

VS: Oh that's great!

RC: It was this very sweet—

VS: Cool!

RC: There was a guy who was 20 years old, and didn't know what a list serve was, and like, very young, and people were sharing "Oh this is where you can advertise now that Backpage is gone." So it was very neat to be there? And they have a photo of Danny on the wall. But no one who works there really knows who he is. They were like "Oh, yes, it says PSSP –

VS: Prostitutes' Safe Sex Project!

RC: – under the photo and it has 1987, PSSP, Danny Cockerline. Two other people in the photo aren't identified. And they told me that they just got the city of Toronto to change the name on the condom delivery because it was still being sent to the Prostitutes' Safe Sex Project, and not to Maggie's. And so they were like "Can we just update something somewhere because that's not what it's been called for a long time?"

VS: An update. Long overdue update. Oh, yes!

RC: It's just that, yes, I find him a very exciting, interesting character that I never learned about because he's gone, obviously, but...

VS: And he didn't have to! That's the thing.

RC: The timing is so brutal!

RH: Yes.

VS: Isn't it?

RC: It's December 1995

VS: Yes. It was something like five, six months later? Protease Inhibitors coming down the pipe, like, available to people?

RC: Yes.

VS: And he wasn't very sick yet. (Though he had developed some allergies, and a few weeks prior to his death while he was visiting, I thought I noticed some ever so slight trembling. But he was riding his bicycle that day, so it wasn't severe).

RC: That's what all the obituaries say.

RH: Yes, but the thing is we had been to so many funerals and he had seen so many of his friends -- suffer terribly. And those were the days when, you know, they would warn you... People's friends had to go to the hospital to bring their food in because the staff were afraid.

VS: I remember doing that. Large biohazard signs on my friend's hospital room doors. When nurses did go into a room, they were covered from head to toe in gowns, masks and gloves. They would leave the food trays on the floor outside of the door, and the sick patient had to maneuver with their various IV tubes to get their food. Friends often brought food.

RH: And, yes, people were treated really badly.

VS: All my gay friends. Died.

RH: I remember Michael Smith killed himself as well.

VS: Yes.

RH: He did have multiple health problems.

GK: Yes. With Michael, it really was, because I saw him shortly before he died. He was starting to have these thoughts and dreams about hurting other people. And that was something Michael just could not deal with.

VS: That's not Michael.

GK: He was actually feeling like he was having thoughts of hurting other people.

VS: Well, Danny. Two days before he died, was out dancing. You know.

RH: Yes. Certainly didn't see that coming.

VS: He was supposed to be at a meeting. The day that he took his life, that night we were scheduled for a meeting. Sex worker rights meeting. I remember because Jack Layton was going to attend. And Jack called me to ask "Is the meeting still happening? At what time? You know, just confirming." And I said "Fuck, Jack... Five minutes ago I got this call..." ...And I couldn't believe it. I didn't want to believe it. But I had to know for certain, so I called the hospital. And I lied. I said I was his sister. "My name is Valerie Cockerline and I just heard this, and I'm not sure if it's true?" And they told me "Yes. He's in the morgue." So I'm on the phone — I'm in shock, you know — I'm on the phone with Jack, and Jack, being the politician that he was starts talking about Danny almost as if he were doing a eulogy.

And I asked Jack, right then, would he speak at Danny's funeral. Would he basically do Danny's funeral. He agreed, he did it, and he did a very nice job.

GK: Wow.

RH: Yes. It's too bad. Danny was such a good researcher. And so thorough. Because he got the recipe for, he had a copy of *Final Exit*, that book? It helped people not turn themselves into vegetables if they wanted to check out. But... yes. It was a real shock. I think the person that was the most shocked was his lover Davide [Pistilli], he was the most shocked. And he said that the building people turned up the very next morning to try and kick him out.

VS: Seven a.m. To change the locks on the door of the apartment! And kick Davide out. And this is a building that was built specifically for people with HIV/AIDS.

GK: And where was he then? Where were they living?

VS: Jarvis and Carlton streets.

RH: But he didn't get kicked out because Danny had anticipated that.

VS: Yup. And had a power of attorney drawn up. So Davide said "You can't do that to me." And they said "Yes we can" and something along the lines of "What gives you the right?" Davide said "This gives me the right, motherfucker." Okay, I don't know if he actually said "Motherfucker", but I feel as though he had every right to.

RC: Let's hope he did. That's great.

GK: Another person both of you have mentioned, who plays an important role in terms of support, pulling things together, is Chris Bearchell. Who other people have talked about in terms of some of our other interviews, but... is there anything you want to talk about in terms of Chris's contribution?

VS: I think Chris really helped Peggie get CORP going. Was a good person to help maneuver, navigate, around feminist politics, especially. She was instrumental in putting together the board of Maggie's, getting that going, and I think she did a lot of good in that respect.

RH: Well, her house was sort of a hub of leftist queer organizing in those days. She would always feed and put up waifs that happened by who were part of one movement or another. She fed me more than once and I stayed there on occasion.

RC: Actually, Danny co-owned that house I believe. The Walnut Street one.

RH: That must have been... Because at one point Danny and I shared an apartment on College street, he said he was homeless at the time. But I don't know what was going on in his life. And the funny part of that was he was trying to get welfare, and they wouldn't give him welfare, because he was living with me. I was working as a bicycle mechanic. And their position was that because we were opposite sex, that that meant that I had to support him. Right? And he, of course, tried to explain that we weren't in that kind of relationship.

VS: Danny was the cleanest, most handsome homeless person!

ALL: (laughing)

RH: I don't know if he was homeless. But yes, he stayed with me on College for a while. But, yes, a lot of people met through Chris Bearchell. I met Valerie at Chris Bearchell's place. I remember there was an early meeting of CORP. Peggie Miller was there. In the basement. That's where Valerie and I met.

VS: I remember CORP meetings in Chris's basement.

GK: Chris got me involved. I mean I didn't do an awful lot of support work for CORP, but she did get me involved in doing some. And that's how I think I met you, and I met Peggie through that, too.

VS: Yes.

RH: She certainly knew the angles to get us and encourage people, and she told me that getting involved in prostitutes' rights movement would be a good way to meet women! I was in my early twenties. (laughing)

GK: She knew good lines.

VS: She did!

GK: That's great. I'm not quite sure if you want to talk about this, but there's obviously, at some point, tensions that emerge.

VS: I really don't like to talk about negative stuff, but I just want to mention that Chris had been wanting to bring a woman into Maggie's. As an employee and spokesperson and this woman was a loose cannon! Mental health issues. And victim-centered! I could see this victim-centering that she was sort of hiding and I was vehemently against this. I've always felt that positioning all sex workers as victims is a dangerous trap. That kind of blew up into a thing and Ryan and I were forced out. After the woman eventually left Maggie's, she began volunteering at the Salvation Army, of all places. For the next few years, we didn't do as much in terms of politics. I went to University of Guelph and studied animal sciences.

And Ryan wrote and got back into his art work. And... then I guess, in the early 2000's I could see the victim thing really heating up with the feminists. I decided "I've got to get back into this again." So I called a bunch of sex workers out of *NOW* magazine, talked with them, and one of the points I kept hearing over and over was that they didn't like the name "Canadian Organization for the Rights of *Prostitutes*," "Prostitute" had fallen out of favour. Just the way "homosexual" fell out of favour, because it was a pejorative term, the meanings behind it.

It was Saturday and I was lying in bed, two in the morning, trying to come up with a *name*. And, Canada typically had, but not always, names for sex worker rights groups that were sort of militaristic. Like "POWER", "CORP", and a couple others had military overtones. Whereas in United States, it was often animals. "COYOTE" – for "Call Off Your Old, Tired, Ethics" – and the *delightful* name "PONY": "Prostitutes Of New York." So, in keeping with the quasi military names in Canada, I came up with "Sex Professionals of Canada", which is "SPOC." Which, you think Start Trek. The logical choice. You could have fun with it. But, yes. Things had changed! Now there were computers and websites and internet and I had to get with all of that! I got ahold of a computer in order to build a website. And I had to ask "How do you turn this on?" From there I built a website. I told myself I would not cry. But there was a fair amount of pulling of hair and gnashing of teeth. Tech support became very familiar with me. But I was always sweet to them, and they were willing to go the extra because it was an interesting thing for them, and they liked what I was doing. After the website went up was I got calls from media, and that was fine. But what was great was I began getting calls from sex workers! So I said, "Wanna join the group? Let's start! Because I'm just beginning this group again!" And, yes, I used to cook big dinners and we had a big table and we began SPOC. SPOC, it was kind of like a supper club. But a social supper club kind of political organization. We all knew that its main purpose was and still is to lobby for decriminalization You know really trying to move that forward. And to try and counter all the victim rhetoric. That's how it began again.

I'm really glad, I'm happy that you asked me to be part of this. Because... so much history gets lost in the mists of time. Or it is destroyed or intentionally rubbed out, wiped out. There is now a concerted and quite successful effort by religious fundamentalists and carceral feminists to wipe out the plethora of weblogs and other writings by sex workers that used to exist on the internet. These people have been successful in creating laws that result in such a climate of fear that sex worker rights conferences have been canceled. They are trying to legislate us out of existence. And are doing their best to destroy and erase any pro sex work culture. Large websites like Redbook and Rentboy have been shutdown. An important section of Redbook was called Pinkbook. Pinkbook was for sex workers only, and had loads of writing about different topics and info about safer sex, safety and clients that sex workers had produced on it. All of that is now lost. For example, my TED talk can no longer be accessed via the browser BING. BING is owned by Microsoft and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation donates money to forcible rescue and conversion therapy organizations that have done much harm to sex workers. Same story

with Australian sex worker Tilly Lawless's TED talk. Via Bing, a window states, "Sorry, this video is no longer available". Currently, both talks are available via Google. I feel like we should store everything we possibly can in a huge underground vault somewhere until this war on sex work ends. Where we are today, is where gay and lesbian people were circa 1965 in Canada. It was illegal. People's families would simply write them out of the family tree. Out of the family history. As if they never existed. And that's what happens with us. It has happened with many sex workers. Some SPOC members as well. I urge parents who have shut out their daughters or sons to get back in touch with them. Life is too short and you will likely regret that decision later on. Disowning a family member because you disagree with their choice of occupation or are ashamed is wrong. And that is the supposed litmus test of whether or not our occupation is a "valid" occupation, is legitimate. Is "Would you want your daughter to be a sex worker?" That's the wrong question. Let's pretend that your daughter is a sex worker. And you just don't know it. Because most parents don't know it. So, pretend your daughter is a sex worker, and she is working tonight. Would you prefer that she work under dangerous conditions where she could be seriously harmed, arrested, or murdered? Or would you prefer, even though you disagree with her choice of work, that she work under safe conditions? Because if you prefer that she work under dangerous conditions, there's something wrong with you, and you need professional help and the sooner you get it, the better.

GK: That's a really good response. What do you feel is the significance, or the contribution, that sex worker activism, has made to the AIDS movement more generally. Because I think that's a really important point that needs to be made.

VS: I think it made a difference. Because all of a sudden it wasn't just gay men. It was, "Oh! These women are showing up, too!" and it's always the more people fighting against the disease and the disease of prejudice, the better. So I think sex workers' contributions were important. And I know they were important for us. It was nice to work with, be connected with, the gay movement more than. After same sex marriage... we kinda fell off the radar. And I think our contributions helped the gay movement and vice versa. And I just wish I could give specific ways, but... I have to give that more thought.

GK: Well, I think that pro-sex contribution was one of the important ones, and that, you know, sex workers were safe sex pros, I mean that, I think that added into a sort of "erotic positive" aspect to the AIDS organizing, which has unfortunately largely been lost. Not entirely. But I think there was a certain coming together around those things that was really important.

VS: Right, okay.

RC: I also think an important piece is the connection between gay liberation activism and sex worker activism — it was about sexual liberation.

VS: Yes!

RC: It wasn't about "gay rights" it wasn't just "sex workers' rights" it was a broader, a much broader vision for how we want the world to be. Right?

VS: You hit it!

RC: Those two together did very different things. I mean I come out of the sexual liberation mindset. Like, I don't care about gay marriage. And I don't care about gays in the military. I don't care about those things because they're not part of the future world that I want to live in.

RH: Yes. We didn't want that kind of world.

VS: Though I understand why people fought for gay marriage. During the HIV/AIDS crisis, many times a dying person's homophobic family would swoop in and take control. The sick person's partner was cut off from making any decisions about their loved one's care, and sometimes the family would have the hospital refuse to allow the the partner to even visit! There were no pension rights. If they has a child, the partner could not adopt that child. So the child would end up living with a homophobic family usually in another city. Their world was turned upside down, and the poor kid was taught to be ashamed of their parents. A long term partner had zero rights and I think the AIDS crisis really brought all of those kinds of issues to the forefront.

RC: Today it would be very hard to find, like *Egale* for example, or any of these gay rights organizations really, they wouldn't do a damn thing for a sex worker, even if they were gay.

VS: And there are many of us. There are so many of us. For sure, there are heterosexual sex workers out there. But... there are many gay and lesbian sex workers. And huge amounts who are bisexual. It would be nice if organizations like *Egale* would seriously back sex worker's legal and civil rights. Now we finally have some empirical evidence attesting to the fact that a good fifty percent of us belong to the LGBTQ+ community. For example, two hundred and fourteen sex workers were interviewed; from St-John's, Montreal, Kitchener, Fort McMurray, Calgary to Victoria. 38 percent of sex workers identified as bisexual or bi-curious, 6 percent as gay or lesbian, 11 percent as other sexual orientations, and 45 percent as straight. Those percentages ring true to me. Many good researchers were involved in that study. That info came out in 2014.² The lead investigator or author is Dr. Cecilia

² <https://www.straight.com/blogra/733571/sex-workers-canada-17-interesting-facts-new-report>

Benoit.³ Another study done by researchers at universities of Birmingham and Lancaster in the U.K. analyzed 27,000 ads by individual sex workers. The 2015 study found more than a third identify as male or trans, and two thirds of escorts advertise to women. That also rings true to me. Many, many sex workers advertise to couples. The study also found that less than half of escorts identify as straight.⁴

RC: And one last thing I'll say is that I think in Canada – I grew up in the U.S., so I moved here... eight years ago – and I see the history of sexual liberation in Canada is a much more interesting story because of the overlaps between sex workers' rights and gay rights, historically. Whereas I don't see that as much in the U.S. It does exist. I won't say it doesn't.

VS: You know where it's really happening now? Africa.

RC: Interesting.

VS: Yes. SWEAT – the Sex Workers Education and Advisory Taskforce, one of the big sex worker rights organizations there is really working with gay and lesbian groups, as are many sex worker rights organizations all over that continent who have very close ties with Gay rights organizations. There is a book written about it called *To Live Freely in This World, Sex Worker Activism in Africa*, by Chi Adanna Mgbako. It's an important, beautiful book and even the title is poetic. Published fairly recently, I think in 2016. Because gay and lesbian people are so oppressed there, and the sex worker movement now has become a global movement, largely because of the internet. We can communicate with each other so quickly and easily and there are sex worker rights organizations in over 70 countries in the world. And lots of countries have many sex worker rights organizations, so... gay and lesbian people in Africa are still as oppressed as it used to be here in 1965. In some African countries even more so than it used to be in Canada. And the sex worker rights movement is becoming stronger, so it's coming together at a good time in that continent.

GK: One thing I wanted to add, not to get into it especially about Egale, is I do think the attempt that we just organized around Bill C-66 (the expungement of historically unjust convictions legislation) shows that, at least there's now an opening for some of the AIDS-based gay groups and some of the more radical gay people, to actually come back into alliance with sex workers. There's some real potential there.

VS: That was a good little ad hoc group we got together there for Bill C-66. Thank you, Gary. Yes, I would very much like to see to see the more creative, unafraid gay groups work with sex worker rights organizations again. That would be wonderful.

³ Cecilia Benoit, "Team Grant on Contexts of Vulnerabilities, Resiliencies and Care Among People in the Sex Industry."

⁴ Nicola Smith, www.indy100.com/article/major-study-reveals-common-misconceptions-about-sex-workers--ZJZ73pzlvq

GK: But it's really interesting, in some ways the opening for that was actually provided by groups like HALCO [the HIV and AIDS Legal Clinic, Ontario] and the Canadian HIV-AIDS Legal Network. Because they know from their work that there's a complete interconnection between these questions.

VS: HIV Legal has been great. HALCO as well. They are unafraid.

GK: So I think that network is really a crucial resource to hold onto even though Bill C-66 is was passed in its current form.

VS: I know. But the information we all produced is at least on the official government record and it was just fun working with you guys. And this is the thing about activism. I remember giving a talk at some university and at the end they said "So you're doing all this work but there's no guarantee at the end of it that you'll... Like, twenty-five thousand pages of evidence in this case, and you have no idea what's going to happen after, whether you'll win or lose. No one is being paid, and..." And they were just, like, "Why would you do this?" I replied, "It's activism." You do it because it's in your heart. It's in your soul. I think a lot of organizations... like maybe, possibly, Egale, have lost sight of that. That it's not about keeping your fucking job! This is about activism and changing things! It's not about the mortgage on your condo.

GK: That's really good. We are moving to the end. But, a couple of questions. One comes back to an earlier period that we should have talked about. You mentioned the charge "prowling by night." I know Gwendolyn made an animated film called *Prowling By Night* (1990) and I think you're in it. Could you talk a little bit about that?

VS: Our voices are in it. It's a great little movie. And it's—

RH: You probably want to explain how it came to be?

GK: You talked about that, earlier.

VS: And so, at the next Maggie's meeting Ryan and I report on the cops threatening to charge us with "prowling by night" and Gwendolyn got the idea to do this little movie about it. And it's a great little movie, she's got, cut-out drawings, us going along, and the cop cut-out car going along, and the different people voiced different characters. I forget who did the cop, but he was good.

RH: Because the cop was claiming that he knew who the bad guys were in the neighbourhood.

VS: Yes.

RH: Yes. we got into quite a discussion.

VS: That's right. He couldn't keep up with you when you began paraphrasing Michel Foucault about social control. It was interesting to watch, but I became increasingly worried that we would be arrested. I wish I had a copy. Do you?

RC: I'll send it to you.

VS: You have a copy?

RC: I've seen it, yes. I emailed the NFB because it's produced by the NFB Studio D, which was the women's studio, right? And I was like "Why is this not up?" I was very angry. And they were like "It's because we can't find Gwendolyn. We have not cleared the rights for this video because she's unreachable." So that's the reason at least they gave me. Whether that's true or not...

RH: I don't know. I've seen her every so often.

VS: Every once in while, you see her in the neighbourhood.

RH: Yes. Supposedly she moved to, when her mom died, she moved to...

VS: Not Hamilton?

RH: Hamilton or maybe it was Burlington? But she may be back in the city because every so often I see her in this neighbourhood.

VS: Well next time you see her—

RH: Talk to her about what?

RC: The NFB. I have a contact for the person, I'd be happy to connect people, because it's such an important video. And so few people have seen it that didn't see it at the time it was made. But, because it's an NFB film, they actually were super generous and they were like "We can share it with you, but you can't screen it, and it can't be put somewhere publically, because we don't have rights to it."

VS: Because they can't get in touch with Gwendolyn.

RH: Because they can't get in touch with Gwendolyn. Yes, I don't know where she's living at the moment.

RC: Right. But if *that* is one of the things that comes out of the interviews that we do, that that video is historicized and put back in the public domain, that would be amazing.

VS: If I see her, I'll definitely say "Gwendolyn! This is important!"

RC: Anyways. I will make sure you get a copy, so that you have it.

VS: Thank you.

RC: And it's great. You're wonderful in it.

VS: Yes. Parkdale Legal was happening then. Parkdale Legal Clinic. And they were really, really good around sex work issues.

RH: Oh, that's right, because they helped you with that client who...

VS: Oh, that client! Yes! I had a bad client. He didn't physically harm me. I had seen him before, with Ryan, and everything was fine. He called me a few weeks later and wanted to see me again, but just me this time, which was kind of odd. And, but the tone of his voice... Not what he said, but the tone of his voice was different. It was slightly harsh. I learned from that. So. Fine. He came over. And he wanted to... we lived a two-storied house. He wanted to have sex on the couch, made like he just couldn't wait to go up to the bedroom. Which was odd. But, I had condoms everywhere in the house, under the cushions... everywhere. I didn't go to mail a letter without a condom in my bra, just in case. Don't leave home without it. He had paid me and, you know, the money is somewhere on a bureau, a TV stand or something. After we finish, he makes it like he's waiting for me to go upstairs to the bathroom – to wash up. And... as I'm walking upstairs, I'm thinking "Hmmm..." So I come back downstairs after washing up, and... he's gone. The door, the front door, is ajar. And the money's gone. Of course it's a long weekend. But I have his legal name. His first and last name. And I've seen him before, and I know what kind of work he does. I wait until Tuesday, and I called Parkdale Legal Clinic. Explain the situation to them and ask them "Is there anything I can do here?" They said "Yes! Yes, there is. You can sue him." I said "Oh, that would be lovely." I go in, and they write a letter, and I have his legal name. And I know what kind of work he's in, so they did a bit of sleuthing and found out where he works. They send him a letter saying, "You owe Valerie Scott x amount of dollars for sexual services rendered at such and such an address at such and such a time, such and such a date. And, according to civil code, you must pay because" social contract law, and I don't know what all. And "Govern yourself accordingly." And signed Parkdale Legal Clinic. And they sent a copy in the regular mail and a copy in registered mail. He got this pretty quickly and... I don't know if he consulted with a lawyer or not. Oh, they told him that he must pay the money to Parkdale Legal Clinic either in cash or a certified cheque. So he was down there a day after he got the letter and the receptionist is asking him, "Please tell me what

this is about?” Because she has to know where to file, and he didn’t want to say. And so, for part of the time there he had to wait. She said it was odd, because he was hiding behind a plant. (laughing). Anyway, he paid them. I don’t remember if it was a cheque or cash, but they gave him a receipt and off he went. And I got paid. Now I did call him, after I came downstairs, and he denied it. “What are you talking about? The money’s there.” I said, “Aw, come on...”

RH: Oh, yes. Valerie and I picketed a client once. For not turning up.

VS: Oh, that other guy! Yes, we picketed him!

RC: For not turning up? That is so good!

RH: He was a no-show.

VS: Well, we’d had it. We had had another no-show earlier in the day.

RH: We made up signs, though. Because in those days, you know where someone lived or worked. And so we went to the address ...

RC: That’s amazing.

VS: That’s what we did! And we knew how to picket.

RH: I can’t remember what, you can probably remember what the signs said, right?

VS: I remember his name.

RH: He was a law student at the time.

RC: That’s amazing.

VS: We said he was unfair to prostitutes and that’s about all I remember of the slogans on the signs. We had two signs. Maybe three? Or four? Because, you know, you don’t want to waste. Do both sides.

RC: Oh, you put something different on both sides.

VS: Yes. And it was a *cold* October night. And we were out there chanting our slogans and next door to him, a bunch of students lived. And they come out to see what is going on, they’re on their porch, and they think this *very* interesting. A bunch of guys, they asked “Would you like us to beat him up for you?” (laughing) “We’ll do it!” “No, thanks. No, no.”

RH: No, we wanted a cancelation fee. Fifty bucks or something.

VS: That's right. And we were out there for a good hour. Then I see a figure. It's a busy street. But I see a figure coming, walking, and I just *knew*, even though I'd never met this person before in my life, except on the phone, that this was the guy. And I have a feeling what he did was make appointments with several sex workers and then decide which one he wanted to go see without *canceling*.

RH: The others, yes. That's probably what he did.

VS: So. It was him. And I explained why we were there. You can't even pick up the phone to call and say "I'm sorry, something's come up, I can't make it"? That would have been fine! And he apologized. And I said "I would like a cancelation fee. There are two of us. That's fifty dollars. Plus our cab fare here and back." And he asked "If I give you that, will you give me these signs?"

RH: Because they had his name on it.

VS: He really wanted those signs! And I said "Yes. And we will cease and desist." And that was that.

RC: That's amazing.

RH: Yes, I mean that whole business, that Free Trade poster reminded me of that. You know, when they were first bringing in the goods and services tax?

VS: Oh, the goods and services tax! That was funny! The GST was a new and much hated tax that the feds were imposing on the country.

RH: Yes. We were *bored*. There weren't any customers that afternoon, and we were watching politics on TV.

VS: We still watch a lot of politics on TV, and we bought three newspapers every day.

RH: Yes, it was the House. They were talking about the goods and services tax coming in, right, and how it would be applied to services, and so we got the idea of getting someone to raise this issue in the House. Whether it would apply to sex workers.

VS: All of the newspapers had half page ads that read "If you have any questions about the new goods and services tax, call this number. 1-800..." It was a government number. So I called.

RH: What was the amount of the GST on a blow job? That was one of our questions.

VS: I said “I’m a prostitute” as we were known then “And, so, if I am charging fifty dollars...” It’s just I, I don’t charge... Let it be known that I do not charge fifty dollars for a blow job. I just... said that. So I asked the poor guy on the line. “If I’m providing a blow job for fifty dollars, must I charge GST?” And he said “Yes you do.” And I asked him how much that would be, and he worked it out for me. “Okay!” I thanked him for his service. Then I called CityTV, CBC, CTV

RH: Yes, we were really bored and explained this to them.

VS: Yes, and I said “You don’t have to take my word for it though. Call them yourself.” And they did. And so we did a lot of media about it. I stated that with responsibilities like paying taxes, sex workers should also have legal rights. And two days later, it was raised in the House of Commons during Question Period. Because it was all over the media now! Like, how can you make the GST about sex? The media loved this!

RC: That’s brilliant.

RH: But someone had done their research. Because the answer to the question about whether the GST would apply was that the sex workers, or prostitutes, would be independent contractors, and because they typically earn under thirty thousand dollars a year each, they would be exempt. Right? And normally you hear inflated amounts of money that prostitutes earn. And so someone had actually looked into this and knew the real numbers.

VS: We knew then that the federal government knew how much the average sex worker in Canada earns. This is back in the ‘80s, you know. So how did they know that?

RC: Yes. That’s pretty brilliant.

GK: That’s amazing.

VS: It was fun!

GK: Well, that’s another important thing about sex worker activism. That it’s fun! Right?

VS: Agreed! But the point we pointed out in the media interviews we did on the GST was that rights and responsibilities do go together.

GK: So we've just got a few more questions. Were you at all involved – because I was then involved, and I remember working with Andy Sorfleet and Chris a bit about this – there was, this new legislation that came to be called, I think it was actually called the Child Porn Law. But we called it the Youth Porn Law.

VS: Right.

GK: And it led to arrests of hustlers, artists, all sorts of people. Were you involved at all in...

VS: Not really, no. No I wasn't. But I don't know if that was the same law that feminists agitated, some feminists agitated, to get pushed through and then the first charge that was laid under that new law was against Glad Day book store.

GK: What you're referring to is the Butler Decision. And it was basically a change to the definition of "obscenity." Where "obscenity" was now about *harm*, right? Not... "too much sexual explicitness" but, supposedly, just "harm" and then *Bad Attitude* was the first charge at Glad Day—

VS: Right. *Bad Attitude*. Yes.

GK: That's a different thing, but you're right. Some feminists were actually behind that. Not all feminists, and certainly not the ones that I was hanging out with at that time, but. Yes, certainly some. The people who were more inclined to support the Andrea Dworkin/Catherine MacKinnon, type position.

VS: Dworkin and McKinnon... Yes.

RH: I know I was involved in that Canadian Committee Against Customs Censorship.

GK: CCACC! Yes! I was involved in that, too!

RH: Oh, yes. My involvement was more peripheral than you were. I was friends with Max Allan who was deeply involved in that. And yes, there ended up being a court case about, because they seized *The Joy of Gay Sex* at the border and eventually the whole thing went to court and we *won*, but it was, like, a hundred thousand dollars and the judgement basically only covered that one book.

GK: I know.

RH: Which meant you would have had to challenge it, it would be very expensive challenging each book.

GK: Yes, that was a challenge to Canada Customs regulations.

RH: It was around the same time as—

GK: A little bit earlier. To challenge *The Joy of Gay Sex*. There's all sorts of permutations of the Butler Decision, because that also had some influence on the Labaye Decision and, I mean, it's hard to exactly determine what that means...

VS: But yes. The only way I think, though, that they would use it against you is if they can victim you to death. Like they victim us. And they use that against us. We're all suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, we can't see the damage that sex work is doing to us, so we need to be immediately and forcibly rescued, usually by a faith-based organization. Consent cannot be seen to be freely given because adult women are too stupid? So if they start that, well they, I know they tried that already with, you know, churches would say they could cure you of homosexuality. Well now they're doing it with us sex workers. So if they can get back somehow to saying they can cure you, then they can start using all these laws against you. I believe the way they will try to get their claws back into the Gay community is via the debate about including LGBT issues in sex education in schools.

GK: So the last three questions are, we always ask everyone if there are people that you've known who've died of AIDS, that you would like to speak about. Because part of what we're trying to do is to remember people who also are no-longer around.

RH: Well... Abigail.

VS: Abigail. Yes...

RH: A woman who turned up on our doorstep running from the States.

VS: Would you talk about Abigail?

RH: Well, Abigail wasn't a sex worker.

VS: I know.

RC: It doesn't have to be.

RH: Yes.

VS: But she was an advocate, in a way. Like...OK, what happened. She was—

RH: Abigail was a male-to— She had been—

VS: She had been a soldier in Vietnam.

RH: Vietnam. As a male. Right? And, anyway. Later on, after she got out of the army. She realized she wanted to transition to female, and she worked in a bank. And she embezzled money from it to pay for her surgery. And, she did have the surgery, but then she got caught, found out, tried, and sentenced to a prison. She was sent to prison in California and the prisons are privatized there. Anyway. She was put in a men's prison even though she was post surgery. She was repeatedly raped by guards and prisoners and that's how she got AIDS. And she did get out.

VS: She did get out.

RH: And she'd enrolled in women's studies, I believe.

VS: But they were trying to put her back in.

RH: Yes. Didn't she sue the state over her treatment?

VS: Yes, she did. She sued the state. And they were trying to put her back in because she was suing. So she knew she had to get out of the United States. She knew Angela Davis and I don't know how but Angela Davis had my address. Doorbell rings, "Hello, my name is Abigail. I'm a refugee from United States." Invite her in, told us her story and all. And, yes. She remained a good friend.

RH: Well, she had terrible trouble in Toronto, though. I mean, she did stay in hostels as well.

VS: She did. She had to stay in hostels.

RH: But there were difficulties because—

VS: Elizabeth Fry Society didn't want to let her in because she's transgender, and they don't really like transgender people. At least didn't then, and I think still don't. I know they dislike sex workers, that's for sure. So... she got the test and found out, because she was— She called me and she said "I was so hoping to just get through this, just this. And then I'd be clear." Because Canada recognized her as a refugee.

GK: That's interesting.

VS: Yes.

GK: That's really hard, to get recognized as a refugee from the States.

VS: Yes it is. So... She was so hoping to get through that one last hurdle. Hoping and hoping the HIV test would come up negative. But it did not. And she, she took her life.

RH: Eventually she did. She was sick by that point. That was in the early days when, from diagnosis to somebody dying was very fast, sometimes it was less than a *year*. Less than two was really common. Eighteen months? Yes. Eventually she did take her own life.

VS: And when the police went into her apartment, they called me. I guess I was on her list, and they couldn't understand why this woman who had all these medals—

RH: Medals from the U.S. army.

VS: And they couldn't understand it. So I explained. And the cop had great respect for Abigail. Because of the Vietnam stuff. I remember saying to Abigail once, You know, "You've got such a great body, your head is so together, like... have you thought of becoming a sex worker?" This was before we knew she had HIV. And she said "Well, Valerie. I can't! I've got all these shrapnel scars on my legs!" and it's just weird. And she was in the horrible battle, well the whole war was awful, but that battle became known as Hamburger Hill. She told me she was laying on the soaking wet ground, covered in mud and blood. And air support, helicopters, came and got some of them out, and she was one. Abigail always had a high voice. After she recovered she was doing radio work, coordinating and the other soldiers would get weirded out. They'd ask "Why do we have a woman giving us coordinates"? It's like Ryan has a deep voice, and Abigail had a high voice. Yes. She was really sweet.

RH: It wasn't until her funeral that we found out she was also Jewish.

VS: Jewish, yes.

RH: We met her parents.

VS: Her parents came up from the States to her funeral, and it was difficult talking with them, because, while they were very nice, they referred to Abigail as "he." And so we're having this very nice conversation and I'm saying "she" and her dad is saying "he." It was strange.

GK: So that, the final two questions that, again, we ask everyone is: Is there anything that's cropped up as we've been doing this interview that you'd want us to talk about but haven't had a chance to? This is your opportunity to raise anything else that has cropped up.

VS: There are many, many things. But I'm getting tired.

GK: And the final thing is do you have any suggestions on other people we should talk to. You said you were going to mention Philip Berger, well, we've done that one.

VS: Yes. Maybe Davide? Danny's guy. Davide Pistilli?

RC: Yes. I recognize that name. Andy Sorfleet has a website that has pictures of Danny and a few obituaries, and that name is, there's a picture of Danny with his then-boyfriend, so yes. That's definitely the name.

VS: Maybe Davide. He would know. He lived with Danny for the last couple of years, of Danny's life. He would have known a lot about what was going on, what Danny was doing.

RC: Yes, that's really smart.

GK: Well, thank you so much for talking to us, both of you. It's been really great.

VS: Thank you. Pleasure has been mine. This history is important. The famous author and activist Marcus Garvey said, "A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots." Or in our case whoristory. I like that new word because it melds whore and history together very nicely. I think Amy Lebovitch came up with it. I prefer it over whorestory.

RC: It is part of what I've been doing at AAHP. I'm really trying to capture the sex workers who were there. I started on the project about a year and a half ago and I've been like, "We need to do this, we need to do this, we need to do this." So getting to interview you is the icing on the cake for me. Thank you so much!

VS: You are very welcome.