

Nova Scotia

Halifax woman who photographed 2SLGBTQ+, women's rights movements has work archived

Anita Martinez's photos, spanning 40 years, 'brings the past forward,' says archivist

[Giuliana Grillo de Lambarri](#) · CBC News · Posted: Feb 28, 2025 6:00 AM AST | Last Updated: February 28



Work of late Halifax 2SLGBTQ+ activist to be archived

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Photographer Anita Martinez died leaving tens of thousands of pictures behind. As Giuliana Grillo reports, the community is working to preserve around 40 years' worth of photos that depict marginalized communities in Halifax.

Eric Smith flips through the pages in one of the many photo albums in his best friend's apartment in Halifax's west end.

He finds a photo of himself, taken decades earlier, with one of the first female members of the Nova Scotia Persons With AIDS Coalition. Looking at the black and white image, Smith thinks of the woman behind the camera — his friend, Anita Martinez.

Martinez, a professional photographer, died of lymphoma on Feb. 4 at the age of 85. Following her death, Smith said members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community and women's rights activists came together to help preserve the tens of thousands of photos Martinez captured of those movements in Halifax from the 1980s onward: snapshots of early Pride Parades, Take Back the Night marches and personal portraits of members of marginalized communities.

"Her contribution has been huge," said Smith. "[For] over 40 years she basically photographed the history of the queer movement."

The Elderberries, an organization for 2SLGBTQ+ elders in Atlantic Canada, raised over \$2,400 to repair Martinez's computer, recover over a dozen external drives, and back up the photos on them before they are archived at the Nova Scotia LGBT Seniors Archive, housed in Dalhousie University.



This photo, taken in the 1980s, shows Eric Smith and a woman, both part of the Nova Scotia Persons With AIDS Coalition. The photo was taken by Smith's friend, Anita Martinez. (Patrick Callaghan/CBC)

Creighton Barrett, acquisitions and reference archivist at Dalhousie University Archives, said Martinez's collection is important because it "brings the past forward" and captures the fuller picture of what life looked like not long ago.

"The struggle for human rights and anti-discrimination, these are all still current battles that are happening today," he said. "And so you do see how far things have come, but also it's a reminder of how far we have to go."

Martinez moved to Halifax from the United States in 1983. Two years later, Martinez came out to her youngest daughter.

"She told me that she was in love with a woman," said Lori Anne Goldammer. "It didn't matter, male, female — just that somebody was kind to Mom."



A photo of the 1996 Halifax Gay Pride march taken by Martinez. It is among the photos she contributed to the Dalhousie University Archives in 2019. (Dalhousie University Archives)

Goldammer said her mother had lived at Bryony House, a shelter for women fleeing domestic abuse, for a period of her life. There, Martinez connected with the women's rights movement and started attending events against gender-based violence and gender inequality.

With their permission, she started taking photographs of other residents. Later, when she became involved with AIDS activism, she took portraits of many young gay men with AIDS who were nearing the end of their lives. Many of those photos were hung on a wall at the Nova Scotia Persons With AIDS Coalition, now the Health Equity Alliance of Nova Scotia.

Smith said she did this as a way to preserve their legacy at a time where HIV/AIDS was heavily stigmatized.

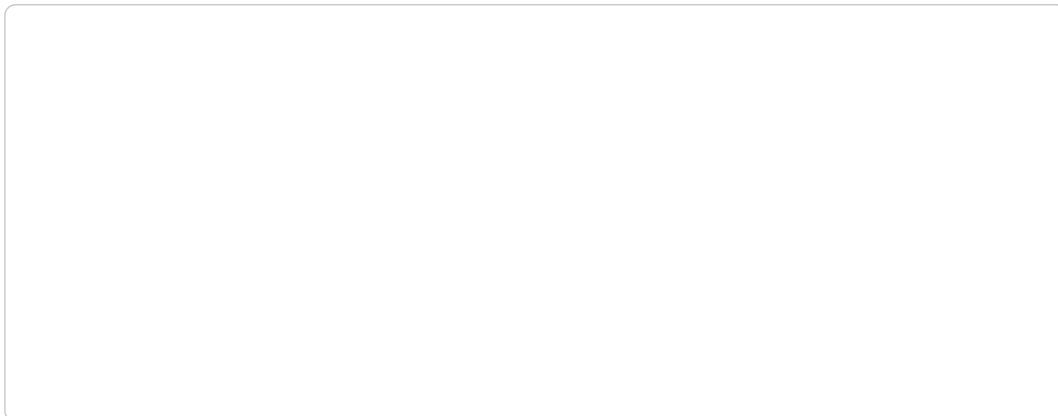
"A lot of them [had] been kicked out of their homes. They had basically no possessions. A lot of them came from rural areas," he said. "Anita was there with the camera, and it became really important for a lot of these guys to have a photo portfolio of themselves to leave to their friends."



A wall of photos showing the original members of the Nova Scotia Persons With AIDS Coalition. The portraits were taken by Martinez and hung on a wall at the coalition's office. (Health Equity Alliance of Nova Scotia)

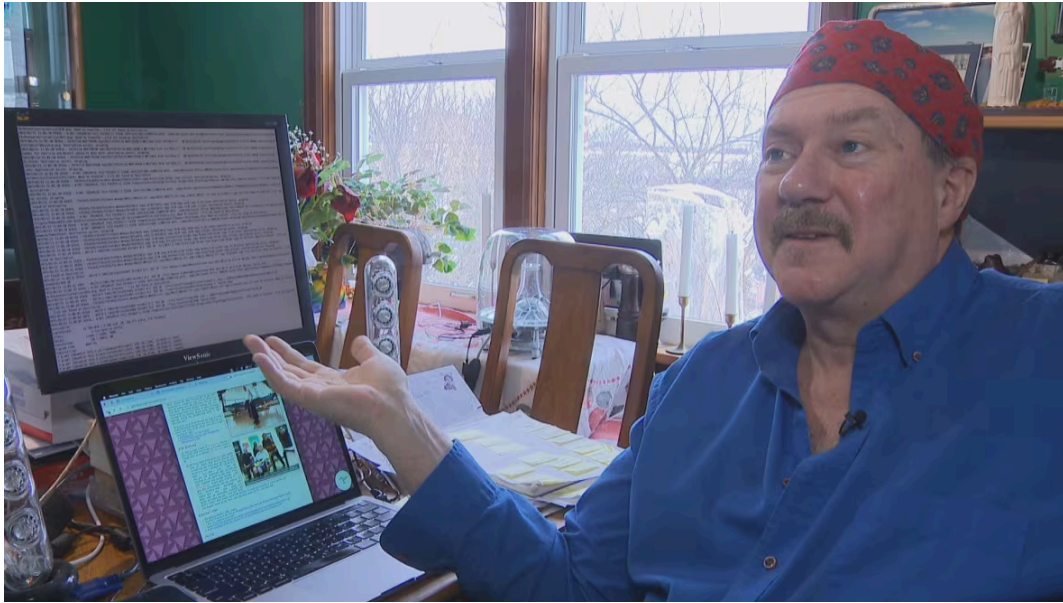
When Daniel MacKay received a call from Martinez's daughter following her death, he went to Martinez's apartment and picked up her computer and 13 external drives, which amounted to over 20,000 gigabytes of content.

As secretary of the Elderberries, he sought community help for fundraising. The original goal was \$1,200, but MacKay said they received over double that, showing how beloved Martinez was.



Once at home, MacKay started the process of sorting through the drives, which contain a mix of personal documents and photographs. While the process is painstaking, MacKay said it is worth it so that future generations can map out the history of the 2SLGBTQ+ and women's rights movements — and the woman behind the lens.

"Dozens or hundreds of years into the future, she will be remembered as the documentarian for the queer community in Halifax in the '80s and '90s," he said.



Daniel MacKay is in the process of sorting through Martinez's drives, which contain a mix of personal documents and photographs. (Hans Banny/CBC)

The next step is to get the community to help identify the photos.

During Martinez's celebration of life on Feb. 22, photo albums were displayed and attendees were invited to add sticky notes next to the photos if they knew when they were taken or who is in them.

MacKay said he will continue to organize similar events and work with the community on the project.

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