

QUEER CARE IN NOVA SCOTIA DURING THE AIDS CRISES

2nd edition. June 2025

AIDS TIMELINE IN NS

- 1984** • Nova Scotia has its first AIDS death in September. Shortly thereafter the Gay Health Association (GHA) is formed.
- 1986** • School teacher Eric Smith is tested for HIV (without his consent) and his HIV+ status is illegally shared.
- 1988** • 400 people attend a candle light vigil at St. Georges Anglican Church in Halifax, and 47 lost loved ones are named.
 - The Nova Scotia Persons With AIDS Coalition (NSPWAC) is formed.
 - The Gay Alliance for Equality, along with other community groups, organizes Halifax's first Pride Week.
 - Halifax's AIDS hospice "Morton House" (after Frank Morton) opens with four beds – and a waiting list.
 - NS Task Force on AIDS submits its final report to the Minister of Health.
- 1990** • A needle exchange begins at NSPWAC.
 - Valley AIDS Concern Group is formed.
 - Pictou County Women's Centre sponsors a Women and AIDS Project.
 - Stepping Stone launches HIV/AIDS outreach program.
 - A local chapter of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) forms in Halifax.
- 1991** • MacAIDS takes on a provincial focus and becomes AIDS NS.
 - After a successful 3-year campaign by Lesbian and Gay Rights Nova Scotia (LGRNS) and other supporting groups, the NS Government amends provincial Human Rights act to add Sexual Orientation.
 - Black Outreach Project begins consultation process, is formed and funded.
 - The Pictou county AIDS Coalition is formed.
 - Tuma Yong and Elizabeth Paul form the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq AIDS Task Force.
 - AIDS Coalition of Cape Breton (ACCB) is formed.
- 1994** • AIDS Nova Scotia (ANS) and NSPWAC move into the same office in September to begin the amalgamation process to become AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia (ACNS) in 1995.
- 1996** • Highly Active Anti-retroviral Therapy (HAART) becomes the standard treatment for HIV.
 - Safe Harbour Metropolitan Community Church sets up "Manna For Health" food bank at ACNS in response to need amongst those with HIV/AIDS.
- 1998** • ACNS chairperson, Wilson Hodder wins his court challenge for same-sex spousal benefits.
 - Dr. Bob Fredrickson becomes the local resource in NS for transgender health info.



DEDICATION

This zine is dedicated to **Dr. Bob Fredrickson** and **Wally and Mary Schlech**. These wonderful people made it possible for RadStorm to buy and upgrade our home at 2177 Gottingen St in Halifax, ensuring that we could survive as a volunteer-run, non-profit community space for many years to come. They also have contributed to anti-poverty struggles in Nova Scotia, and were at the forefront of HIV/AIDS care in the first decades of that epidemic.

RadStorm is a queer-positive, anti-capitalist space that hosts many activities that centre the LGBTQ+ community, and we are proud to be part of a legacy of queer care in Nova Scotia.

This zine documents the history of HIV/AIDS care in Halifax, where Wally Schlech, as head of infectious diseases for the province, was the person that Nova Scotians heard speaking about AIDS regularly. Dr. Bob ran a clinic where virtually all of the LGBT community went, and consequently was the primary care for almost all of the AIDS patients in Halifax in the 1980s and early 1990s. He also founded multiple advocacy organizations. These doctors played a key role in not only supporting the LGBTQ community, but also educating the public and healthcare institutions and workers to combat the AIDS hysteria and provide the community most hard hit by the disease with compassionate care.

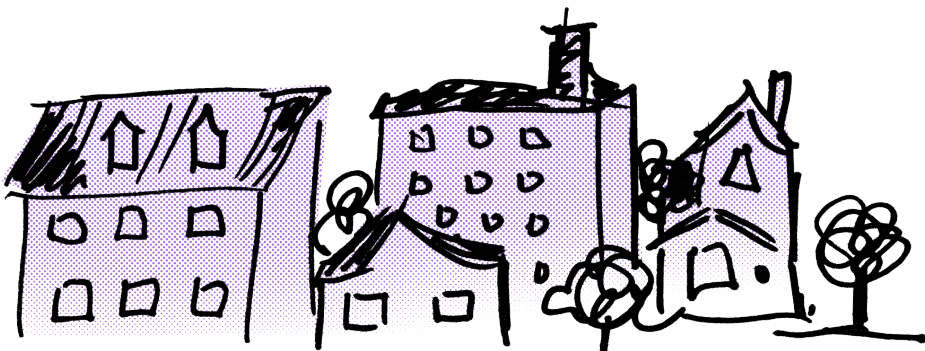




GAY HEALTH ASSOCIATION



In the early 80's, Halifax's gay bars doubled as community centres. The two main gay clubs, **Thee Klub** and **The Turret**, both had social missions. Thee Klub raised funds for the Equality Scholarship Fund, a fund to allow gay men to attend post-secondary school. The Turret was owned and operated by the **Gay Alliance for Equality**, which provided funding for gay and lesbian political causes and cultural events.





After the first well-known “Club Boy” Graeme Ellis died of AIDS only 16 days after his diagnosis, the community sprung into action. The year was 1984, and the community owned bar, “The Turret” had been renamed “Rumours” and moved to a new location on Granville Street. The Gay Alliance for Equality still ran the club, and after being approached by a small group formed by Dr. Bob Fredickson, John Hurlbert, Arthur Carter, Darrell Martin and Scott MacNeil, they agreed to launch a fundraiser aimed at educating the gay community on AIDS risk reduction. The Gay Health Association was born. With the funds from that first party, they were able to open a PO Box and print and distribute risk reduction pamphlets.



The Association also got media attention, helping reporters connect with medical personnel and patients to cast a wider net to spread information about AIDS. However, this prompted the Gay Health Association to change their name, as the news refused to broadcast any name with the word “gay” in it. Dr. Bob suggested the name “Metro Area Committee on AIDS”, or MacAIDS, and by the end of 1985, the newly formed organization was incorporated and registered with the Nova Scotia Registry of Joint Stocks. Soon after, it applied to Health Canada for funding. With that funding, MacAIDS opened their first office on Blowers St, and even organized a one-day conference on AIDS in Halifax. When the Canadian AIDS Society had their inaugural meeting in Toronto, MacAIDS represented Nova Scotia.



Boycott 'inevitable' over AIDS teacher

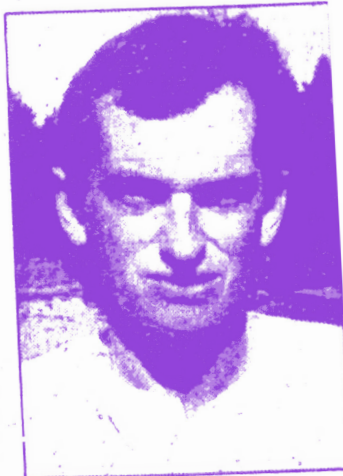
By ROB GORHAM
Yarmouth Bureau

STONEY ISLAND, Cape Sable Is- and — Parents opposed to the rehiring of Eric Smith — Nova Scotia's first teacher known to have contracted the AIDS virus — say a large-scale boycott of their children from school is inevitable.

Many of the parents, "shocked" and "angered" by the Shelburne District School Board's decision Wednesday to allow Mr. Smith to resume teaching Grade 6 at Cape Sable Island Elementary School, gathered at the home of Tina Hatfield here Wednesday night and Thursday.

"I had about 20 concerned parents here last night, a dozen here today, and the phone has been ringing off the hook," Mrs. Hatfield said in an interview Thursday.

See **BOYCOTT** page 20



Eric Smith

Won't send kids to Smith's class parents warn

By PETER HAYS
The Daily News

Parents on Cape Sable Island are preparing to pull their children out of the local public school if Eric Smith is allowed to return to the classroom.

Smith left a teaching job at Clark's Harbour amid controversy in 1987 after the small community discovered he is homosexual and has the AIDS virus. To diffuse the furore, the province hired Smith as an AIDS consultant in the Education Department.

But Smith's Halifax contract expires this summer, and he has applied to return to teaching on Cape Sable Island.

Education Minister Ron Giffin has said Smith has a legally binding contract with the school board, and must be allowed to return to work there.

"We thought it important to make a statement prior to (next Monday's school board) meeting, to let the school and the general public know we are still concerned with this," parent Kent Blades said yesterday.

Blades said parents in the community are considering forming their own school system to keep their children out of the same classroom as Smith.

"It would consist of some volunteer teachers using the Department of Education-approved curriculum, and making use of some local facilities; it would be simply an alternative system at this sense," he said.

Blades did not want to say whether a parent's group wants Smith out because he is gay or because he carries the AIDS virus.

"We'd be fools to deny that both the teachers aren't important for some people's group," he said. "Those are still issues they probably always will be for folks."

Blades added that medical evidence indicates the AIDS virus is virtually impossible to contract under normal classroom conditions and changed the views of local residents.

"We've had four years now (since Smith's departure) to think about the AIDS issue, and local authorities have brought out some information and so on, and yet the people are just as afraid as they were in 1987," he said.



ERIC SMITH

ERIC SMITH STORY

Homophobia at heart of issue—Smith

Decision whether to rehire Cape Sable Island teacher expected by Monday

By Rob Gorham
YARMOUTH BUREAU

Eric Smith, the former Cape Sable Island school teacher pulled from the classroom in 1987 for carrying the AIDS virus, says it's now opponents of gay people who are most afraid of him returning to his old job.

"I guess now, as opposed to 1987, the issue is one of homophobia. They (parents) can't imagine a gay teacher being a proper role model," Mr. Smith said Friday in a telephone interview from Halifax.

Mr. Smith, 33, has written to the Shelburne District School Board, requesting the board "re-open his teaching position." Mr. Smith has been on loan to the Department of Education the past four years, but his contract runs out in July and he wants his teaching position back.

The board has received Mr. Smith's letter and will have to make a decision before May 31, said board chairman Margaret Stoddard.

Ms. Stoddard has "no comment" on what the board thought of the request and said "no date has been set" to discuss the issue.

Ms. Stoddard said she was "not sure" if the matter would be on the agenda of the school board's next meeting on April 15. She also has "no idea" if parents had made any complaints to the board.

In 1987, concerned parents on Cape Sable Island formed a group and threatened to pull their children from school if Mr. Smith was permitted to teach.

Mr. Smith said he expects there will still be considerable opposition, but suggested the opposition may have more to do with his sexual preference than the risk of disease transmission.

People in small communities get upset "with the liberal press and gay rights movements telling them what to do," he said. "They don't want to be told from people on the outside how to do things."

In the heat of the emotional debate in 1987, Mr. Smith said many people didn't take the time to educate themselves about AIDS.

"I think things have been relatively calm over the last three and a half years." People who wanted to learn more about AIDS have had the time to do so, he said.

"What makes the whole thing

interesting?" Mr. many Cape Sable knew about his years before he contracted the AIDS virus.

"Some people know. But certain of people knew back in high school. Mr. Smith expect to hear from before the end of the year."

If he isn't position, Mr. Smith include pursuing through the H mission or the

An oft-cited account illustrating the reality of the AIDS hysteria in Nova Scotia is the story of Eric Smith, who taught at Cape Sable Island Elementary School. In 1987, a gossipy medical secretary disclosed his HIV positive status, and a firestorm followed. Parents demanded that he be fired from his post, and one city councillor even demanded that gay people be banned from the classroom all together, including students.



ERIC SMITH

“There was sort of a lack of communication with all groups involved,” admitted Smith. “So much so that when they actually decided to take me out of the classroom, I had no idea that they were debating, that they were thinking about that.”

Smith was publicly outed at the beginning of summer, and by the end of the summer tensions escalated through the private conversations of townsfolk; The school board decided to pull Eric from the classroom.

Luckily, the AIDS Task force was forming around the same time, and Smith was available to become it's first “**token AIDS person and gay person**,” according to Smith. The Task Force was made up of two representatives from five different government departments, including Justice, Health, Education and Social Services. From civil society, it included representatives from the teacher's union, the Nurse's Association, The Home and School Association, the Dental Association, and eventually members from MacAIDS.

The Task Force on AIDS conducted a wide-ranging review of all matters relating to AIDS in Nova Scotia, including holding more than a dozen public forums.

These meetings were sometimes hostile, and the task force was not always welcome. Scott MacNeil recalled the meeting on Cape Sable Island, where Eric Smith had taught: “The newspaper headline and editorial were basically saying that the Task Force was not welcome there.” They listened to submissions claiming that “the thinking and free swinging lifestyle” of gay men was to blame, and others that concluded “we do not feel we can expose our children to a virus borne disease that could kill them.”

The “one lone voice in that sea of hysteria” was Ms. Joan Czapalay with the Nova Scotia Teachers Union. “There are two principles which might guide us which we need now more than ever,” Scott recalled her saying. “Love one another and do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

As Joan remembers it, she literally had to put herself in between Scott and the angry townsfolk. “I took him home in my Bronco! We were chased!”

“I shall never forget that night,” Joan recounted of the night. “A mountie said ‘get him (Eric) out of here asap. The two of us can’t stop that mob.’ I never drove so fast.”



In September 1988 the Task Force submitted its final report to the Minister of Health, containing forty-seven recommendations related to AIDS education, care and financial support for people with AIDS/HIV and ensuring the rights of infected people.

Despite growing to 21 people, the Task Force worked surprisingly well, according to Eric Smith, even though there were some disagreements on what to recommend.

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contracted the AIDS virus.

"Some people say they didn't know. But certainly a large number of people knew I was gay from word back in high school."

Mr. Smith said he doesn't expect to hear from the board much before the end of May.

If he isn't offered a teaching position, Mr. Smith said his options include pursuing the matter

"The task force was a really positive experience", recalled Eric Smith in a 2014 interview. "And in reading back through some of the press coverage of the reports, you know there's lots of praise for how well thought out the recommendations were, how they weren't stand alone, they were all intertwined; and the important ones that the government didn't accept, the media were extremely critical of the government."



ERIC SMITH

Reflecting on the efficacy of the task force's work, Eric explained two polls asking if people with HIV and gays should be allowed in the classroom. "When we did it in November, the results were about only 25 percent of people said they should be. When we did it six months later, the numbers were almost the opposite," Eric recalled. "Almost 75 percent were saying there was not a problem with it."

Most of the report's recommendations were accepted, with the exception of amending the Human Rights Act to include sexual orientation as protected ground for discrimination and anonymous testing for HIV/AIDS. Within a few years, however, the change to the Human Rights Act was made in Nova Scotia, five years before the federal Act was similarly amended. And in 1994, anonymous testing was available in Halifax.

Yarmouth Bureau

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PWA COALITION



Some of the First Members of the Persons With Aids (PWA) Coalition In Halifax.
From Left to Right Back Row...Dayle Oxford, Fred Wells, Father Mike Macdonald, Eric Smith, Raymond MacDougall
From Left to Right Front Row...Frank Morton, Peter Woods, Bruce Davidson

At the last of the task force public hearings, a person who identified themselves as “Kevin” spoke out, identifying himself as a person living with AIDS. “Kevin”, who later went public with his real name Bruce Davidson, became one of the founding members of the Person with AIDS (PWA) Coalition. His experience as a father of two boys allowed him to connect with youth, as he presented at high schools throughout Nova Scotia, including his sons’ school.

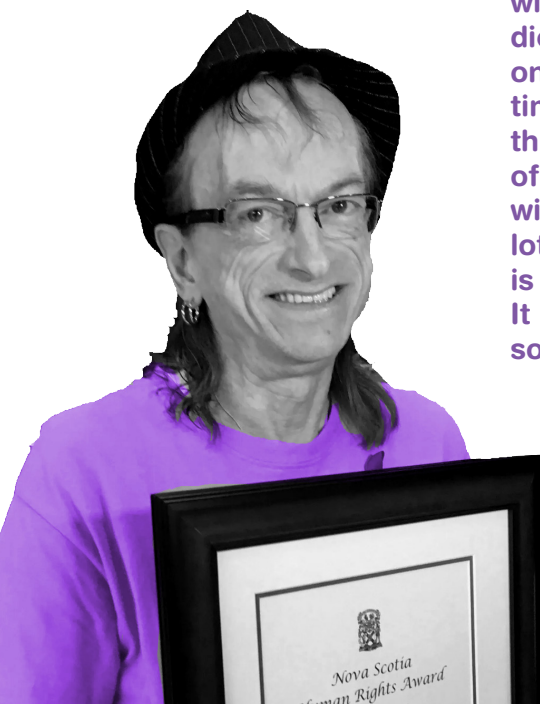


Bruce's children with Bruce (Davidson) and Dale," AIDS Activist History Project.
Photo by Anita Martinez

While MacAIDS did AIDS101 education, the PWA Coalition focused on peer support, walking their members through their grief, while helping them shift their mentality from dying of AIDS to living with the disease. While both organizations did advocacy, MacAIDS was known as professionals in the field, while the PWA Coalition was an activist organization, with the anger and urgency that came with their lived experience.

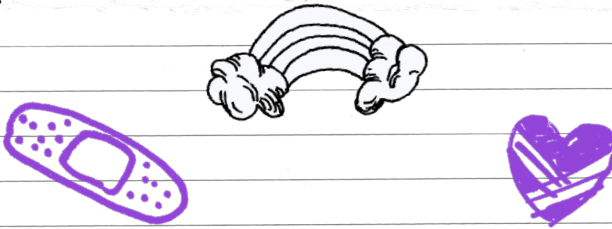
The first coalition office was on Gottingen St, across from the Rumours nightclub. There were multiple spaces for offices and lounging, with a fridge that was always full of snacks. The offices would often be open at all hours of the night, as people from the night club might have needed a quiet place to talk through what they were experiencing.

“I mean it sounds strange when you say, late ‘80s early ‘90s, working in an AIDS organization was probably the best time of my life,” admitted Eric Smith. “I mean that sounds odd, because those were crisis days and people were sick and dying all the time. I mean as far as positive, rewarding feelings you were accomplishing a lot of stuff that in a regular job you weren’t doing. You know, sitting up all night with someone who wanted to die at home. You know, you only met the person three times, but in that space of three nights you become best of friends and here you are wiping their backside. And a lot of people think, ‘Okay, how is that exciting or rewarding?’ It is. You’re accomplishing something and it is...
It was wonderful.”



The PWA ran a low-key needle exchange, giving out clean needles to drug users. They also ran outreach programs for women and black folks, as they were self conscious that as a gay male and white-dominated space, they would need to put extra effort in reaching communities outside of that demographic.

According to Eric Smith, as the PWA Coalition was evolving and getting invited to more and more government tables, its voice started to change. Believing that AIDS advocacy needed to employ a diversity of tactics, Eric ran around and told people about this shift and said, “We need to start an ACT UP.”



On World AIDS Day, December 1st, 1990, the Halifax chapter of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) staged their first protest of government inaction on AIDS by marching with a donkey and staging a die-in in the streets of Halifax.



SEP 15 1988

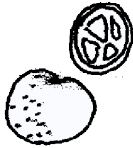
AIDS protest

Members of the Nova Scotia PWA (People With AIDS) Coalition demonstrate outside the conference of the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities in Halifax yesterday. They

were protesting a resolution by three Shelburne county municipalities banning teachers with the AIDS virus from the classroom. The resolution was defeated.

"The things we were looking at as far as dealing with the government were issues, and in a lot of cases these were issues that go beyond AIDS, things like increasing the amount of money available to people on social assistance, so they can actually buy decent food," explained Eric Smith.

"If your immune system's down obviously Kraft Dinner's not going to sustain you very long."



Newspaper clippings from Halifax ACT UP actions.

LEFT: News clipping from The Daily News (Halifax)
RIGHT: An article from the Daily News on the Halifax Pride Parade. June 23, 1991



By BARBARA BATEMAN
The Daily News

AIDS activist Eric Smith led the annual gay and lesbian parade yesterday afternoon.

As many as 125 members of the city's gay and lesbian community played drums, danced through the streets and towed helium balloons along the route. Placards and T-shirts celebrated the gay community and bemoaned lagging policies on AIDS and human rights.

Smith was accompanied in the parade's lead car by two tall, slender men dressed in cocktail dresses and prom gowns, while two other self-described "drag queens" walked the route — a first for the Halifax event.

"This'll give them something to look at on a Saturday afternoon," said a smiling Robert Allan of the Persons With Aids Coalition.

The parade got nearly unanimous tolerance and approval from spectators on the sidewalks of the north end and the downtown bar district.

Visitor Kevin Takakuwa said celebrations are bigger in his native San Francisco, but said he thought Haligonians are breaking new ground. "It's very nice — it's very small. It seems like a daring thing to do here."

Organizers say marching is still a dangerous statement, since the province offers gays and lesbians no protection against job or housing discrimination.

"It definitely takes some guts to do this in Nova Scotia," Krista MacRoberts said at a bazaar afterward in the gay club Rumours.

EVENTS

Gay and lesbian pride week continues through next weekend. Highlights include:

- Seminar for parents of gays at Brunswick Street United Church, 2 p.m. today.
- Vespers and reception at St. John's United Church, Windsor Street, 7:30 p.m. tonight.
- Playwright Kent Stetson reads from his critically acclaimed work, *Warm Wind in China*, 2112 Gottingen St., 7:30 p.m., Thursday.

Activist Anne many gays and offered support from walks because the fired if they walked parade. "The first were more people along the sidelines parade," she said.

U.S. sailor David said homosexual against the Bible's and shouldn't be promoted as a lifestyle.

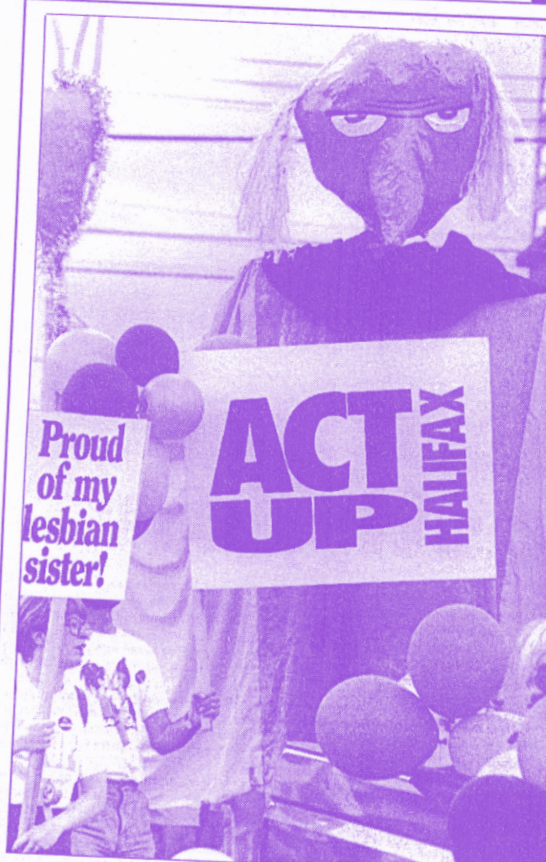
"There's a bunch kids out here. What going to get out of ling said.

But a mother of Street with a toddler didn't mind, as she ears to shield him loudest of the music, he likes it," she said tie one kept his eyes dancers and banner "It can't hurt."

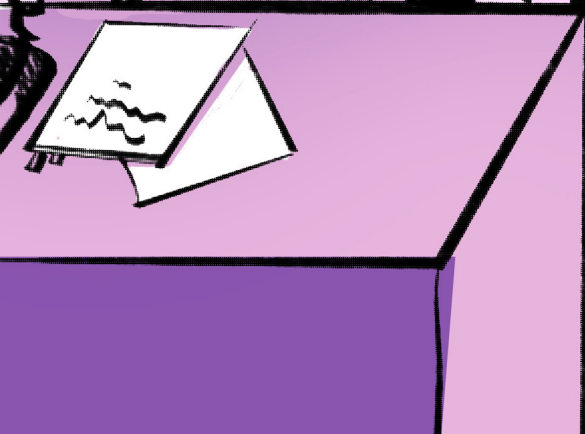
This is the third year the community pride parade, after hiatus.

Gays parade with pride

One of the many colorful participants in yesterday's parade was this giant



WHO'S
NEXT?



DR. BOB'S CLiNIC

"Bob did more for the collective sanity of the gay community than anyone. As a patient, Bob had a way of making things that were frightening, not frightening."

Bob Fredrickson's clinic, known by many as the **"gay clinic"**, was in operation before the AIDS epidemic hit Nova Scotia. Throughout the AIDS crisis, the clinic served as a community institution providing care to the community closest hit by the disease.

"It was a welcoming, holistic spot... that would serve multiple needs, sometimes needs that you didn't even know you had," explained former patient Norval Collins. The environment in the clinic was social, typically buzzing with conversation with friends and acquaintances. Not everyone was gay, but people were always open and friendly.

"The social experience in the waiting room was so good that you could have gone to the office just for that," remembers Norval.

Dr. Bob's clinic didn't take appointments, but if you didn't like the wait, you would just come back later, and if it was really urgent, you would get there just before the clinic opened. As Norval recalled, "To not have appointments, you would think that was chaotic, but it wasn't." Bob and his receptionist Mary Lou Roche were an efficient team, and, at least as Norval remembered it, you often did not have to wait long to be seen.

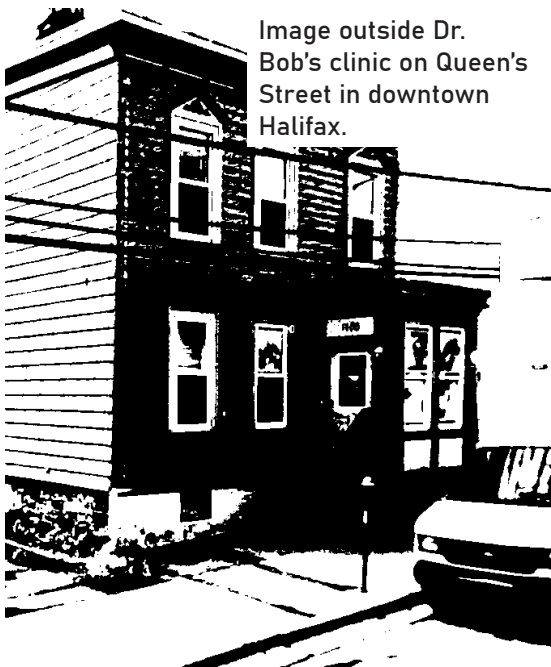


Image outside Dr. Bob's clinic on Queen's Street in downtown Halifax.

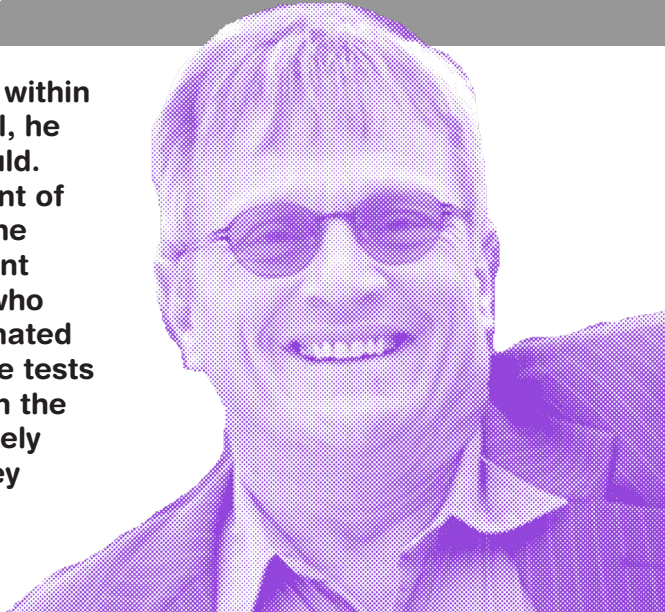
“I think about all of my experiences after Dr. Bob, nothing came close,” concluded Norval, describing other doctors’ offices as **“antiseptic”** by comparison.

While providing a warm space of care for the gay community, the context was heartbreaking.

“I think my first ten years of practice I had like, six deaths,” reflected Dr. Bob in a 2015 interview. **“Because you’re a young doctor and you have young patients. And the second ten years – several hundred. All young patients. Gay. People you knew.”**

What made things worse, for a couple of years the government was refusing to pay for the most effective treatments for patients. “I’d go to conferences and I’d be the laughing stock – no point in asking Fredrickson what they can do in Nova Scotia, because they cannot do anything!” remembered Dr. Bob. “Everyone else is getting combination therapy and we would not let it happen. And when your patients are reading that stuff and they know what’s going on, and you’re sitting there trying to have some sort of confidence level with them, and you know and they know that you’re not giving them the best treatment. And what do you do?”

For things that were within Fredrickson’s control, he helped where he could. At one point, a patient of Bob’s was sued by the Red Cross. His patient was a blood donor, who unknowingly had donated infected blood before tests were available. When the Red Cross retroactively tested the blood, they pursued charges.



"The guy was devastated. He was conscientiously giving blood," Bob recalled of his patient, who would never have donated had he known. Since his patient couldn't afford a lawyer, Bob paid for one. And after one and a half years, the Red Cross dropped the case.

Before anonymous testing was available in Halifax, Dr. Bob would work within the system to provide it. "I started sending the test under the name of John Buchanan, he was the premier at that point," Dr. Bob admitted with a chuckle. "I would number them separately in my office on post-it notes, so that they could never get it anyway. Obviously, I'm the provocateur in this situation and the Health Department didn't like me. But interestingly enough, the ID (Infectious Disease) people did because, of course, they were under the politics of Dal and can't make this noise, and I was completely autonomous."

Shit-talking magazine Frank dishes out rare praise in a birthday message for Dr. Bob in their April 21, 1998 edition.

"Robert will be 50, April 25."

Well no, I couldn't. But there's no doubt about it, the boy wonder of Queen St. is soon to be solidly over the hill. He doesn't look it and it certainly doesn't seem like two decades or more since the Decatur, Ill. born Viking arrived here, fresh out of Princeton, to work in the Northend Community Clinic.

Gregarious and disdainful of pretense and everything that comes between a patient and the care they need, Dr. Bob has ministered to a large and loyal flock of iconoclastic sickos, who universally regard him as friend rather than physician. He has championed minority causes, led the way in the treatment of AIDS and has been an outspoken critic of government healthcare policy.

They may not get the pills they think they need, but no one leaves his office without a laugh, more often than not a roar from Bob that lets the next in line know it's their turn to drop their drawers.

"John Baltzer and I have been patients since the start," Betty told

me. "We sit reverently on his doorstep every Monday and Friday waiting for him to open.

"He's just such a wonderful doctor. So kind and considerate and he even makes house calls."

Happy birthday Bob!

KENTVILLE

BIKER

DECIDES

TO RIDE SOLO

ALL GOOD THINGS HAVE TO COME TO AN END. BUT I CERTAINLY DIDN'T EXPECT

KENTVILLE'S ROMANCE OF THE CENTURY WOULD FLAME OUT QUITE SO QUICKLY.

The torrid Rick Johnson-Kimberley Anderson relationship suddenly ran out of gas in early March. The Rickster



DEFYING GRAVITY: THE REDOUTABLE, UNSTOPPABLE DR. BOB at 50, WITH HIS EQUALLY REDOUTABLE, UNSTOPPABLE NURSE, MARY LOU ROCHE, WHO IS HOLDING AT TWENTY-NINE AND THREE-QUARTERS.



As new HIV therapies became available, like AZT and HAART (or highly active antiretroviral therapy), the province prevented general practitioners like Dr. Bob from prescribing the treatments, so he had to work with doctors in the Infectious Disease division, including Wally Schlech. “Part of that was probably the government wanting to have control over it and knowledge of who did whatever,” speculated Dr. Bob.

“Once HAART happened and the spectrum of drugs changed and they all had to be done by ID, I think that my involvement with them was more supportive than it was medical,” he explained.

This, in addition to the severe burnout resulting from working for years on the AIDS epidemic in an under-funded health care system, led Dr. Bob to take time off and eventually close his clinic.

Bob went on to co-found the “Physicians’ Health Coalition,” helping doctors, dentists, and vets who were burnt out, or having drug and alcohol troubles.



WARD-8A

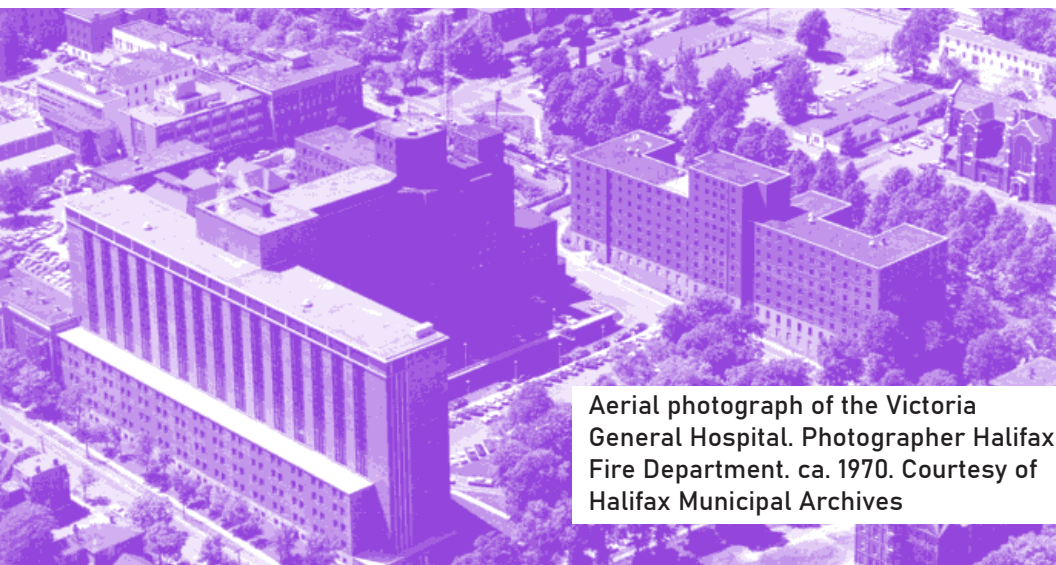
“Halifax was very lucky when the AIDS crisis struck,” explained Eric Smith, shouting out two members of the medical community. This was because Wally Schlech, the head of Infectious Diseases at Victoria General Hospital (VG), and Lynn Johnson, who came from San Francisco General Hospital, decided to create an AIDS ward on the 8th floor of the VG.

“The theory at the time was that you should be able to go in any ward,” explained Smith. “That was uncomfortable, though, if you were a couple, and you were in this ward with all of these straight people, not knowing how accepting they were.”

All of the rooms were private. And when they created the ward, they put out a call for staff. “All the staff there volunteered to work there, so there were no issues with negative reactions from health care,” explained Smith. For Smith, it worked well to have the AIDS ward for when his partner was dying. The nurses allowed him to give his partner baths in his room, and they would even let him sleep in his partner’s bed past the time that they would typically send visitors home.

“When you went to conferences, they were horrified that you were segregating people with HIV, which is not how it felt at all,” recalled Smith.

Dan MacKay also had fond memories of “8A”. He explained how concentration of AIDS patients allowed the queer community to visit with and care for people who needed it most. “On a Sunday afternoon, or whenever, you’d just go to the hospital, and go to 8a and just walk around and visit your friends there, because you knew everyone there. The fact that they were all dying was not the point of the visit,” Dan explained, “it was to be friendly and renew your friendships and to catch up and cheer them up.”



Aerial photograph of the Victoria General Hospital. Photographer Halifax Fire Department. ca. 1970. Courtesy of Halifax Municipal Archives

Of course, in other areas of the hospital, fear of AIDS impacted care. **Some surgeons refused to work on AIDS patients, and even with those that did, fear of the virus impacted outcomes.** One heartbreaking story was that of Bill Souter. Bill had gone in for a lymph node biopsy – typically regarded as a routine surgery – and an artery was mistakenly nicked. With blood spurting out, people got scared. Bill went into a coma and died shortly afterwards.

“He was one of my favourite people in the world,” remembered Bob Fredrickson, who encountered a “veil of silence” when he tried to find out more details of what had happened to his friend and former patient.

A HISTORY OF CARE AT 2177 GOTTINGEN

Mary and Wally Schlech were two of the founders of “Sunday suppers”, a Christmas party that turned into a weekly community meal at St. Andrews church, which continues to this day. In 1988 there weren’t many supports for the marginalized and homeless population in Halifax, so the leadership of Sunday Suppers wanted to expand from a weekly meal into running a drop-in centre. The idea of a drop-in centre quickly evolved into a space for street-involved youth, as youth in particular seemed to be falling through the cracks. 2177 Gottingen happened to be on the market, so Mary and Wally bought the building, and helped transform it into the **ARK**. Mary volunteered as a support person not only for people using the space, but for Dorothy Patterson, the driving force behind the ARK.

The centre offered daily meals, showers, laundry facilities, and access to other basics like clothing and socks. But beyond that, the ARK was an arts space. Youth had the opportunity to explore music, pottery, and visual arts.



“I don’t think I’d be alive today if it wasn’t for the ARK,” admitted musician Gabe Squalor. The co-founder of Halifax’s first queer owned tattoo shop, Squalor insists that the ARK was the first place that they were able to identify as an artist.

When the ARK decided not to have a physical location and moved out in 2018, Wally and Mary were happy to offer the space to RadStorm, an economically accessible community arts space that served many of the same folks who once used the ARK.



“Dorothy at the ARK, along with Wally and Mary Schlech, were incredibly supportive of RadStorm because they believed the building should continue to serve as a community space,” explained Radstorm member Capp Larsen. **“Now that 2177 Gottingen is Radstorm’s forever home, we’re proud to carry forward the legacy the ARK began, continuing to shape it as a valued, youth-centred community space where art, music, and creativity remain accessible long into the future.”**



This zine relied heavily on articles and audio clips of Elderberries salons from **Halifax Rainbow Encyclopedia**, interviews with Bob Fredrickson and Eric Smith by Gary Kinsman and Alexis Stockwell for www.aidsactivisthistory.ca, personal interviews in 2025 with Norval Collins and Dan MacKay by Sakura Saunders, and a 2025 interview with Wally and Mary Schlech by Wayves Magazine writer Onna Young.

SEP 15 1988
Members of the Nova Scotia (With AIDS) Coalition at the conference of the Municipalities in Halifax

Newspaper clippings and photos also taken from www.aidsactivisthistory.ca

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