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**Laura Browder:** Okay. I think we're ready. Do you feel ready :a?

**LC:** I reckon.

**LB:** Good.

**LC:** I'm happy that it's just being transcribed because if I fumble, it doesn't matter.

**LB:** Nothing matters. The sad truth of this is it'll be great for the archives but in the exhibition itself usually it's a 300-to-500-word text panel out of 10,000...12,000 words. So say anything.

**LC:** Exactly. I know how that is. And that's how B roll happens.

**LB:** Yes.

**LC:** I've got bazillions of hours of...and usually my B roll is better than the real thing. You know? But it makes you realize like when they say, "Oh this rare Jimi Hendrix thing just got unearthed." How did that happen? How did that get lost? It's like, "Oh, I know. I know how."

**LB:** Oh god. Yes! It's in the garage somewhere. Right?

**LC:** Exactly. It was on some B roll and nobody knew who he was at the time.

**LB:** Probably.

**LC:** Yeah.

**LB:** So I tell you what—why don't we start in a really easy way. Just tell me something about where you came from, how you grew up, what brought you to Richmond, all of that.

**LC:** Okay. I'm from Southampton County, Courtland Virginia, which is about 96 miles south of Richmond...thereabouts. That's where all the good peanuts come from. That's our claim to fame, seriously. And then the nearby town used to be a paper mill town. So my dad was a paper maker. Everybody was either a farmer or a paper maker. So I grew up there. I had three brothers. I have one left. What else do you need to know about that?

**LB:** Anything you want to tell me and/or you can tell me how you got to Richmond.

**LC:** Well I will say the best thing about Courtland, Virginia was that we had a library and museum, the Walter Cecil Rawls Library & Museum. It was in walking distance of our house. And there was nothing there. I mean we didn't have a stoplight. Still don't. But we had that. So my older brother and I spent virtually every waking moment in that library. And that's the first place that I ever saw art...was there.

**LB:** And you're talking about Alan now?

00:02:34 **LC:** Mhm.

**LB:** Yeah. So what kind of art did they have? How did you connect to it? How did he connect to it?

**LC:** They have a little museum and mostly we weren't allowed in that part and I don't know why. But where the art came from was one time... The artmobile. The Virginia Museum had a program called the "Artmobile" and, like the bookmobile, they go to rural areas. We went to the library one day and there was this big trailer parked in the side lot. We were like, "That's new." And this lady said, "Come in here." So we went in there, and it was all dark and creepy. There was this Sheba sculpture back there and that's all I remember—just the lighting, and this Sheba thing that just scared the bajeezus out of me. But what was the "thing," the "Aha!" was... "This came from somewhere. This is not from here." That was my first notion that there was a "there" there. You know? Like, "We don't have to stay here." So Alan was always more progressive. He was super smart. He was just born smart and read like mad. We all did. But he read at this level and he seemed to understand big concepts from the time he was teeny. So, you know, he already knew that there was a "there" there. He probably knew what the Sheba was, but I wouldn't.

Then he left to go to college and then that's also... I left two years later. He was two years older than I. We're all two years apart, all my brothers.

**LB:** So where'd you go to college?

**LC:** I went to Longwood.

**LB:** Okay.

**LC:** My plan was to be a teacher, but that was during the raving years when I was graduating, and I went and did my student teaching and realized you know that art was for the most part babysitting class in public schools. And I didn't have the temperament for that, so I switched my major to Painting and Printmaking at the last minute. I graduated with way too many credits. I accidentally minored in English.

**LB:** That can happen.

**LC:** I didn't even know. So...

**LB:** So then you moved to Richmond.

**LC:** Circuitously. I moved to Texas briefly.

**LB:** What was in Texas?

00:05:24 **LC:** My best friend from college was from there and I thought it would be a good place to be an artist. I didn't like it and didn't stay long. And then came back and worked at the Suffolk News Herald as a I pulled up with my Ryder truck with everything I owned. And I pulled over to get a

newspaper so I could look for a job. I was sitting there looking through the long ads and there was this job for a graphic artist. I didn't know what that meant but it had the word artist in it. It turned out I was in the parking lot of the newspaper and it was for the newspaper and I was in their parking lot. So I got out my portfolio out of the back of the truck and went in and applied for the job. So I got a job as a paste-up artist.

**LB:** That's fantastic.

**LC:** It was a great, great learning-curve job and intro into graphic design because it was a daily newspaper. You didn't have time to dwell on your mistakes. Nobody could be mad at you for long because you just had another paper to get out. But from there I learned all the things. I learned how to do all the old school things that we don't do anymore, but they were fun at the time.

**LB:** How long did you stay there?

**LC:** I was there for probably a year and a half and then I got a job in Richmond as a graphic artist at a little teeny design firm. I was supposed to be the graphic artist working behind an art director, and when I was there two weeks she quit in a huff. So I got her job.

**LB:** And this is what 1984?

**LC:** Yeah. That was in '85.

**LB:** '84... '85... okay.

**LC:** Mhm.

**LB:** So tell me about Richmond then—what was it like?

**LC:** Well Richmond was a huge city to me. I mean I'm from nowhere and we didn't come to Richmond very often. For some reason, down there, you went to Suffolk or Norfolk. My impression of Richmond from what I'd been taught was that it was the murder capital of the world and all this stuff. I got here and I just thought it was a really neat place. It was pretty and it was easy to get around. But back then it was whole lot more provincial, obviously. I was mostly focused on work. I didn't do a lot. You know? I just worked. But then in the.... I had a couple of different jobs and then I started my business in '86. That was sort of around the... Once I started my first business, I was asked to get involved in some marketing for the LGBT community because it was really, really difficult for those people to...the people who were doing Pride and whatever... it was all really small at the time...it was hard for them to go into places and get typeset or get something printed because they basically had to come out every time they did that. Printers back then were very old school. You didn't know when you were gonna get your ass kicked. So I sort of got into that, you know, doing that work for those people that I had met. And then I just got really involved in everything.

00:08:45

**LB:** Tell me more.

**LC:** So back then there was an organization called the Lesbian and Gay Pride Coalition, which today is the big Pride Fest, but back then Pride was little teeny. It was in the park. And people's big fear was that somebody was gonna come with a camera and stand across the street and take your picture and send it to your boss or whatever and get you fired. I was really lucky because my parents knew that I was lesbian and they were supportive.

**LB:** Which must have been kind of unusual.

**LC:** It was. It was. Especially for sort of a blue-collar family. My mother hated it because she hated anything that was different. She was very, very conservative. And my dad was just... When I told him, he went, "What? Oh hell, I don't care about any of that. How are your grades?" So it was just... that was the end of it. Because I had that... you know, it's like once your parents know and haven't disowned you... everybody else can just take a hike. That was sort of how I approached all of it. Once I was my own boss, even though I could lose clients, and I did, I couldn't get fired. Many people back then who were doing the work, especially on the Gay Pride Coalition, and that was sort of *the* group... they were all doing it in secret. They couldn't get their names in anything. That was sort of a big deal back then. I don't know if... I'm not a historian so I don't know enough about [unc. 00:10:41 Lyn? Lin?], what happened, but I remember that there were these little riffs about that, where people really wanted people to sign their names to things and come out where they could because visibility was so important. But they were school teachers. There were a lot of school teachers on that committee and did all the work and, you know... you couldn't.

**LB:** Yeah. They would risk their jobs.

**LC:** Right.

**LB:** And you couldn't... You could be denied an apartment, right? Or a house?

**LC:** Oh, everything. It was really, really scary back then. And people were still getting beat up in the Fan, you know, routinely. And half the time that was Vice or the police, you know? So you just had to be really, really careful. Men, I think, a little more than women. For some reason? But, I think, that was just my experience. But anyway, so when I came into the coalition, one of the things that I kind of took over was they didn't have any money. We couldn't grow or anything if we didn't have any money. So we did these little books for the Pride Festival. That was, I think, the first thing they asked me to do. So I took over ad sales for that. I had to go into businesses and say, "Would you buy an ad in this gay publication?" That was scary. You didn't know what was gonna happen. But luckily I'm intense enough that nobody hurt me. And it was a really positive experience. I would be so afraid when I would go in and then they just wouldn't even look up. They'd go, "Do you need a check now?" or "Yes, I'll take a full page." or whatever. I was able to sell enough ads for us to get more money and help grow the organization. So we started having bigger and bigger Pride festivals and things like that. We started doing fundraisers and the whole thing... Certainly I was not even one of the leaders, I was just sort of the marketing person, but like Shirley Lesser and Howard Wells and Jenny Murray and Julie Labum [00:12:58 unc. name spellings]. A lot of them were really sort of running the festivals.

00:12:58

We moved to the Richmond Center. One of the first festivals that we had there, the Southern Baptist Convention was right next door. So that was pretty funny. And another time...what was it...some big food festival...some big ethnic food festival. I can't remember what it was. That was awesome because we went over there and got food and they'd come wandering over to our side. That was fun.

Klee Jones [00:13:38 unc. name spelling] was one of our speakers then. We got some big speakers and things like that—for the time. It was a big deal. The first time we hit 3,000 people that was a huge deal. And now it's what—40,000 people? And they have every corporate sponsor on earth. I've heard a lot of complaints lately, from young people in particular, about corporations and people exploiting our community and trying to make money on us. It just makes me sort of laugh because I'm just like, "Yes! That's so awesome that they want to!"

**LB:** Yeah!

**LC:** I mean, I know there's another side to it and everything, but I'm like, "It's better than it was honey."

**LB:** I think it's probably very hard to explain, to people who are coming up today, what it was like then.

**LC:** I know... but I don't wanna be ever one of those, you know, Back-in-my-day-Missy!-kind-of-people because it's like, "Yay!" that they don't know. You know?

**LB:** Yes.

**LC:** Yay! That was what we were doing, right? So I'm glad.

**LB:** 'Cause I remember... Even coming to Richmond in 1994, when I moved here, it was so conservative...

**LC:** Mhm.

**LB:** ...and you were there ten years earlier.

**LC:** I know. And it was conservative. It was really conservative. But it was conservative in every orifice—not just *that*. You know... the way people dr.. [unc. 00:15:11 dressed?]

00:15:46

I remember—and this has nothing to do with any of this—but I had... One of my clients was McGuireWoods, the law firm. I had long since started wearing pantsuits. And that was a big deal then. Women still always wore skirts, dresses, and things like that. And I had started that [wearing pants instead]. That was my thing. And it was hard to find, you know, juicy suits, for women and everything back then. But I worked really hard at it and I had all these cool suits. Well... so... this woman who was on the client side at McGuireWoods called me. I was supposed to go over there for a meeting and she was hemming and hawing on the phone. I was

like, “What? Do I need to bring something or what?” And she goes, “I need you to wear a dress.” I was like, “Aw, hell no I’m not wearin’ a dress.” It was so funny because I was really nervous when I went. But just on principal, you know, I wasn’t wearing a dress. And I went in there and all the women who worked there were just looking at me, I mean, like I was naked! You know? It was so funny.

**LB:** I know. That’s unbelievable.

**LC:** There were clients that required that their women employees—I don’t know what they did with the men—but they required that the women shop at Talbots. Yeah.

**Woman 1:** Unbelievable.

**LC:** I mean there was such a weird little funky dress code. So I had to step on that everywhere I could, you know? And it was like... people still asked, not just, “Where are you from” or, you know, it’s like if you didn’t live here, if you weren’t born here, if your grandmother wasn’t born here... you were nobody. You know. I mean it was like that. It was so strange. And now, I think, a lot of the change has occurred because of the influx of outsiders. People came in and made that not matter.

**LB:** I remember people asking, “So where do you go to church?” Which is a question I’d never heard.

**LC:** People still ask that sometimes.

**LB:** So there you are in the middle of this tiny, scared, but vibrant community. It sounds like. So when did you first hear about HIV and AIDS?

**LC:** Right around in there in the mid 80s. I don’t remember, to be honest, exactly the first thing that I ever heard about it. But it was just something that everybody started talking about. Some people started getting sick. It wasn’t anybody that I knew directly, at first, but it was people in our community. Organizations like Richmond AIDS Information Network...and, well, the Fan Free Clinic was probably actually where I first heard about it. Norma Chance [00:18:24 unc. name spelling] was the director then. My brother had done some... My brother went there. And he had done some volunteer work for them and he had done some interviews with Norma Shance that I have the tapes for.

**LB:** Oh, amazing.

**LC:** Yeah. She was a piece of work.

**LB:** That’s what I heard.

**LC:** Yeah! So you might want those.

00:18:46

**LB:** Absolutely. Are you kidding?

**LC:** They're on those little tapes.

**LB:** That's great, because actually Ariel is going to VCU Special Collections to go through the archives of the Fan Free Clinic.

**LC:** Oh, really?

**LB:** 'Cause we're gonna use that material for our class. So, yeah, interviews? Absolutely.

**LC:** Yeah. And I've got a bunch of stuff too. Pack rat that I am. Most of it I've given to somebody who's doing some archive somewhere. But I just ran across more just the other day...

**LB:** That would be wonderful.

**LC:** ...from back then. So yeah I could just, you know, shoot it to you all or scan it so you could see it.

**W1:** They're on cassettes?

**LC:** The little tapes. They're the little tapes, those little micro-cassettes?

**LB:** Yeah.

**W1:** Yeah.

**LC:** And somewhere I have a microcassette player but I'm always nervous about tapes because, you know, as soon as you put them in a tape recorder eats it. So I try to just not really touch stuff. But I've just been going through and digitizing a bunch of regular tapes.

**LB:** That's great

**LC:** 'Cause I've got some recordings of my brother and things from back in the day.

**LB:** Just conversations with him? Or interviews?

**LC:** I had this weird... Do you remember answering machines?

**LB:** Oh yeah.

**LC:** So I had an answering machine... I don't know if this is a thing. I'm guessing it wouldn't even be legal, but whenever you picked up the receiver, it started to record.

**LB:** That sounds highly illegal!

**LC:** Right? If somebody called and left a message, it recorded that. If I picked up in the middle of that, it started to record the conversation.

**LB:** That's right. I remember that as a feature.

**W1:** Oh yeah. I remember.

**LC:** So I just never erased over tapes. I would just throw 'em in a box. Recently I was going through this box of tapes and I was like, "What are all these tapes?" I started listening to 'em and it's... I love them. They're amazing because they're so mundane. They're just every day, nobody knew they were getting recorded. You know? And I didn't care. I wasn't even thinking about that. So it was just conversations about anything. I mean I've found stuff with my dad who died and my mom, Alan, Shirley Lester, who was the first person that ever called me about anything. I met her in Babes. And she called and was telling me about you know, blah, blah, blah, some activist, something. I didn't even know what she was talking about, but I found that message.

**LB:** Wow.

**LC:** That was like the first thing that anybody ever invited me to in the community.

**LB:** That would be so amazing.

**LC:** So I have all of that stuff. So I started just... and, you know, it's just minute-for-minute, hour-for-hour. Right?

**LB:** Yeah.

**LC:** Doin' that stuff. So every once in a while, when I have time, I just play 'em. And I split 'em as I go. I split 'em and name 'em as I go. Yeah.

**LB:** So you're really an archivist, not a pack rat, right? I mean there's a fine line.

**LC:** Well... I know. There is a fine line. That's right. I can find some of this stuff. But yeah. I love that stuff. I have all kinds of things that I've run across from people. So I haven't gotten this far yet. Because they went all the way to... In 1991 I gave the answering machine to my mother. So they went that far. I even have a few tapes from when it was hers, when I called her.

**LB:** My parents still use one.

**LC:** Yeah. So I probably have... I might have some conversations. Most people called me at my office, not my house, by then. But a lot of people would just leave me messages at the house. So anyway, there might be some fundraiser related stuff. We did Artists for Life in '88. There might be some... you know... I don't know.

**LB:** So Shirley contacts you... right?...



**LC:** Mhm.

**LB:** ...in '86... '87... around there?

**LC:** Yeah. It must've been '86. Early '86.

**LB:** And what does she want you to do?

**LC:** I can't even remember. Even when she said, when I listened to her say it, I didn't recognize the name of the organization. It was a political action of some sort. It was my impression.

**LB:** Related to AIDS? Or just gay rights...

**LC:** It was probably just LGBT stuff. Yeah. But I don't remember the organization. But she was inviting me to come to this thing.

**LB:** And so you came to that thing?

**LC:** I didn't go. No.

**LB:** You didn't go to that thing.

**LC:** I didn't go to that.

**LB:** But you went to another thing?

**LC:** So later there was somebody that was the chair or the president or whatever of the Pride coalition. It was Julie Lapam [00:23:39 unc. name spelling] who has since died. She was kind of a little bit bossy number. She was intimidating a lot of people and it was making some people not want to stay involved. So Shirley asked me to come specifically to kind of take her on.

**LB:** Face her down. Yeah.

**LC:** Yeah. And she and I wound up being girlfriends actually.

**LB:** So it was perfect!

**LC:** Yeah. So that's how I got involved though.

**LB:** So there's all this activism swirling around and you're starting to hear about AIDS. It's starting to affect people in your outer circle. Maybe?

**LC:** So we started writing about it, I remember. And I have a lot of those, you probably already have them, those old gay pride books that we did?

**LB:** We need those.

00:24:30

**LC:** Oh. Well I have them, probably all of the ones I did. But Alan, my brother... I designed them and everything. They always had a listing of resources, a schedule of what was going on, the events, but they would always be an essay, like in the front, and Alan would write that. And AIDS first started cropping in... I can't remember... what was like '86 or '87. It was the one, the "Unmasking" was the theme, and I think that was the first one that I'd ever sort of heard of AIDS.

Alan had come back. He had gone to Florida, to Key West. He dropped out of school early on and didn't tell our parents and so, you know, that was a problem. But anyway... he was sort of newly gay and that was a problem. Richmond was still too close to Courtland. So he moved to Key West. While he was in Key West he got really, really sick. And he came home weighing nothing. I mean... he looked like he was gonna die then. He was sick for a year. And they finally diagnosed him with diabetes, juvenile onset diabetes. And then, in the late 80s, he was diagnosed HIV-positive. So... And I knew. And I think he knew. By then we were both doing a lot of things... and reading... this is probably unusual, but we got a lot of our information about HIV stuff from music magazines.

**LB:** That is unusual.

**LC:** I have some of them—Spin, and Cream, and Rolling Stone, and a lot of those were doing some really serious articles about HIV, about... I found a note that Alan wrote me the other day. He called me "Dweezle." I have no idea why. What the hell is "dweezle"? But he used to call... I don't know if that's some character's name that I don't know?... But anyway, it said, "Dweezles, please read this article about AZT. Do not put it in your car." 'Cause my car was sort of the great place where everything went to...

**LB:** Dumping ground.

**LC:** ...die. So... and that was an article in Cream. And I found a bunch of notes and letters that he wrote to Sara Monroe about different things and referencing articles that he was giving her.

**LB:** So when did she become his doctor?

00:28:26

**LC:** Really early on. I got him to go get tested. He didn't want to and that was sort of a thing. But he did. And we knew. That was in... I think that was in '87, somewhere or another I'm gonna run across the actual date for that and I haven't yet but I know it's there. The first time he got sick... so he had this terrible diabetes and he was HIV-positive. The first time he was in the hospital for an AIDS related thing was really early on. It was probably in '87. And he was at St. Mary's. I went... When I got to the hospital in the morning, you know they wouldn't let you stay, when I got to the hospital in the morning, they had the big, yellow... His door was covered in yellow plastic and it had the "Danger" signs on it. And they had left his food on the floor outside the door. I threw a Tasmanian devil fit... I mean... like I did a Shirley MacLaine number all over that place. That was the last time he was ever there. So, after that, I can't remember exactly when I heard about Lisa Kaplowitz's program, but... you know... we were all starting to go like, "What is this?" and so she was like the savior. I mean, that's how I remember... Her

name, to me, is like: “Lisa Kaplowitz. She’s the one. You gotta get into her thing.” So I started doing everything I could do to get him into her research program... and did. She wasn’t a doctor per se, she was a researcher, and so he had to go to MCV to be in her program. And so that’s how we got Sara Monroe. And she was his doctor from [00:29:11 unc. jump?]. And she was awesome. She was so awesome.

**LB:** I bet she was.

**LC:** I mean she... You know. AIDS was so hard because they didn’t know what was going on. You know? It was so new and it was so fast and it was so urgent. But, the thing about AIDS in that time, is that there was so much shame attached to it. So when Alan was HIV positive, it was a long time before we told anybody else in the family. And he was not close with my father and he expressly would not tell my father and wouldn’t let me tell him. I was very close to my dad. So we didn’t tell Daddy for the longest time. I can’t remember when we told my mom or the boys. But it was just so... You felt guilty all the time. And, I mean, I felt like that, and it wasn’t even me. In ’88 we did that... Chris Burnside came up with this idea to do a fundraiser to raise money called “Artists for Life” and I was on the steering committee for that with Julie Labraman, Dez Kelly, and Rob Gabriel [00:30:37 unc. name spellings]. They were down at the... They got their dance troupe and some of the drama students, from I guess VCU, to go down to the James Center and promote the show. It was a big show—two nights at the Empire Theater. Those bankers threw bricks at them and called them names and said that, you know, “That’s a faggot disease,” and, “Who cares?” kinda thing. That’s how it was. Which is just so surprising when... So we felt so alone... We’re reading articles in *Cream* and trying to find a cure—you know? I mean that’s what it was about, was trying, like, “What do we do? What do we do? What do we do? Where do we go?” I took him to a healer in Allentown, Pennsylvania. You know? I mean... I was like... So my whole role became: “How much money can I raise to cure this before my brother dies?” You know.

**LB:** It must’ve been some incredibly intense years.

00:33:38

**LC:** Oh yeah, yeah. It was very intense. And one thing that’s interesting... I don’t know where this would fit in, but... I’ve never told anybody this... So, my dad didn’t know and my parents had divorced and he had remarried. His wife’s brother was some prominent somebody, who used to around here, although I never knew him. I never even met him. But he lived in New York, and he was a gay man, and he had AIDS. Well... my dad called me and told me. And I had heard about this, just in my community. I knew that he had AIDS. So my dad called and he’s talking to me and he said, “You know Roger’s got cancer.” And I said, “Yeah.” He goes, “They said he’s probably gonna die in the next week or two.” I said, “Are y’all goin’?” And he said, “No. He doesn’t want us to.” So we talked for a little while and I said... finally... you know, I’m thinking about Alan and I thought, “Okay... this is my test balloon...” so I said, “Daddy, you know Roger doesn’t have cancer, right?” And he says, “Right.” And I said, “He’s got AIDS. You know that, right?” And he said, “Right.” And I said, “Well then why are you pretending like he has cancer?” He said, “Because that’s what he wants us to do.” And I said, “Hmmm... No... That’s not what he wants.” I said, “What he wants is to not have to know that his family hates him while he’s dying.” And so he was like, “Huh...” And the next day he called and he left a message at my office that he and his wife were going and heading to New York. So they just went to New York,

went to the hospital, told Roger they knew. He lived three more months and they stayed with him the whole time. So after that I told Daddy about Alan.

**LB:** He had known Alan was gay, right?

**LC:** Yeah. Mhm. Yeah. And it was interesting how everybody did think it was this gay, male disease. I don't know so much about the racial thing then. Like I don't know if there was... I wasn't as aware that it was a "white, gay, male thing." Because we had a fair number of African American, gay guys in our circle. My office was in old City Hall at the time, and I kept this huge, I mean, *this* big, all of condoms, right on my receptionist's desk. Right there. And it was so funny because people would think it was gonna be candy or something. And it was... I had every kind. And it was like, "Grab some condoms on your way out." That was just one thing because it was like safe sex was like, "No." You know? People thought about pregnancy. They didn't even think so much about STDs, much less AIDS. But you know now suddenly you have this thing that will kill you. So I was very much in that, sort of the safe sex education thing. Bill Harrison and I used to go and do these outrageous things at... what was it... Richmond AIDS Ministry? And Dignity Integrity? Dignity Integrity had these great programs. It was at the church, at St. Paul's Episcopal Church. I would just follow Bill Harrison's lead, to be honest, but we'd go in there and we would just say the most outrageous stuff, because if you said something that was just, I mean, *out there* risqué—then whatever little thing they were doing, that they had a question about, was not so freaky. Right?

**LB:** Yeah.

**LC:** So we would just do... But it was all about that, about safe sex education. So anyway, I had this bowl of condoms on my desk. Most of my clients were straight, or as far as I knew. And they'd come in and I'd be like, "Have some condoms." And the women, almost always, would say, "Oh, I don't need that, I'm taking birth control." I'd go, "Yeah, it's not about that. Have you had an AIDS test lately?" And they would be horrified. I mean—horrified. You know. I would go toe-to-toe with my dad, the same way, after we started talking about this. 'Cause my dad was actually, once he was single, he was a lady's-man man, you know. So I would say crazy stuff to him so he would... so he'd get it... "This applies to you too, dude." You know.

**LB:** So what would you say to him to get through and try and kind of shake him up a little?

**LC:** I would say things like... If he was seeing somebody new—and he was always seeing somebody new—he was just, you know, he was single. And I'd go, "So... who was the last person she slept with? Boy? Girl? Gay? Straight?" I mean I would just say all... I would say all kinds of things to him.

**LB:** And he rolled with it.

**LC:** Oh yeah. I mean he'd be like, "Oh god!" You know, kind of thing. But no, I mean, we had a really good relationship. And it helped him get it. He was very open, you know, in his way.

00:38:03

**LB:** Sounds like maybe more so than your mom.

**LC:** Oh, yeah, yeah. Although, I mean, she tried. She was from Calasi [00:38:11 unc. spelling] though. I mean she was this little... She never left down there. You know? She was just very... just her way. No matter where she lived on earth, she would've been. She was just like a character out of a little girl's novel or something. She was just like that. She wanted everything to be like this little girl way. She and I just couldn't have been more opposite from each other if they had designed it that way.

**LB:** And you were her only daughter.

**LC:** Mhm. Yeah. So that was hard for all involved.

**LB:** So you're back in Richmond. Alan's sick at this point. You're coping with some of the misunderstandings, attitudes, of the medical system. Right? Tell me more about how his illness unfolded.

**LC:** I remember there being a lot about like his T-cell count. Remember—we were learning terminology. So all I knew was that the T-cells needed to be at a certain place, and when they dropped too low that was bad. And he lived at... We were at MCV so often that the nurses barely even paid attention to us. And if he was there, I was there. Always. When I took him to that healer, his T-cell count went up to over 1700. Like he actually got so healthy he had to be not in Lisa Kaplowitz's program for a little bit, for a few months, because his T-cell count was too high. Yeah. So that was interesting.

He wouldn't do AZT. That was kind of like the only game in town at the time. But he was reading a lot about it. And Sara told me... I talked to her several months ago and she remembered that he wouldn't do AZT. And she said, "As it turned out he was right."

**LB:** But wasn't that the only game in town then?

**LC:** Mhm. Yeah. But he had diabetes too, really bad diabetes. It was an extra challenge because he had two immune system diseases and he was young. He was 35 when he died. He was barely 30, I guess, when he got diagnosed. But Sara was guessing that he probably got HIV-positive when he was in Key West, which had been years earlier.

**LB:** So it was just dormant in his system?

**LC:** Yeah. Or he was just so sick with other things and they just didn't know.

**LB:** No one noticed.

00:41:29

**LC:** Yeah. And he was a skinny little guy. But the double whammy of the two things—he was young enough that if, when he went into kidney failure, if he hadn't had AIDS, he could've gotten a kidney transplant, possibly, but... I remember at one point saying to Sara, when that started happening... His nephrologist was Dr. Gehr, Tod Gehr, who was lovely, just a lovely human being, nice as pie and sweet to us and acted like he cared. But I remember asking Sara...

I was like, “Well, can I give him a kidney?” And she looked at me horrified, like absolutely horrified. And I don’t know what... I’ve always wondered what that particular... I mean, it was. “Horrified” was the look on her face. And I thought, “Did she just go, ‘Oh my god, is she that stupid?’” You know? Because of course. He could’ve had all the kidneys in the world; but he had AIDS... so... you know... you couldn’t do it.

**LB:** She talked to me a lot about what it was like during those years to be with these patients and be completely unable to do anything.

**LC:** Yeah.

**LB:** What that was like. And what it was like working with you and Alan and her other patients, where, you know, you could just see this terrible roller coaster, and do nothing. The only treatments were like AZT, which made people so sick in so many other ways.

**LC:** Right, right. And she really did seem like she cared. She wasn’t one of those stoic... She was really cool, for one thing, and she was really pretty and young and just a very neat person. She loved art, so she kind of got us. And Alan would just write, write to her. I thought it was so remarkable, number one, that she kept his letters. I mean, how many doctors you know would even see them? Much less keep them. Sorry I lost my train of thought. I don’t know where I was going with that. But anyway... They just had a really good relationship. She brought her daughters in to meet him at the hospital one time. I remember, she said she wanted them... I guess something had happened in school. Kids were starting to understand or hear about AIDS or whatever and so do a lot more gay-bashing, you know? And she wanted her kids to know real life gay people. So she asked Alan if she could...

**LB:** He would be that real-life gay person.

**LC:** Mhm. Yep. There was this woman that I worked with, a colleague of mine, I won’t say who she was. She’s still real prominent in Richmond. But we were actually talking about going into business together. She had a brother who was gay. And she was married and had two kids. When her brother got diagnosed HIV-positive, we were walking into... Actually we were walking into the church here, the...

**W1:** The chapel?

**LC:** The chapel. For something. I don’t remember what. And we were walking down the sidewalk and I was in front of her and I said, “Have you told the kids yet?” And she said, “Yeah. And I told them that he was a drug addict.” And I spun around on the sidewalk and I went, excuse me, I was like, “Are you fucking kidding me?” She went, “What?” And I went, “You just told your little children that it was better to be a drug addict than to be gay?” After that day she and I didn’t ever speak again. She didn’t even know what she did wrong. It’s like... he’s just sick. That’s all you gotta say. The 80s. What a time.

**LC:** But there were so many other people that helped. I mean I was just like crazy busy. I’ve never worked so hard in my life, because I had my new business and I actually started another

business in '89, without partners, so I was working all the time, and trying to pay for Alan. He worked at Style magazine. He was a writer for his job for most of the time. He worked for all these different publications in Richmond. But he worked for Style in the 80s. He stopped working for them in '90. And he was starting to get to where he was missing a lot of work and stuff like that. God bless him though. He was going through so many things. And I mean, we'd get a call and then it's like, "Yeah, I'm not coming in." You know. It was whatever. He just lived his life. He was a prolific artist. He was never not drawing. He wrote. He never missed deadlines. He was just... He just dealt with it. He didn't drive. He was a terrible driver, even when he did drive. So it was a blessing that he stopped driving. But he was real wobbly. He was super skinny and he got to where he was super wobbly. He'd fall down somewhere. I've always said that if we were anywhere but Richmond, he would've been killed, 'cause he'd... you know... or robbed, or whatever. He'd fall somewhere and somebody would go help him and he'd go, "Call my sister," and some stranger would call me and they'd stay with him 'til I got there. All this stuff. People always helped him. Only Richmond. He walked everywhere. But, anyway, so he started working for me, like in my office, so I could get him on my insurance. That was really the main thing. But that was a great time 'cause he was so talented, so it was a real treat for me to have him on my staff. He was like my resident celebrity [00:48:04 unc. jivot?]. He didn't have, sort of, functional skills, as far as like production or anything like that. But he could... Like I would just be... We all smoked, all the time, and he'd be standing back there and I'd go back to his office and I'd be like all describing some job I had to do and you know, he would just go, "ZZZZZ." He wouldn't say anything. He was actually very quiet. And then [he] would just like say something that he would just put his finger right on the essence of the whole thing. You know? And just... "Solved." And then he'd write all the copy. Some of my favorite work I ever did was stuff he and I did together. So he was very good.

**LB:** How long did he stay working with you?

00:50:51

**LC:** He stayed on staff there 'til he died and he died in November of '92. So a couple of years. But we worked together collaboratively from the time I started my first business. When he worked for other people he did freelance stuff for me. I found all these notes and everything from him. He did everything either handwritten... And he had this beautiful, cool, cool, handwriting that everybody who ever knew him recognized. Everybody always tells me I should make a font of his handwriting. Or he would type on this old-timey manual typewriter. So I've got all these drafts of copy that he wrote. And so I had lost, just going back, I had lost him... He and I were not that close when we were growing up because he was Mr. Cool, and weird, and I was all country music and he was all David Bowie, you know. I was just like, "Ugh." He had that Diamond Dogs poster in his... And it was... for down there? It's like, "Mmm. Dude." But he was real neat and he was real smart and all this stuff and cool. But anyway... And then I went to college. He left and I went to college and when I moved to Richmond, I lived in the far West End. Long story short—one time it snowed and I got trapped out there in the snow. I was like, "Yeah. No. I'm not doing that anymore." So early one morning I drove to the Fan. I'm driving around the Fan. I saw a "For Rent" sign on an apartment. I pulled over to a pay phone, back then, called the lady, you know, 7 o'clock in the morning, and I said, "I want this apartment." She goes, "Well do you wanna see it first." And I said, "I guess so." So I was standing there, waiting for her, and I called my mother on the pay phone. I said, "I think I'm gonna be moving to this

place on Kensington Avenue.” She goes, “I think Alan lives on that street.” And sure enough, I could look out of my bathroom window and see him sitting at his typewriter.

**LB:** That’s crazy.

**LC:** I know! So I moved right next door to him. I was so stupid that... I mean I was just such a hick—I didn’t know apartments didn’t come with, you know, like toilet paper and stuff like that. So I get there and anyway he came over and left this grocery bag outside my door of toilet paper and whatever, paper towels and stuff.

**LB:** So how did you not know that he was right there on Kensington? Did you guys not visit back and forth at all?

**LC:** Mnm. No. I’ve got some letters that he wrote to me from wherever he was and wherever I was. But no. Our paths just didn’t cross.

**LB:** Even in the same city?

**LC:** Not until then. Not until I moved next door to him. Yeah.

**LB:** Wow.

**LC:** We just weren’t close. You know. He was like... I mean, really, there was that riff in our family. And I’ve got all these letters about it. But there was just a big riff, with him.

**LB:** So it was him vs. everyone else.

**LC:** I would say it was everyone else vs. him.

**LB:** Yeah.

00:54:01

**LC:** At that time. And it wasn’t about the gay thing. It was about the dropping out of school and sort of being so different and, you know... I mean back then you got a job and stayed at it ‘til you died kind of thing. He was just on a different path. So he was a waiter, and that was weird to us. And he was, you know, it’s like, “Why would you drop out of school that somebody else is paying for to live in a hovel with no money? Why would you do that?” It was like that. I found this awesome letter after one of the brawls. He was either 20 or 21, I can’t remember. And it’s like a five-page, teeny, tiny, beautiful-handwriting letter where he was taking on my mom about all of it. It was the first time I ever knew that it was all so intentional—that he had a path, and that he was gonna be a famous writer or famous artist or... He was on that path. He was actively not choosing their life. It wasn’t a failure. He was actively choosing something different. And it was the greatest letter because he completely had the guts to stand up for himself and say things that most people I know, when they’re twenty years old, had never taken on their parents like that. But he did it in this really sweet way, this... like... it was biting, but it was also respectful and acknowledged their side of the universe. It’s a great letter. I keep saying I should give it to Side By Side for them to give to every gay kid that ever lived.



**LB:** Yeah.

**LC:** Because it's such a good example of that. So anyway... that was really neat for me. I've been working on this... I did a show of his art last year for Iridian Gallery. It was the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. He was a writer, and everybody knew that, but they didn't really know that he was an artist. He was actually a more prolific artist than anything. So I have like 300-some works of art that I've had in storage all this time. I decided for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death I wanted to do something. So we did this fundraiser for Iridian Gallery and did this show. So I had 75 pieces in the show. That has turned into this whole thing. For that we raised \$11,800.00, for the gallery. In his lifetime, the most he ever got for a commissioned piece, that I found evidence of—like one was \$35 and one was \$50. And he worked on 'em for weeks, you know? And he would just die if he knew that... And his art was every... His whole will was two pages long and all about the art. So that was his most important thing. So that was 75 pieces. Now I'm getting ready to have a show at the Baron and Ellin Gordon Galleries at ODU. They're doing a huge show—69 pieces.

**LB:** Oh, that's great.

**LC:** Yeah.

**LB:** When is that gonna open?

**LC:** It opens in September. The reception is October 11<sup>th</sup>. And it'll be up for four months, I think. And then the Valentine bought that piece that's in that show.

**LB:** Yeah, in the *Pandemic* show.

**LC:** Mhm.

**LB:** We should do a class trip to ODU to see the show.

**LC:** Yeah. That's really interesting. So we did a retrospect of that Iridian. But what she's doing... Ramona Austin is the curator. She's doing... It's sort of this... I'm staying out of it and just doing what she tells me to do. But it's like race, religion, and sexuality in the South. Because a lot of his work is... You've probably only seen the pieces in the *Pandemic* show, so...

**LB:** Yeah.

00:57:07

**LC:** So he has, what I call the "Sick Work," that's about AIDS or about being sick. That's all sort of later. The earlier work, the very early work, is sort of this very gay-centric... I always refer to it as, "The Porn." But he was using... he was untrained, right? He was self-taught. So he used a lot of porn magazines as his figure studies and everything. So it's that kind of thing. But I've been educated a lot on that. It's not my taste. That stuff is not my taste. But I was educated a lot when I did the show about sort of the value of it and how good it was. So anyway, then he started doing more sophisticated work over time. And he just... He drew always. He was always,

always drawing. So much of it represents that kind of time. It's like very gay-centric, but it's way beyond that. Pop culture was his thing. That's what he wrote about. He was a pop music reviewer, a theater reviewer. He was always into pop culture. So this work is very... like this total decade, span of time, you know.

**LB:** And what a decade to choose, right?

**LC:** Right. Exactly. And a lot of things are... like you could tell what he was listening to while he was drawing. You know what I mean? You could tell the influences. And then in some cases... Some I'm going through, I found this box of letters. So when my mom had died, my dad died... My mom actually killed herself. And my dad died. And I'm the family repository for all things. So I've got just like boxes and boxes of crap, and letters, and CDs, and you name it. So I was going through. You know, "What's in this box?" And there's every letter that Alan ever wrote to my mother. And Alan was a notorious and prolific letter writer. I don't know how he had time to do anything else, to be honest, because how many times a week do you write a letter to anybody?

**LB:** I have one letter-writing day a week. That's it.

**LC:** Well that's a lot for most people. But, I mean, he wrote to everybody. And these were not just, "Hey, how are you?" letters—these were pages long and wildly detailed.

**LB:** Well that was before email. Right? I mean remember? We all used to...

**LC:** Because we joke around that invented email, after he died, because it was so a tool that he would've loved. Oh my god. That would've been amazing. The whole internet would've just blown his mind. But he wrote all these letters and, god bless him, he dated everything. So everything was...

**LB:** ...so important.

**LC:** You know. It was like "June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1989." I have letters from the 70s up until she died. She died just not quite a year before he did. So anyway, these letters, they're fascinating because they're like a road map for Richmond. He was so detailed about everything. If he met you, it was in a letter—that he met you, what you had on, where you all went to eat, or what restaurant was behind you on the sidewalk where you met, where you worked, who your boss was, whether you liked him or not. I mean it's in letters to Mom. He acted like she cared. And she probably didn't even know anything he was talking about half the time, but you know, it was like diary things. You know. A lot of it was personal, and, but, anyway, a lot of it was about the art. So I've been going through all those. I've read them all and I put them all in chronological order. And then I spent, you know, four months, last year reading them. Now I'm going through and scanning them and annotating them and pairing them with the art if there's any art reference or anything like that. It solved some problems for me.

01:00:47

**LB:** I bet.

**LC:** You know, just things where it's like... There was one piece that wasn't titled. And all of his stuff was titled and signed on the back. You could tell, almost, that the titles came first. He was a word guy. Anyway I found this whole long paragraph description of the idea for this piece. So now I understand it. But anyway he was drawing right up until the night he died. He finished his last work that night. And Shelly Clanger [01:01:23 unc. name spelling]... do you know her?

**LB:** Again I know the name, but I don't...

**LC:** She was the psychologist at MCV at the time.

**LB:** Okay.

**LC:** And she was assigned to us. She was awesome. She was so awesome. And she bought that piece, the last piece he ever did. It was called "Folk Art for Nursing." It has MCV hospital in the title. So, yeah. And the piece that the Valentine bought, he did a detailed sketch for, which he rarely did. But he did the sketch while he was in the hospital. So that was in the Iridian show, not for sale. And I wasn't intending to sell that one. I wasn't gonna sell any of the sick work, just 'cause I didn't want any of that stuff out there unattended, just 'cause it wasn't really what he was about. But Meg Hughes convinced me, you know. And he loved the Valentine. As wild and urban and cool as he was—he was actually kind of a conventional... not conservative... but he had this odd old-fashioned way to him. And the Valentine, back then, was not everything it is today. It was this tiny little place. But they were actually a client of mine, back then. So I was doing a catalog called "Smoke Signals" for them, and this whole, like all the marketing related to that show. It was really cool idea, and all this cool stuff, and it was about cigarettes, God knows, so we loved that. Alan had just started working for me around then. That was around 1990. I said, "Do you wanna work with me on the cover for this?" And he thought anything that was published was the best thing. So the biggest compliment he would ever give you is that something you drew looked like a greeting card. Like he thought that was a really good thing. Because he just loved the whole idea of something being in print... 'cause his stuff wasn't. And so he worked and worked and worked on that cover. While he was in the middle of it, we working together on it, so parts of it I did and parts of it he did, but he had a vitreous explosion. And completely lost his eyesight. And had to have a vitrectomy.

**LB:** What's that?

**LC:** Do you wanna know? 'Cause it's really creepy, but it's the coolest thing ever. It really is cool. And I witnessed this 'cause I made them... anybody that was ever doing anything, I had to be in the room when they were doing it. 'Cause people almost killed him so many times.

**LB:** You must've seen a lot of stuff.

01:04:29

**LC:** I did. And the rule was... I don't even know if they would let you do this anymore, but the rule was—if I fainted or puked I had to leave. And I never did. I had this thing where it was like I had to learn it, like somehow I was gonna have to do it, or something? And it's funny 'cause I'm super squeamish, but I could like go into this zone and do it. So a vitrectomy... a vitreous explosion... so your eye is filled with vitreous fluid. It is a very primitive thing. They don't

know... It's like adenoids. They don't know what they're for. A vitreous explosion—it's almost like a stroke in your eyes. Your eyeball fills up with blood, so that's why he couldn't see. All he could see was purple. The way they fixed that is that... if you're gonna puke or throw up, you have to leave...

**LB:** I won't. I'll just cringe a little.

**LC:** They literally take your eyeball out, deflate it. They take the fluid out, so you've got this little... it's like the wrapping on eggs, on hardboiled eggs, that thin? It's like that, but surprisingly tough. And it's still connected and all the little lenses and parts are floating around in this little sack. They take it out, drain it, I guess they wash it? I don't know. And then they fill it with saline and put it back in your eye. Then he had to be in the hospital over...it was the hospital that...is it still there? It used to be right across from old City Hall, the shiny one. So they bolt your head to a table, with your forehead to the table. You cannot move.

**W1:** Bolt your head?

**LC:** Yes. Not through your head or anything.

**LB:** Like a strap.

**LC:** It's like this contraption.

**LB:** Frankenstein.

**LC:** It looks like a cartoon contraption where you're like strapped down to this table. So you literally cannot move. You can't move. You sit like that for three days and they put the saline in. They inject an air bubble in. While your head is in that position, all of the lenses and parts go to that bubble, and sit there, and then the bubble evaporates—it takes three days—and voila.

**LB:** That's amazing.

**LC:** Right?!

**LB:** So are you lying face down?

**LC:** Sitting.

**LB:** You're sitting.

**LC:** He was sitting, so...

**LB:** And they just give you an IV or something?

01:06:44

**LC:** Well I remember bringing him—and I still have this—I went and got him all these cool like Jetson straws and all those like whirly straws.

**LB:** Oh yeah! I remember those.

**LC:** We'd bring him milkshakes and all sit on the floor and hold them up for him to drink out of these like crazy straws.

**W1:** That's cute.

**LC:** We had fun in the hospital, I have to say. We would do all kinds of things. I mean, 'cause it was sad, you know? People would be in there in the waiting room and, you know, everybody's dyin'. Oh my god. We would have everybody crackin' up. We laughed. We joked around about things that weren't funny. What are you gonna do? We would have everybody laughing. And he wrote about... There are some pieces of letters that you might like. I can remember one where he was talking about these little kids that were in there that were HIV-positive. He was talking about them and this one little boy that was drawing a picture. He drew... I don't know... like the trees were red and the sky was green or somethin' like that. I can't remember if it was a nurse or his mother. Somebody was correcting that. And Alan went on and on about that. So anyway, I've got all these things, if you ever want them, like that.

**LB:** Yeah, absolutely.

**LC:** They were just like little moments in time. But anyway, all he wanted, when that happened, the most important thing to him on the planet was to be able to finish that Valentine project. The eye doctor told me that he wouldn't ever get enough vision. They said, "We hope that he'll get enough vision." He was already blind. I mean he had diabetes. He wore these like Elvis Costello glasses that were so thick. He'd had cataract surgery and everything. So they said, "He'll get enough vision to not walk into walls, but that's like the most we can hope for. Like I said, he was drawing right up until the day he died. His eye doctor...at one point we were in there for a follow-up appointment a week or two after that was all done. And he held up this card and he was like, "Alan, what is this?" And Alan was like looking at him and he goes, "I can't read it." Well there was nothing on it. He was just trying to see if he could see it at all. So he got this look on his face and he said, "Can I talk to you for a minute?" And he took me out into the hall and he goes, "He doesn't have enough vision in his eyes to see what he thinks he seeing. I said, "Well... don't tell him."

If you ever saw his work, he drew himself as African American.

**LB:** Yes.

**LC:** Always.

**LB:** What was that all about?

01:09:47

**LC:** So he said that he... 'cause I asked him one time and he was really sheepish about it... 'cause I didn't even... I was not aware that they were self-portraits. I just thought it was just all African American people, but a lot of them were self-portraits. And he said, "I feel like I'm

living another parallel life, beyond the fourth wall, and in that life, I'm African American. So I've wondered if, you know, in that life he could see. I mean, who knows? I don't know. And he was the whitest white guy. He was this like skinny little... He was just this white little skinny white guy.

**LB:** It must've been an amazing time to be together, those last years.

**LC:** I wouldn't trade it for anything. The only thing that I regret is I was just working so hard to pay for it. I mean it was very expensive copays, even back then. Today I don't even know what I would've done. So I was like the daddy. I was just trying to pay for things. I wish I could've just spent all of my time with him. I still, all these years later, still think of questions that like my knee jerk is to call him and ask him. You know? After all this time. And we were just super... we were super close.

**LB:** So how did you get from not even knowing he was on Kensington Street so that you lived next door to him accidentally—to being that close where your whole life was really focused on him?

**LC:** As soon as we were living next door to each other, literally, we were best friends. We were up in each other's apartments all the time. We did stuff together all the time. We would all go to... My friends became his friends. We'd all go to Pyramid dancing, almost every night. We just would have fun. I found this one answering machine message and he goes, "If you get home before 11, call me. I need to know if you have a band-aid. I have an idea for a really quick Halloween costume." And I don't remember it. Damn. I wish I did.

**LB:** Really quick.

**LC:** Yeah, really quick. I have no idea. I mean we had fun, you know? I mean we did! We had a blast. Because I was in the business I was in... I was sort of his—to him—I was his kind of art guider person. That's just a joke, you know, when you think about it, because everything about his work was authentic and wonderful. But that didn't stop me from butting in. But anyway. It's just kind of... that's how it was.

**LB:** How did that whole experience change you?

01:14:06

**LC:** I don't even know. Because I can't even fathom not having had that experience. Everybody is like that. When he died, total strangers would show up at my office. And we had a huge network. We both had a million friends. But people would show up at my office, they'd come in, they would have file folders of letters that they had saved for years. And they wouldn't give 'em to me. But they wanted me to know, "Look. Look what I have." You know? Kind of thing. I mean everybody was like... He had that impact on everybody. And when we had the show, so here it is 25 years later, people came in from all over the place. We had a friends and family preview and so I just got in touch with as many people as I could find and let 'em know it was coming and that I was gonna sell these works for this fundraiser. I wanted, specifically for that friends and family preview, the whole point of that was that if people who actually knew him—I wanted them to have first crack at the stuff. So we had people there from five countries, all over

the United States. People just came from everywhere to this, you know. I mean here, if you can have, I mean if you have 75 people at an art opening, that's really good. And there were over 200 people, this was like 225 people at this opening...for somebody who died 25 years ago. And they all had stories.

**LB:** It must've been an incredible night.

**LC:** Oh, it was an incredible night. Except I hadn't slept in like a month, so.... Actually I think that was like a...

**LB:** Yeah! That was probably why you forgot our interview.

**LC:** Yeah, I think that was it. Yeah. I was so tired. But yeah, it was amazing. It was just amazing. And everybody stayed. Usually at art openings people come and go, but everybody stayed the whole night. So I was like a ping pong ball. I met people that I'd never met before, but were friends of his. A lot of people have friended me on Facebook. There's a Facebook group about him. So there's all these people in there that, you know, I don't know. This one guy got in touch with me through that group and then he called me right before the show. He's a straight guy who lives down there. He just said, "I've never had the courage to be who I am." But he and Alan were apparently in love when they were younger, and that's why they broke up. Now I know who... like there were these references to that guy in a bunch of the letters. So I knew his name sort of, but I'd never met him. I didn't know what a big deal that was. So this total stranger calls me up. He doesn't know what I'm gonna say to who. And he just like spilled his guts at 11 o'clock at night.

**LB:** That's intense.

**LC:** I know.

**LB:** And plus, I imagine, he must be in his 50s, 60s, by now.

**LC:** I think he was a little bit older than us, so yeah, at least in his 60s.

**LB:** And to think about the path not taken.

**LC:** Mhm. Exactly. He said he was gonna come to the show, but he didn't.

**LB:** But just calling you must've been such a big deal for him.

**LC:** I know. I was just so surprised. Anyway. It's actually kind of interesting that I answered the phone. Usually I don't if it's a number I don't know. But I did. So... Yeah. So it's just funny the impact somebody would have all those years later.

01:17:23

**LB:** What happened in the aftermath of his death? 'Cause I can't imagine what it was like to be on this intense roller coaster, super focused, super focused, everything is crazy, you know, like

his eyeball is being removed his eye one day and reinserted and then some other crazy medical emergency is happening the next day.

**LC:** Yeah, it was always something.

**LB:** And then all of a sudden—it's over.

**LC:** Yeah. Yeah. It's like that for anybody who goes through any kind of caretaker situation where you're in this kind of post-traumatic stress disorder thing and... I call it "post-event depression," you know? It's like after... usually it's something more fun than that, but or it's like coming out from being underwater kind of thing? So... I went to France.

**LB:** For a long time? Or...

**LC:** Long for me. I'd never taken a vacation so I just wanted to have like a non-verbal art experience and just clear my head and all that stuff. It was very intense. I lost relationships in the course of that. Our mother died in the course of that. 'Cause I was dealing with her at the same time I was taking care of him.

**LB:** That's a lot.

**LC:** Yeah. It really was. It was a very intense time. Just in that year a good friend of mine committed suicide, my mother committed suicide, my mentor died, or had a heart attack, but she had cancer. And Alan died. Like all within nine months of each other. It was like... intense. But I have incredible stamina as a result of that. I can take a punch.

**LB:** Yeah, it'll give you that. Right?

**W1:** It's 'cause of the pant suits.

**LC:** That's right. That's right. It was just like that. My brothers were... It was interesting there at the end. Alan let my dad come to see him and that was always super hard for everybody, stiff, you know. And my dad was so sad. And my dad was such a cool guy. I hate that they always had that thing that was like first-born, and we were a big sports family and, god bless Alan, he was, you know... not. But my dad didn't care about any of that. It was just—he needed to understand. That's all. And so with me, you know, I made him understand what I needed him to understand. But Alan was first. And it was a little bit different because he was a guy. They just never could communicate very well. So the boys would come see him. Daddy would come see him. It was just hard and awful. They didn't have a sense... 'cause they weren't, you know, all the time... of *how* sick he was. You know? So they were actually surprised when he died. Especially my little brother. My little brother called me one day. Before Alan died, I sent them all a bunch of his writing, his published works, and said, "I just thought y'all might wanna see some of Alan's stuff if you never have." And my youngest brother called me. He had been in the Marine Corps and he was back home and he goes, "Alan's so talented. I hope someday I know what he's talkin' about." 'Cause it was all pop culture. Do you know who Divine is?

01:21:27



**LB:** Yeah.

**LC:** Oh my god. He wrote this piece about Divine when she performed at the Pyramid. I mean I am bent over doubled. When I am reading this stuff, going through this stuff, I laugh so hard. That's how I got through it, was laughing as hard as I did about everything. 'Cause, you know, just endorphins keep you alive. Oh my god. This article's so funny. All of 'em are so funny, but that one is just... And he had such a good grasp of language. He used to say, "It's our birthright as a Southerner to be wordy."

**LB:** It's true.

**LC:** Well and back then, his columns were... they'd be a full broadsheet! You know. They gave you a column it wasn't some little short stuff.

**LB:** Well because people had better attention spans back in the day.

**LC:** Right. People could read. And he started the personal ads here. We had never had those. That was still kind of new in the world then, I guess, people lookin' for love in the newspaper. So he convinced Style Weekly to let them do personal ads. He was the Classifieds manager and he said it would be good for sales. Sure enough it was. So he created this character called Mr. Classified who only spoke in italics and he would do this commentary throughout the personal ads. And it was so funny. It became this big thing in Richmond. People didn't know who it was.

So the whole time I'm growing up, I've got this genius fucking brother. And so here's me. I'm the delinquent of the family. People would be like, "You're Alan Cumbey's sister?...." And then, you know, I grew up and got to have my own whatever. And then he starts Mr. Classified and it was all over again. People would find out. "You're Mr. Classified's sister!"

"Yes, yes I am."

But anyway, that was pretty funny. And they actually put that in his obit, in the paper, about Mr. Classifieds.

**LB:** Oh that's great.

**LC:** And it was really sweet. It was funny but it was really sweet too. He would connect people. I ran across one the other day and it said, "Whatever-kind-of-guy seeks tomboy." And Alan wrote in there, "For purposes of clarification, he does mean a woman."

**LB:** So what were some of your big turning points during this time?

**LC:** What do you mean?

01:24:20

**LB:** Whatever you want it to mean. You can take it anywhere. I mean, sort of moments where the before was different than the after.

**LC:** When the AIDS part first started... So my impression of Diabetes was that it was solvable, 'cause we had a lot of that in our family. My grandmother lived to be 93 and she had it, the same kind Alan had. His was worse, but I didn't know that. So, for me, AIDS was the one to beat. Then when he first was diagnosed... And just the way that we were together. He was gonna sit there quietly, always smoking his cigarettes, and waiting to say something pithy. And I was the one who was twirling around getting stuff done. I was gonna solve it, you know, find whatever was gonna make him well. So everything was still... it was urgent and it was desperate, but it wasn't futile at that point. I didn't give up 'til the bitter end. I remember Dr. Gher calling me and I can't remember if Sarah was there or not, somebody else was there, but they did this like... it was almost like an intervention. It was sort of like, "He's ready to go and you gotta let him go." And I was like, "Not uh." You know. "One more day, one more day." And then it just was so awful at the end. It just... Disease is brutal. You know? It's ugly.

He was so sweet to everybody though. That's one of the things that always really stuck out to me, that you see a lot of people that are just, you know, hateful anyway, but especially when they get in these dependent places—it's like they get trapped in hateful. He was just sweet always. We had so much help from. It was like RAIN, Richmond AIDS Information Network, and RAM, and Fan Free Clinic had volunteers, these volunteer teams. They would come in... I couldn't afford... He had a nurse. We had a nursing service kind of thing. But I couldn't afford the real ones. Like I had the ones that would like come in and do the laundry and wash the dishes. They were nurses, but that's what they did. But I would come home and do the medicine and do the bandages and that stuff. 'Cause I couldn't afford...you had to pay for another step up. So anyway we had this nurse. But all these volunteers from... I couldn't leave him by himself at all. And they'd come in and make dinner or just hang out with him or whatever. I don't know of another thing that's exactly like that. Whenever anybody... if you had a big circle... and we had all these friends and everything. But there are some things that you're going through that you don't even want your friends there for. You know? So it was helpful to have, I mean they became to not be strangers, but they were strangers when we got 'em. I don't know of another disease, kind of, that had that—that sprung up network of total strangers that just jumped in to do things.

Has anybody told you that story? And I don't know if I'm supposed to talk about that. There was that story about when that one guy died and his family wanted his body back but you couldn't... You weren't allowed to transport them across state lines.

**LB:** Someone told me that. I can't remember whether they talked about it on tape or not. Where he was... What was he put in? Like a refrigerator truck?

**LC:** Yeah. Yeah, so you know about that?

**LB:** Yeah, yeah.

**LC:** So they called me and I just paid for it. But how about that? That that's what you had to do.

01:29:08

**LB:** Yeah that's insane.

**LC:** And I love that people did it. That's the one thing I have to say. I don't like generalizations at all. But straight people would've never done that. They just wouldn't have. That's like, that gay community just like, "Vvvooph."

**LB:** Tight.

**LC:** What it takes. You know?

**LB:** I think it was Bill Harrison that told me that the funerals were amazing.

**LC:** Yeah. My brother's funeral was amazing. I have a tape of it. It was so amazing. Bill spoke. He did that thing. People told stories. It was at the Friends Meeting House. We weren't Quakers but he didn't want a church. And so Kathy Bennoit, or Beth Marchak [01:29:58 unc. name spellings] or somebody made it so that we could have it there. That was kind of an eye opener—like my whole Southern Baptist family is there. My grandmother. We're used to Southern Baptist funerals where they play some stupid hymns. Never the good ones, it's always the stupid ones. The preacher says things that don't have anything to do with you and everybody waits 'til you can get out in the yard and smoke and tell the real stories and so we just did that one. It was so good. I mean, it was so good. I just listened to it.

**LB:** Another thing... I can't remember who it was that told me this, but someone told me that back then, funeral homes wouldn't take people who had died of AIDS and burial grounds wouldn't either.

**LC:** Yeah, yeah.

**LB:** So that Fan Free Clinic got some land donated to them in Goochland that they could use for a cemetery.

**LC:** I know, isn't that just awful? We had Alan cremated. He was the first person in my family to ever be cremated. Most people... Like my younger brother died and he didn't believe in cremation. They think cremation is a sin. So... But yeah, it was even different, you know, Alan died in his home and so that was this whole... you know... just the way they handled that was different than I think they would've handled... It was different than they handled my dad, put it that way. So... And I understand that to some extent. But, you know, I was all up in that. I didn't die.

**LB:** Did you stay involved with AIDS work/AIDS activism after that?

**LC:** That's an interesting question. I did more LGBT stuff. I didn't do... There was this woman at the hospital named Peggy Britton. Now I think her name is Margaret... she goes by Margaret now. She used to go by Peggy and her last name is different. She just actually came to Iridian Gallery not long ago. I looked for her and looked for her to invite her to Alan's show and I couldn't find her because of her name change. But anyway, Peggy Britton, and she was... I can't remember what her role there was... but she might have been a social worker? Or an HR person

or something? She was so nice to us and so helpful. But she used to tell me I should write a book about just how to get through the medical system, kind of thing.

01:32:46

**LB:** I can't even imagine.

**LC:** I mean it was so hard. Every day was a... Every day was something. And we had insurance. I had Cadillac insurance. You know? I remember Blue Cross... Toward the end he had that starvation syndrome. And so he had to drink Ensure. And he couldn't eat. His stomach was paralyzed and all this terrible stuff was happening. So I had to buy Ensure. And when he was in the hospital, we would buy it through the hospital. It cost like \$35 for a case, or whatever the price was. Or it was like \$15 a case. And when I'd go to get it at the store, it was hard to get then. Now it's easy. But you couldn't get it most anywhere. It was like \$40 a case, or whatever. So I had asked the hospital if I could just buy it through the hospital so I could get that price and they were like, "No you have to talk to your insurance company." So I talked to them and they wouldn't let it happen. But they said, "If you install a feeding tube in him, then we'll pay for it, you won't have to pay for anything."

**LB:** Wow.

**LC:** A friend of mine worked in Major Accounts at Blue Cross back then. So I got her to find out who. And so I showed up at her office one day and I threw a big ol' fit that would've been on YouTube today. I said, "So you're telling me that instead of just like giving me the wholesale price... It's not even like you're... You're not paying for anything here. It's profit margin. That's it. But you would pay, like whatever it is... How much does that surgery cost? \$20,000? \$30,000? Seriously? That's what you're telling me? And that's why my insurance premiums are...?" And so I threw this like huge fit. And then I went home. Late that day my assistant called me and she said, "Did you buy a bunch of Ensure?" And I said, "No. Why?" And she said, "'Cause like a huge..." A guy just showed up with like... it was on one of those wheeled carts, like cases of Ensure just got delivered to the office. I still don't know who did that.

**LB:** There must've been a lot of those just weird moments.

**LC:** Yeah. Everybody has that who goes through these systems. But you ask... Like if I kept on doing AIDS work, I just... you know... I think I was just so tired, just so shell-shocked, or whatever.

**LB:** I can completely imagine that you wouldn't necessarily wanna be reliving that all the time.

01:36:30

**LC:** Yeah. And I did LGBT stuff for still a little while. And then I stopped doing that for a while. I stopped doing all the activist stuff for a long time. I got involved with what was back then the Hand Workshop. And I have been doing a lot of... Since before I was doing my business, I was doing a lot of pro bono work for them. But I became involved, I got on their board, and I just really started focusing on the arts and doing things. And they were super sweet to Alan too, like there at the end. Paula Owen, who was the executive director then, she was so nice. She was a good friend to us. She was a client, but she was a good friend. She offered Alan a show at the Hand Workshop which was completely inappropriate for his work. She never even

saw very much of his work. I think, I'm sure she knew it was never gonna happen. But it gave him like this little juice there at the end. He goes, "She wouldn't have said that if she didn't think my work was good, right." It was just so nice. People were so nice. Everybody was so nice.

Susan, Baldrige now, was this little designer who worked for me for a long time—sweet as pie. She and Alan just adored each other. She was pregnant, really pregnant, when he died. Alan died in November and her son was born in January. And Alan loved to ride in the car. He didn't drive, but he loved to ride. He wasn't mobile at that stage, and here she was, seven months pregnant, and he still chain-smoked the whole time. She'd go get him, late at night, and drag his ass up in her pickup truck. He'd roll down the window, and hold his hat out the window, and smoke cigarettes. And she'd just ride him around town.

**LB:** That's great.

**LC:** I know. I mean people, everybody, did stuff. And it's been so cool. As I've been documenting all this artwork, people have sent me pictures of works that they have of his.

**LB:** That you didn't even know about necessarily.

**LC:** Yeah. I mean, he would gift works to people. That's the only people who knew about them, is like really close friends. You had to have gone to his house to know he was an artist. And they were all up on the walls, floor to ceiling.

**LB:** It sounds like he was an amazing person.

**LC:** Yeah, I mean, he was. He was amazing.

**LB:** So Lisa, is there anything that I haven't asked you that you would like to talk about?

**LC:** I was really surprised about... I think it was about a year, a year and a half ago, I was surprised to learn that AIDS was as rampant in Virginia as it is.

**LB:** I know.

**LC:** And so that made me think, "Okay. I'm all in the gay community. I'm still all [01:39:00 unc. yinged up?] in that... and I didn't know." So I think that's kind of an important... And I pay attention to things! So how are people supposed to know? You know?

**LB:** Exactly.

**LC:** I've seen some billboards. I can't even remember where, but I think there's one on like Belt Boulevard...

**LB:** And one in Church Hill?

01:39:32

**LC:** ...that I saw the other day and I was like, “Okay. Here’s this billboard out in kinda the middle of nowhere. Who’s it for?” I mean it is more of an African American corridor but still it’s kind of a dead corridor, I think, or maybe it’s not and I just don’t know that.

**LB:** It’s a weird corridor, for sure.

**LC:** There’s not much there.

**LB:** It’s very industrial.

**LC:** Yeah. So it just made me wonder, like, “Do we need those to be more front and center somewhere? Or what would the medium be? ‘Cause I don’t even know?”

**LB:** Well that’s been our challenge with this project—is thinking about how to get it out there that Richmond is #17 out of 2,300 localities.

**LC:** Right.

**LB:** And we’re always in the top ten for syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia. And sometimes we’re #1 for one of those.

**LC:** So what does that mean? I mean, what does that mean? Why is that?

**W1:** We have terrible sex education.

**LC:** I mean that’s what I was... Well back in the... So I’m from Southampton County. We had this guy, Paul Council, down in Southampton County, he was the...well whatever he was... he was the representative, councilman, or whatever he was. And what was he? Must’ve been something at the State level because... When I had just started my business somebody found out that I was from down there. Do you remember the family life curriculum?

**W1:** Mhm.

**LB:** You would remember it, yeah.

**LC:** You do? How old are you?

**W1:** Uhhh, 21.

**LC:** How do you remember that?

**W1:** Well they may just still call it “Family Life” but...

**LC:** Oh okay.

**W1:** Yeah. ‘Cause I had to go through Family Life.

01:41:30

**LC:** Okay. Well they were trying to get that passed. So that was the very first thing I worked on, actually, was that Family Life curriculum. Oh! I forgot about that. I started a political action committee.

**LB:** Cool.

**LC:** I barely even knew what that meant. I went to... Somebody told me that Paul Council was trying to block the Family Life curriculum. And they wanted me to go and talk to him. I was like... This was so foreign to me. Politics? You know? I had barely voted. I had voted for president, whatever, but I just didn't know about how things got done. So I said, "No I don't wanna do that." Anyways my office was in old City Hall, so I'm right there by the Capitol. But then they told me that he said somethin' about... And he had a million kids. And he was like, he said, "'Cause out there in the county, we don't have sexually transmitted diseases and we don't need blah, blah, blah." Well I was like, "Hell yes, I'm goin'!" So off we went. That's what made me get started in that Family Life curriculum, 'cause that was the first time I heard a politician either say something that was so patently a lie, or that he was (giving all benefit of the doubt) that he was so out of touch with reality. You know? And trust me—he didn't deserve the benefit of the doubt. I later... you know. But anyway that's how I got started.

So I started this political action committee and what that meant, to me, I was all about Communications. So I started this little newsletter, so to speak. It was like a little post card. Everything was snail mail, and I paid for it. So I would, real quick, like do these like: "On this day... Thursday afternoon at three, in Chambers, whatever, they're gonna vote on the whatever." So it started on Family Life curriculum and then we added all the AIDS legislation stuff. 'Cause that was a big part of our interest, was getting condoms in school, and sex education, and things like that. All of a sudden people from... I don't even know how people learn about this! People from like all over the place, from Washington, all this stuff, would just like mail me money, for my political action committee.

**LB:** That's wild.

**LC:** I know. I know. And this was just a tiny little thing. You know? It wasn't paying for itself by any stretch of anything. But I thought, "This is how corruption happens in political action committee." And it just showed you how desperate people were for any kind of action because there wasn't anything going on. But I was right there by the Capitol, so. But the problem was is that they would change things up. I didn't know about that as a ploy. They would intentionally... they knew that I was sending out these things, telling all these people to show up,

**LB:** So they'd change the time of the meeting or place or time?

**LC:** Yeah. So it's gonna be nine o'clock, Friday morning, instead of two o'clock Thursday afternoon, or whatever. So, you know, ugh. But do you know Guy Kinman?

**LB:** No.

01:44:52

**LC:** Guy Kinman just turned 100. He is lovely. He did the first billboard project where it said, “Somebody...” What did it say? “Somebody you know is gay.” And it was on a public billboard. It was a big deal. He was a minister who finally admitted he was gay when he was in like his fifties. He was married, got a divorce. Anyway, he just turned 100. He lives over in one of the nursing homes. He still comes, god bless him, to our stuff. He wrote to me about my brother’s show. He’s got some stories, let me tell you.

**LB:** I would love to interview him.

**LC:** So that, when I first was involved, he was very involved. He’s the one. He is the first person I ever saw. He’d be down at the Capitol. So I’d go over to the Capitol to do whatever I was doing, and I was always a little nervous about it, and I didn’t know who anybody was, or even how to know. You know, pre-internet. Guy would just, he’d come up and he’d be talking to me and then he’d see somebody and he’d go, “Excuse me, one minute.” And he’d go marching up. He’d be like, “Senator Whoever, my name is Guy Kinman. And blah, blah, blah.” And he’d just be polite and lovely but like *whammo*-to-the-point about what he wanted. He was just a huge guide for me.

**LB:** I can imagine.

**LC:** He was awesome.

**W1:** He sounds awesome.

**LC:** He talked a lot. And he was so lovely, he got a [01:46:37 unc. microphone fumbles] state proclamation. Mayor Stoney came and we did this thing at the University of Richmond...

**LB:** Oh nice.

**LC:** ...in September. I’ve got really good pictures from it. So they aren’t supposed to talk. Anybody who gets these awards aren’t supposed to talk. So here comes Guy with his little walker, and who’s gonna take a microphone away from him, right? So he starts to talk and everybody’s looking ‘cause he would like get a microphone and like we were gonna be there for like two hours... much like y’all’s day today. Anyway he goes, “Don’t worry, I’m not gonna talk very much.” So he said a little something. It was sweet. And then he’s walking off the stage and it was taking like ten minutes for him to get off the stage. And he stops, and he looks up, and he goes, “I’m not doing this for dramatic effect.”

He’s lovely. And he would totally talk to you. Like I can email him and just go, “This lady’s gonna call you up. Talk to her.”

**LB:** Now I’ve got a big favor to ask, which you could absolutely say no to. But would you be interested in coming to the interview?

**LC:** Yeah! If we could work it out timewise.



**LB:** Because...

01:47:43

**LC:** Hurry up before he dies!

**LB:** I will hurry up before he dies. Because we're trying to finish these all up this summer. But often I find, especially with older people, that if they have someone there who knows them...

**LC:** Yeah yeah.

**LB:** ...and knows the prompts...

**LC:** But he'll talk. I mean all you have to do is go, "Go."

**LB:** Okay cool.

**LC:** I mean seriously. He's like that.

**LB:** Yeah.

**LC:** You know. And he's gotta...

**LB:** He's sharp?

**LC:** Yeah! So far, he's really good. He'll see me now and we've been friends for a long time, not like close inner circle friends, but like friends enough.

**LB:** Yeah.

**LC:** And he'll see me and he'll go... He'll know everything but it'll take him like two minutes for my name.

**WI:** That's okay. I experience that sometimes.

**LC:** Yeah. God. I don't even try. I just go. If I don't introduce you it means I have no idea who that is or I can't remember their name, so...

**LB:** Okay, well we'll...

**LC:** But I'd be glad to. At least for, you know, if we can work out the time.

**LB:** Yeah.

**LC:** I'd be glad to at least go, even if I had to go.

**LB:** Yeah, yeah. That might be good because we just interviewed a 92-year-old for another project. And afterwards... 'cause we went and interviewed her daughter... and afterwards we wished that we had brought the daughter along to interview the mother as well.

01:48:58

**LC:** Yeah.

**LB:** 'Cause sometimes, well, you know.

**LC:** No and if I'm able to go, you know, just 'cause we hung out a lot in the 80s.

**LB:** Yeah.

**LC:** And I mean yeah. I just think it's really neat when people do that and just decide: No fear.

**LB:** Yeah.

**LC:** And so he did that. And he was at all those Pride coalition meetings. I don't know what all he'll remember of it. But he'll definitely be able to talk to you about it. He would have an interesting perspective, I bet, on the whole AIDS situation then.

**LB:** I bet he would. That sounds really interesting, especially coming from the background that he did.

**LC:** Yeah. Yeah he was military. I think he was a...

**LB:** ...a chaplain?

**LC:** Yeah.

**LB:** Wow.

**LC:** And he was real good lookin'. And just nice as pie. He was so nice. But a real, you know, trail blazer in many, many ways.

**W1:** Sounds like it.

**LB:** So Lisa, if you could say anything to people today in Richmond about AIDS, what would it be?

**LC:** I guess it would be—it can happen to anybody. But that's not news.

**LB:** I'll ask you another question then—what do you think we're in danger of forgetting, that we need to make sure to remember?

**LC:** Well especially here, and I wonder if this... of course I have no idea why it's so prevalent here, but... our sex education is awful and we're also... we're very privileged here. Just about

everywhere. Even our worst places aren't as bad as a lot of people's medium places. So when you're privileged, you're safe. You know? "These bad things aren't going to happen to us." And maybe this is old Richmond, old Virginia, but we don't talk about our... I heard something, what was it?

**LB:** A tiny yellow bird clinging to the window outside.

01:51:23

**LC:** Oh. Nice.

**LB:** Sorry I interrupted your train of thought, and it flew away.

**LC:** I have those, those little goldfinches. But I... you know... in Virginia we don't talk about our shameful things. We don't talk about shameful things out loud. We don't talk about [01:51:39 unc. crazies?]. We don't talk about suicide. We don't talk about AIDS. We don't talk about sex. So I just feel like that's kind of the answer to things—to just about everything—is talking about it, somehow. And like I used to do with my dad, you know, I mean I used to... this is... how old are you?

**W1:** 21.

**LC:** 21. Okay. I was just talking to him about sex and sexually transmitted diseases and stuff. So I'd talk to him about all that but then the sodomy laws were what they were and so I had this idea. I wanted the sodomy laws overturned. And so what I wanted was to do a big ol' thing where I got every straight married couple I could find to go and turn themselves in, for sodomy.

**LB:** Yeah.

**LC:** 'Cause I thought, "This'll get it done." You know? And that's hard to do, as you might imagine.

**LB:** It's a great idea.

**LC:** It'd be funny. But I used to talk to my dad about it because he just did, you know, and I'd go, "When's the last time you had a blow job?" And he'd be like... But you know what I mean? It's like people do not... They just think it's so like... you know... they don't even know what it is! Much less that it applies to them, kinda thing. Back in the 80s before I had my own business I worked for this company that had fifty or sixty employees, lots of young people, young art people. They would just talk about anal sex, right... These were straight, mostly, girls, and that was birth control. That was foolproof birth control. But doesn't apply to straight people. I mean, you know what I mean? Not that it should even matter who it applies to, but... you know... that's the... it's segmentation that makes things not get solved. So I don't know. Communication I think. Just talkin' about everything. Not necessarily specific education about AIDS per se, but all of it. If we could fix that, then we probably could fix that. I heard there was a vaccine. Is that true?

**LB:** Well certainly you can take PREP.

01:54:24 **LC:** Mhm.

**LB:** Right? And now the treatments—it's a single pill a day, once you are HIV-positive. And now you can get to the point where your viral load is totally undetectable and they consider you cured.

**LC:** Wow.

**LB:** Sarah, when I interviewed her, said we could eliminate AIDS tomorrow.

**LC:** If?

**LB:** If people just got the treatment. If people took PREP and then if they were good about their medications once they were HIV-positive. It's literally curable now.

**LC:** And it's a communication issue? It's a money issue? It's a...?

**LB:** Well a lot of it is a issue of people being unable to really stick to the regimen. I mean imagine if you're 25, or you're 20, and you're diagnosed, and you're told, "Well you have to take this pill every day for the rest of your life."

**LC:** Least it's not a shot, you know.

**LB:** Right? But it seems abstract.

**LC:** Alan was like that with diabetes. He was a young guy. He loved sweets. I was forever going in there and peeling donuts out of his house and stuff like that. And I mean he just could not do that stuff. He would take his shots at night instead of in the morning because nobody ever explained to him about spikes and...

**LB:** Yeah.

**LC:** ...you know, all that stuff. So he just thought, "This is when I eat." You know? "Right before I go out to dance." So he would take his shots at night. And that's a thing. It like messes up our little blood vessels and makes you lose your... I mean he had false teeth by the time he was, you know, 28.

**LB:** Wow. Yeah.

**LC:** Oh my god. When the first part of his teeth got pulled... so and he never had any money, I had to pay for all this stuff. So I had gotten him a job where I worked, before, at ATLS. Long story short we had just gotten this, what was called a partial. So they pulled all of his front teeth and there was this partial. It cost several hundred dollars, even at this cheap ass place that we went to get it. So the next day I'm in the back at my office and one of the artists comes running up, "Lisa, Lisa, come quick Alan needs you." And so I come running up there and I'm like,

“Where is he?” And he says, “He’s in the bathroom.” So I go running in the bathroom and he’s sitting on the floor beside the toilet and he’s just looking at me and he goes, “I got sick.” And I was like, “Tell me what you need.” And what happened was...

**LB:** Oh no, he lost his...

**LC:** He forgot he had ‘em and he threw up his teeth and flushed them down the toilet. And, though, he did it because he drank Tang... which is nothing but sugar. I wanted to kill him. I made him wait four days before I would buy him replacement teeth—as punishment. Asshole. But you know what I mean?

**LB:** Absolutely.

**LC:** So that’s like that. I don’t know. A pill would be easier, but...

**LB:** It still is very abstract.

**LC:** And the consequences are not clear. You know? We risk... I mean, think about it, with smoking—it’s like, you know...

**LB:** Oh yeah. I mean I was a smoker.

**LC:** I used to say... ‘cause I wrote all the... I used to do work for the Heart Association. So I did all the... and I pretended like I didn’t smoke... I did the “Save a Sweetheart” campaign for middle school, to get kids to not smoke and everything. I was like, “Who better than me? I’ve smoked since I was nine...” But I said, “It’s not the risk of death that’s gonna make people quit smoking. Let them know how much shinier their hair will be, and how much better their skin will be if they quit smoking.”

**LB:** It’s true.

**LC:** Yeah! You know? But I don’t know. We don’t want to know about those bad things. What I don’t know is why is it different here than other places. So I guess it’s what we should look at.

**LB:** Well I ask every AIDS educator, and every health care provider that I interview. And they all have different answers, which is interesting. Sarah thinks that it’s because there’s so many men who are married but on the down low.

**LC:** Oh, sure, sure.

**LB:** And so they’re transmitting to their wives.

**LC:** That’s what I used to tell my dad. No kidding.

**LB:** Yeah.

01:59:15

**LC:** I would talk to him about that, about all these people, who, not only are they hiding the fact that they are gay, but they don't even consider themselves gay. They don't even put themselves in that category. So, you know, because this is just this other little thing they do on the side. I know. I don't know what you do about that. That's gonna last forever.

**LB:** I think it was Rodney Lofton who had the theory that it was the corridor, like Baltimore, Washington, Richmond. So there were people moving back and forth.

**LC:** Florida.

**LB:** Yeah.

**LC:** Mhm.

**LB:** Because Baltimore has a super high rate as well.

**LC:** Yeah.

**LB:** And I think D.C.

**LC:** Yeah, that would make perfect sense. But I don't know... I don't know the answer. I certainly don't know the answer. I wish I did.

**LB:** Well thank you, Lisa.

**LC:** Oh yeah! Let me know. I'll send you names and I'll send you all stuff.

**LB:** This was great. Yeah! And maybe we'll take our class on a field trip to ODU in the fall.

**LC:** I would love for you to. So that show will be up until January.

**LB:** Perfect.

**LC:** And I'll let you know. I don't know about all the programming. But they told Laura... Laura Belden [02:00:36 unc. name spelling] is helping me with the show. Ramona Austin is the curator. There's apparently going to be a panel talk at some point. Laura said that they had some really good people who were gonna be at that panel. But I don't know who it is or when it is.

**LB:** That would be great.

**W1:** Yeah.

**LC:** So when I find out when that is, and if that's, you know, I know they do a lot of things for students. So that would be a cool thing.

**LB:** That would be really cool. ‘Cause we really wanna bring our students out and about. So we’ll be visiting places like Health Brigade, and Diversity, and talking to people.

02:01:14

**LC:** If you have any interest, I’ve been cataloging his artwork on this online thing called “Artwork Archive” that’s an online database kinda thing. It’s really, really good for art. But there’s a public component, so you can go in and publish certain pieces so then, “Voila,” there’s like a little accessible web component. So if you wanna see any of that stuff.

**LB:** Yeah.

**LC:** It’s nice and tidy. It’s like a Pinterest page.

**LB:** Yeah.

**LC:** Just all the work.

**LB:** Yeah, that would be cool.

**JC:** So you can see what it’s like. Alright, well, y’all have been here a long time. What time is it? That felt like a long time. Mic’s been dead the whole time.

END TIME: 02:02:05