

Pasquale Natale December 2008

My name is Pasquale Natale, at the moment, in about 2008, I'm 63 years old. Here in Provincetown, I'm being part of the oral history of the town's response to the HIV/AIDS when it first hit town, the very early eighties.

First of all I'd like to go on record and thank the Provincetown Library, in specific, Mary Nicolini and Mick Rudd for making this oral history possible. It's something that no other organization has been able to do and they applied for a grant for it, specifically for this, and I think it's outstanding. So, thank you.

My part, in addition to being around, being here during that period... I think I'm going to first go into the part that I helped create. I moved here permanently from Boston in 1986. I had been diagnosed HIV positive in 1985. When the test first came out I went to Mass General, I needed to know. I'm one of those people... I gotta know... and I tested positive and I put that information away. I assumed I would never get sick. Back then there was ARC it was being positive, it was AIDS related complex they thought, and then from that some people would go on to get HIV/AIDS. So, even though I thought I would probably would beat it, somehow how inside, I decided that if I didn't, because most of my friends were becoming ill, if I was having a short life span, I wanted to live somewhere where I felt good and so I moved to Provincetown. I was fortunate enough back then to have bought a little house \$48,000.00 on Washington Avenue in '83. So, I moved from the North End of Boston where I was living in a great cold water flat for \$150.00 a month, five rooms, in the North End, where I also love. Anyway, I moved here so I wanted to become involved. The AIDS Support Group was having an open meeting, open to the town, and it was being held in the Unitarian Universalist Church. I think I saw it in the

paper, so I went. Sitting in the audience, I think I was sitting next to Mary Jo Avellar at the time, who I didn't know, and the board was sitting up at a table. Alice was there, Preston Babbitt, Frankie Girolamo and other people who I can't remember or didn't know. Anyway, there was talk of what people could do, volunteerism, and, prior to that, I used to help the Fine Arts Work Center set up their auctions. I used to set up the presentation. I used to help them, that's the kind of work I used to do; visual installations and decorating. So, I had a little knowledge of auctions, not much, so I thought, "Well maybe we could do an auction for the support Group." I raised my hand and I proposed the idea and it was shot down. The response that I got was, "We've tried yard sales before and they really don't bring in much, we really need to bring in some money." So it ended, and after that meeting Frankie G, Frankie Girolamo, who I didn't know, came over to me and said, "Listen if you want to do it, do it. Don't listen to them, just go ahead and do it."

And, because he said that and for whatever reason, I thought, you know what, "I am going to go ahead and try it." So, the process began to find out how to do it, where to do it, when to do it and how to get stuff to auction off. So that very first year was 1986. A very good friend of mine, James Hanson, who is now dead from HIV, I asked him to create a poster for us. It was the first poster for the auction and he...black and white, and there was a large urn, urn shape, then it had my name and home number to call me with donations.

I then went to the Fine Arts Works Center and I knew Robyn Watson and Susan Slocumb was then the director. And I said, "I know that this is maybe conflict with your auction but I'm going to try this. Can you help me out?" and Ione Walker, Berta Walker's mother, who was alive then, who was very involved with the Work Center, when she found out about this, she gave the auction her blessing. She said to those women, "We will help him out with this." I didn't know

this until years later, when they told me that. So they gave me all the paperwork, you know, how to label an item when it came in, how to, when it's auctioned off, what to give the person who bought it, how to record things and they helped me work several of the first auctions. They were there working it.

We needed an auctioneer, Jimmy had a friend Shelley, who was an auctioneer at Christie's, who used to come and also used to work in Provincetown. She volunteered to be the auctioneer. We needed a space, the Unitarian church gave us the first floor. We needed items, I went around everywhere, word of mouth and people started joining me. Bill Meves, George Libone, Toby Kaplowitz, when she was here, and you know what I don't remember a lot, a lot of people who helped but it was an incredible response. Artists were incredible, we had a lot of really good stuff. In addition to some great art, Hilda Neily, I need to go and say this, Hilda, who has given from the very first auction and has consistently given every year, one year she even, when her painting... we were doing this upstairs at the church then... one of her paintings went for some large money, and during the auction she went home and she got another painting, another large painting and gave it to us to auction off at that auction, so there were two of her paintings at that auction. This is not to just single her out, just something that came into my mind.

Everyone gave work, everyone that you can think of. So, I think what his name was at that auction, the gay congressman, Gerry Studds was there and I think he bought... there was a heather collection some landscapers had gave, beautiful heather collection, and it went so over what it's worth was and, I think, people were bidding from outside the windows because people couldn't get in. People were game, so it was way beyond... I was thinking, we were thinking,

ten, maybe twelve, fourteen thousand hopefully. The first one, we got about \$29,000.00, to our amazement. The Support Group was not there, the treasurer, I think Max was the treasurer, was not there. Alice was not there, and the next day, or that night, I called them and they came over and got the... and it was a huge success and we were very happy. So, it became an event, that was not a Support Group event but that we continued for years and years and years until it became....., the Support Group then took it on and it became an event that they had... a development person would run that, a paid person who would run that.

But prior to that I was the auction chairman for twelve years. So, I was the chair for twelve years and most of the original people worked every year on the auction with us. Jimmy Rann, as I said, and we would have someone who was in charge of getting art, someone who was in charge of getting jewelry, gift certificates to restaurants, guest houses, memberships to the gym. We even had, Rhoda Rossmore and her husband, for many years donated their Villa in Puerto Vallarta, two weeks staying there... you just got there on your own. We had trips. It became quite an event and it raised a lot of money and it was fun. It was fun and exciting and eventually it started bringing in over \$100,000.00 an auction.

I never figured it out cause I've never really known all the amounts but it has to be close to two million by now, over these past twenty-two years that it's been going. Labor Day weekend was the weekend we started and it turned out to be a great week-end and we continued with that weekend. The site had to move several times because it got larger and larger. We went upstairs at the church and then eventually to town hall. Now the town hall is closed. This last year, I did not attend it, it was out on the wharf.

So, that's how it began and it was important, the money that come in from that was important

and, at one point... oh and then I became a volunteer. It was either during that or before that. I was in the second volunteer training class that they held, to become a volunteer to work with clients. I think we talked about that at the round table, Irene Rabinowitz, Phyllis Temple, Greg Russo a lot of people were in my group and we worked with men, hands on or not. I became a driver for the van driving to Boston. One year, many years ago, Alice and I talked about dinners, about food, about doing a luncheon or a dinner. So, we came up with the idea of doing a once a week dinner, and I cooked the first dinner. I didn't know if people would want to come, it was pork roast as I remember, several pork roasts, and it became a weekly event which continues to this day. This must have happened in the early nineties, late eighties, early nineties. Now, guys hang around and play cards. People have come and gone from that dinner. It was part of that and another thing that come out of the auction was... early on in the epidemic, as we talked about before, people were trying anything to be able to get better. One of the things that seemed like it had some promise were egg lipids, they were expensive, not everyone could get them, they were not covered and the support group was able to pay for them for certain people... not certain people, for some people, but not every one... they didn't have the money. So we, the auction committee, thought, "Why don't we use half of that money, half of the auction money, whatever we make for the auction each year. It'll all go to the Support Group but half of it goes into a fund specifically for, what we termed, non-reimbursable therapies and those could include acupuncture, massage, reindeer antler... you know there were, there were many things that people wanted to try... and we even included therapies that might make someone's life better, like gardening, doing art. We had to break it down to a weekly amount that was available for those who wanted to participate in the program. So, I brought that idea to the Board, the AIDS Support Group Board, and they rejected the idea. They said they needed the money to run the

organization. So, we the committee then thought, because it was out auction, we raised the money, we thought we would set up an account of our own to do this, but there was one person who did not vote on that on that committee and she was the director and her name is Alice Foley. Alice Foley called me up the next day and said, "Can we have coffee?" and I said, "Sure". I think it was Little Billy's Restaurant, it was down the street from where I lived, Billy Forlenza, who was great. We sat there and had coffee and she said, "What is it that you want?" I said, "We kind of explained it at the meeting, we don't want to handle the money, we want you to have it, we want you to do the bookkeeping, but we would like half of this money from this auction to go into this fund and if you're not going to do it, we're going to try to figure out a way of doing it ourselves." Gratefully, she said, "OK we'll do it." and it was a fund that continued... it just ended... it ended maybe three years ago, so it might have continued up to 2005.

In the very beginning, it was large sums of money, it might have been a hundred dollars a month in the beginning but gradually it dwindled down because there were so many clients, people kept moving to Provincetown and it was available to everyone. We had no criteria, no income criteria, we didn't want to go that route where, if you... to try to figure out who was benefitting and who wouldn't benefit. It was great, it was a great thing. It helped a lot of people, people relied upon it, sometimes people used it for fireplace wood to heat themselves.

Then, in the eighties when the Support Group decided to join the Upper Cape AIDS organizations and open that up, then the auction wasn't making enough money to be able to fund the entire Cape. It was really a Provincetown thing and I fought to keep the auction money specifically in Provincetown, but the board opened it up to the rest of the Cape, Falmouth., Hyannis. So, immediately that money went down to like ten dollars a person and then there

wasn't enough... but it was great thing while it lasted. Now the auction, I think the support group depends upon 100% of it to keep going, to keep running.

I think that's it... oh, there's a couple of other things about the auction I need to talk about. First year we had a poster. Jimmy did it, as I said, James Hanson and so, the poster was great, so we decided, every year, us on the committee, to ask a different artist to do the poster and I think you're going to be able to see all the posters on one of the histories... somewhere. We have each poster framed and hung in one of the rooms at the support group. That was one of the great joys, in choosing an artist, then seeing what they came up with and there were some incredibly beautiful posters and, a saint named Donna Flax, for many, many, many years would print these posters, and in addition to the posters, she would print... that's when the t-shirt, the AIDS support t-shirt... what's the word when something becomes a regular thing... whatever, it became a regular thing every year and we would sell hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of these t-shirts and Donna, even during the busy summer season... and the posters were silk screened, a method which takes time and energy, and she did this every year for us, so willingly, so beautifully, it was amazing. So anyway, the posters were great. I even got a chance one year, when I stepped down from being the auction chairperson, the new committee said to me, "We would like for you to do a poster this year." and I did. It was a great feeling. So yeh, Donna Flax, hopefully you'll get to speak on one of these. I guess that's it for the auction.

Jimmy had asked for me to talk about the Long Term Survivors Group. Also way back, sort of when the dinners first started, I was in therapy myself with someone actually, who did one of these interviews, Katina, Katina Rodis and it was so good for me because it helped me do my art again so I thought about doing a group, and at that time it had nothing to do with being a long

term survivor, it had to do with having HIV and what it was like, what living was like back then. That we could get together once a week, with a facilitator and just talk. Alice was on board with that and the first facilitator was Doreen Devlin. She had been working for the support group and used to hold it at the Council on Aging on Alden St. I'm not going to mention the people who were in it because I don't know if I can but were... this one man who were in the original group, there were maybe six or seven of us who were still alive and we would meet once a week and talk. It became an important piece of my life and, I think, a lot of other guys lives. It continued, it continued with different facilitators, Katina Rodis became a facilitator once. Jimmy Rann came on board early on so he and I are probably the two longest in the group, which is now at least eighteen years, going on eighteen years... and it's come to be known as the Long Term Survivors Group.

It's usually men who come into our group. We usually limit it to eight people. We pretty much always have a facilitator, we meet on Tuesdays, no Wednesdays, we meet on Wednesdays now every week for an hour and a half. We talk about anything and everything, most of the time it's not about HIV. It's about our lives, relationships, what it's like to live, politics, movies, the economy, everything now. I think it started, I'm really bad with that kind of stuff but either the late eighties or the early nineties, I'm going to say the late eighties, I'm going to say like '89. I got an AIDS diagnosis in '88, before that I had been considered HIV positive, back then. I think maybe '88 or '89 so it could be twenty years, could be 1990, I don't know and a lot of people have died and that was really always hard in the group. Sometimes we would hold group at people's homes, because they couldn't make it to group any more so we would go to....I'm going to mention Victor because I know he would..... this would be fine with him. A great man named Victor D'Lugin I'm not sure of the last name, it was a funny pronunciation, and we would go to

his house and have group. Sometimes he would come down to the living room, sometimes we would have it around the bed when he couldn't get out of bed. It continues, as I said, and people have come and gone. We have a really great group right now and this is 2008, with some people who have been in it for quite a while and new ones that come in. Why and how this group started and became what it has become, I'm going to try to... I guess it was personal on my part, I guess it was something that I needed. In general, I am an isolator, I love to be home, or in the studio and I guess I had the need to talk to other people who knew what it was like to be living with this in their body. I guess that's the genesis in my mind although I had been in some other groups prior and I liked, I love groups, I think everyone should be in some kind of group, whatever you call it, it's great to talk to other people, like minded people. Not necessarily like minded, even if they're not like-minded, it's really... I think it's a great thing. It was like I knew, one day a week, I was going to part of a fellowship of, a brotherhood of men who really knew what it was like to live with this. I guess for me that was the genesis of it and then we became close, a lot of us became close. Way back then, when it was one of our birthdays, after group, Fat Jack's was around then, and we would go to Fat Jack's, we'd all sit there and celebrate, most of the time all of us went, some of the time somebody couldn't go and we would celebrate birthdays. We would do things at each other's houses even because we were in this group and we became close and friends. It wasn't for everyone, people joined and didn't like it. People would come in and didn't like being confronted, we would confront one another, and would leave, which was sad. I remember once there was a man, way, way back, and, I don't know, I said something to him, I asked him a question which he was kind of hesitant to answer. After group, he said to me, "Will you continue doing that to me?" and I know it made him uncomfortable, but on some level he wanted it or liked it and he wanted me to confront him on

things that I had questions about.

Personally, myself, I never went on to get anything, the reason I had an AIDS diagnosis even was because there's a condition called ITP which stands for Idiopathic Thrombocytopenia and it means bruising for unknown reasons, low platelets and maybe some bruising and my platelets had become very low, very, very low. So we worked on trying to get those up. I did AZT around the clock with the little buzzer that would wake me up during the middle of the night, my body was able to tolerate it. I was able to tolerate those kind of drugs for some reason and it didn't effect the rest of my immune system, but it did not bring my platelets up. I had bone marrow taps, it could have been lymphoma. We ruled out all the reasons other than it was HIV lowering my blood platelets, but the few platelets that I had, and sometimes they would go down to twenty or forty, the few that I had were very tough, cause I never hemorrhaged, I hardly ever black and blued. Fatigue was a huge part back then but they never caused me to get worse or sicken. I never came down with thrush, I never had pretty much any of the other things that the rest of the guys had, I just kept living. I was in good shape and doing stuff. Franco Palumbo, who was a friend of mine, who had Franco's Restaurant, I was heavy, heavier, we used to joke because he was heavy and we said, "There would be a book out called: 'And Some Died Fat'". You know, because we never lost weight even. So, until the cocktail came along in '95, the cocktail that I'm on brings my platelets way up to normal, but my teeth broke up and I continue to go on, living and not progressing. Now, of course, had I known that, had I known that back in '86, of course, I would have stayed in the work force, worked, made money, had more of a career. Had I known that, of course, I wouldn't have been here. Had I not moved here. I could have gotten ill.

Maybe, living in Provincetown, maybe becoming part of a community, maybe living in a village

with very little stress, other than the daily stress of the HIV and the people around me, but really no other stress, maybe that's why I am still here. I don't know the answer but I do know that stress is a killer for pretty much anyone, especially with HIV. As I said I'm an isolator and I never really joined anything in Boston. You know, I had friends, my close core friends, five or six, that we did things, but I was not a volunteer and I didn't become part of anything in Boston. For the first time in my life, here in Provincetown, I did all of those things. In addition to the AIDS Support Group, because of HIV, a man named Paul Richards started what was known back then as the healing circle. I think the work "hearts" was in it. And we used to meet at night, once a week, at the Unitarian Church, again, the Unitarian Church was great - still is. We would meet there, people, with and without AIDS, people healthy, very healthy, people not healthy, anyone could go, it was for anyone. We would sit in a circle, talk, sing, do exercises and I got to meet people and I was part of something that I never would have done anywhere else. I met Tim Callas there, who's become a great friend, who was actually a great, great friend of the auctions, who still 22 years later, he would bring three or four dozen mums to the auction to, number one, arrange them so that the presentation looked good and then at the end we would auction them off, a dozen at a time. He would show up, his truck would show up every year, with the mums.

The auction did become... it was like a ball of putty that so many parts of the community became attached to. It became an event that everyone really looked forward to. People would call up the business guild and the chamber... they wanted to know what date the auction was, to arrange their vacation around the auction. I guess one of the reasons was they got some great deals, There was some great art, great merchandise hardly ever went for its full value, but most of it did very well, some of it over its value. As far as the community, I can't think of any

segment of it that wasn't part of it or didn't participate. Roslyn Garfield and Phyllis Temple joined the auction at the very beginning. They became the recorders, they sat up there, every Labor Day week-end. They gave up any party, going away, any event that they were invited to they gave it up that night, the night of the auction, it was usually a Saturday of that weekend ...to record what items sold for and then that would be taken down to the place where people went to pick up their items. I'm trying to think of other people, real estate agents, restaurants... People did look forward to it, it was joyous, number one, it was happy. It made people feel good. It was a result of HIV, it was a good result in a way, I guess, that was a beautiful event. It always looked beautiful and it made people feel good and it was a way for them to contribute money and get something. It was a way that people could come together, in a comforting way, during a crisis.

You know it was my baby originally and then I had to let go of it. The baby had its own life and it worked. It was a system that knew how to happen, some years it happened better than others. But the Support Group did take it on, as I said, and it's one of their fund raising events now. It's different, it's actually harder for them to get people to work on it and volunteer now. At one point, when people started living longer, the cocktail came around and unfortunately there's that feeling that AIDS is not that crisis that it used to be. It's true that people aren't dying here the way they used to be but it is still a crisis, worldwide now, worldwide.

I'm grateful to have been... it's love/hate you know... it's twenty two years and (phone ring)... I don't know if you just heard the phone ring but that's Daniel Cleary, one the guys in our group. Anyway the love/hate with living here, I think a lot of people, with or without AIDS who live

here year round, I think, have that need for something more in the winter, another something that you have to leave to get, and it would be great to have another place to go to for three months, with everything different and new and be anonymous. But, it continues to be my home. I have a partner now, which I hadn't had pretty much most of my life. We're together now, this January will be seven years. He's a really, really good, good man. I love him, his name is David.

I'm going to speak of now, it has nothing to do with the auction, but I think it's an important piece because of the response of Alice Foley and the AIDS Support Group. This is I think 1990 and it was a result of the auction. The auction was being held upstairs at the Unitarian Church and again the two week trip to Mexico came on the block to be auctioned off. A friend of mine, Judy Poor and another friend of mine Kay Baker, at the spur of the moment, Judy said to us, "Let's bid on this." so we bid on it, at the spur of the moment, not having planned on it, we bid on the trip and we got it. We then made plans to go, I think it was in November or early December, and we flew to, and we finally got to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. I had booked and reserved a car from Hertz, Hertz Rent-A-Car, who told me, at that time, we would be getting a normal, regular car with four doors. Anyway, we got there, went to Hertz and there was no such thing for us, no such thing, I think, existed there. It was an old Volkswagen dune buggy with no roof and a bar, I think it had a crash bar, maybe it didn't even have that. We didn't want that. "That's all you get, it's your choice." So we took it. Neither Kay nor Judy would drive, so I became the designated driver for us. We made our way half way to the house we were going to stay in, and the car broke down, it stopped. We got in touch with them and eventually they brought another car to us, took the old one away, so we had another car with the same thing, no roof, no anything, so seatbelts. We made our way to the Villa, the Villa was very lovely on

water, we went into town, had dinner, maybe a night or two. I think it was the third day we were there, we decided to go down the coast and spend and look at the place where Night of the Iguana... the falls that were in that movie, beautiful area, we were told where it was, how to get there. The women used to change, who was going to sit in the front, who was going to sit in the back, there wasn't much leg room in the back, so they would switch off who's turn it was and, of course, I was driving.

And we were waiting outside, Kay Baker, who was supposed to sit in the front next to me came out first from the house, so, while waiting for Judy she said, "I'm just going to jump in the back, so Judy can get in the front." Judy got in the front, we pulled out of this place, had to go up a hill, had to get onto this highway, small highway, it wasn't really a highway, it was two lanes with a strip in the middle and it ran along the coast, down. So I started driving. It was a beautiful sunny day and the mountain was to my left and a cliff that went down and the water to my right. There was a guard rail and we were driving, talking, happy going, and ahead of me was a curve in the road, there was a hill, a mountain there. So I kept driving and I saw a car coming from around the curve in our lane, This was a two lane highway, you could either go one direction or the other... in our lane... I assumed he would, whoever it was would get back in their lane so I went closer and closer to the guard rail as I could get, and it was moments, it happened in moments and it was a head on collision, from what I remember, and I was conscious throughout the entire ordeal. The two women were not conscious, Judy was in the front, Kay, as I said, was in the back. I broke my arm and I had a cut but, I was very aware, I guess I was full of adrenaline and couldn't believe what was happening and my first thing was to check on my friends. Judy was beside me. She had hit either the dashboard or the windshield and she was bleeding and I got one of the beach towels and put the beach towel where she was bleeding.

Then I went to check on Kay Baker, who was in the back, who was in and out of consciousness, who was on her side, laying on her side and Kay had very long legs As I said there wasn't much room between the two seats and people kept driving by, they'd slow down and they'd drive by. The people behind us were annoyed because they couldn't get by. The response to this accident was like something I've never experienced or seen in my life... apparently at some point someone called the clinic in Puerto Vallarta and they sent help but the amount of time that occurred between that seemed like an hour, but it was over a half hour at least. It was a man who was in the other car and he stayed in his car. Eventually a station wagon came, with no life saving equipment, no emergency apparatus, nothing... and there was some cardboard in the back of this... and we all were put into the back of a station wagon and I was holding both their hands. So we're holding hands, pretty bloody, one of my concerns was my blood, I had cuts here and here but my hands were not bloody, the blood that was on my hands was theirs... my blood was infected. So we got to the clinic in Puerto Vallarta, they separated us immediately. Judy was the one who needed immediate attention, more than Kay and I. They immediately, apparently, took her into a surgery room. They put me, I think, in a wheel chair and took me up to a room and then Kay disappeared, so we were all separated. Time went by, I was sitting in a bed in my room and I knew one of the things I had to let them know was that I had AIDS, I knew that, because there was some blood coming from me and because they needed to know that. I asked for, I wanted to know if there was someone from, if there was an American Consulate in that town. There was a woman and she came over, maybe about a half hour later, and I told her of my position, my condition and I asked her... and I wanted her to find out what was going on. She said she would do that and she assured me that my having HIV would not be a problem. Now this is 1990. What I recall is that after that really no-one would come in the

room. For my bleeding they would come in briefly and throw them on the bed. They put me in a wheel chair to take me down to get x-rays, for my arm I believe, and while I was sitting waiting for that I was asking anyone I could find that could speak English, what was going on with my friends. Eventually a doctor came over to me and he looked down at me and he said “Judy, dead.” Not “Judy is dead”, not “your friend has died.” “Judy, dead” and I lost it and then a few minutes later, of course, I asked about Kay, they couldn’t give me any answers about Kay, but that she was alive and she was OK. A few seconds after that happened the consulate woman came to me and told me I was under house arrest. The way it works in Mexico is you’re considered guilty for something immediately, you have to be proven innocent. So, I was under house arrest cause the accident could have been my fault, they said. My friend had just died and I needed to know about Kay. They did take an x-ray and I was bandaged and then they took me to Kay’s room. I wanted to see Kay, just kept saying, I needed to see Kay, I needed to be with Kay. They took me to her room and she was in and out of consciousness and she had damaged her leg very badly. They wanted me to go back to the room that they had put me in and I didn’t want to go back, I wanted to stay on the chair in her room, there was a bench, I just wanted to stay with her. Eventually they forced me to go back to my room. I did. Then the consulate came and told me I was not under house arrest because the man who had drove the car had told the police that he had been working twenty-four hours a day for days in a row without sleep and he had fallen asleep at the wheel and when he was making the turn he had come into our lane. And he was asleep when that happened. Had I known I could have went into his lane, but I didn’t know that he was asleep. A series of events after that happened, happened for me in my room that, because of my HIV. I found myself out on the street in front of the clinic trying to make my way back to where we were staying. My clothes were gone, my bags with money, they

were gone, so I made it back to the apartment called the Support Group, my first call was to the Support Group, for them to let people know, Judy's family, my family, what had happened. I was never able to get any more information about Kay on the telephone, only that she was OK. We didn't know what was going on with me internally at that time, if there was something going on as I said I had those low blood platelets and the support group wanted me to get on the next plane and come home. They arranged it, Alice Foley arranged a flight back, which, I think, went to Texas first, it changed somewhere. And people talked to me throughout the night on the telephone to keep me sane because it was a nightmare. So I could have some touch with some kind of reality, people would keep calling back and stay awake they said a car was going to come and get me. And meanwhile when I had gotten back to the little villa that we had stayed in, the caretakers had the safe open, there was a safe that was there with our stuff, the safe was open and they had all our stuff out and looking at it and counting it and going through it. It was surreal, it was like some kind of movie. I made it through their customs. We were on a plane, they had sent a very good friend of mine, they flew her from Boston, my friend Judy, to meet me in Texas. I was in a wheelchair and be with me till I got back. When I got back to Boston, they had an ambulance waiting at the airport to take me to Beth Israel. I was in Beth Israel for three days, there was no internal bleeding. Meanwhile Kay, who had some injuries to her legs was airlifted to a hospital in Texas and remained there for a month, at least. She had to have pins put into her leg before she came home. And then there was Judy, Judy's family, getting her home. Judy was a very beloved, very beloved person in Provincetown. So, that was basically the story of Mexico and I guess I wanted to talk about how important it was to have the support group there and in place and Alice to take charge and immediately knew what to do and did it.

Now this other little story, for me, was years later, four or five years later and it involved a friend. I mentioned him before, Franco Palumbo, who also had HIV, who was on a trip in Italy with several friends of his. They were touring different places in Italy and they had gotten down to Palermo in Sicily when Franco took sick. Friends took him to the hospital, the local hospital in Palermo and once they found out that he had HIV, they then sent him immediately to this facility. We didn't know about any of this yet and didn't hear about Franco being in there till maybe three days later. It was an old TB facility somewhere in Palermo, old, decrepit, that was never used any more place, where they put anyone with HIV and they put him there. The call came eventually to the support group that's where he was. They said he had pneumonia and they could not release him. What do we do? His friends had left him and continued with their tour, no-one stayed with him. I spoke some Italian, I am Italian and again Alice said, "We've got to get him home. Would you go? Would you go get him and bring him home?" Without hesitation I said, "Of course I would." And what happened, it actually became for me an opportunity to go back into the lion's mouth in a way. His experience was not that unsimilar to mine in so far that... how other countries at that time treated people with HIV. How we were treated. I made my way to Palermo and the next morning made my way, I had directions, to the facility he was at, made my way there and we got to it and there were armed guards at the little station out front, like a prison, it was all walled off. I told them I was his brother. I had come to see him. Finally they found this building, all the others were vacant, there was nothing going on in all these old unused, decaying building. We got to the building where he was at. There was nothing on the first floor, just an old stairway, walked up the stairs and as I was getting to the top I could see across the landing something burning. I could see flames, I kept going and it turned out to be a wastepaper basket in an office with people standing around, some in white medical

outfits and some not, burning apparently items that had come in contact with some of the patients there. That was their way of dealing with HIV. The lobby, the hallway, the long hallway was loaded with maybe ten of twelve cabinieri, their police, with rifles on their shoulders, smoking, talking, laughing, they just kept walking up and down the hallway. I made my way into the room, told them who I was, who I was here to see. They took me, as I said there were maybe three or four people there, there was no doctor, took me to the end of this hallway. As I passed doorways, I could see people sort of in squalor in different rooms. Franco was at the very end. I walked into his room, he was alone in his room. It was a single room, it was filthy, there was no sheets on his bed and he was hallucinating. He sort of knew who I was. All he kept saying was he wanted to go home. He was really unaware. I don't know why or what it was. He told me that his rings had been taken off. One of the other people with HIV during the night had got in bed with him and that his rings were gone. He knew that and said, "I want to go home, You've got to get me home." I said, "OK", so I went back to that office and said I need to be able to have him released so that I can take him home on the next available flight. It was the week-end and they said "No, you have to speak to the doctor. Only the doctor can release him." "Can we get in touch with him? Can we call him?" "No"

I had to wait, so I would go back to the hotel and go back to Franco every day and bring him food. He loved to eat, different things that he wanted, pizzas, paninis, coca colas. I tried to clean the room up a little bit. Apparently most of the other people there were, what they said, were criminals, maybe people who lived outside of the law, maybe drug addicts, maybe street walkers. Those were the people pretty much, I saw some of them and talked to them, a few drag queens. It was very, very sad to see that be there. So, finally I did speak to the doctor. He was a nice

guy. I spoke to him in English and Italian and he said Franco had pneumonia, he was sure of it and that he could not be released. I asked him what tests they had done to make him come to that conclusion. And, meanwhile I kept talking with Alice on the phone from the hotel, going over everything. It was determined by people here in Provincetown, in the Support Group and myself, that he may not have had pneumonia, from what it sounded like and from the tests that they did and that we needed to get him home. The doctor would not release him. I was as nice as I could be to him in trying to explain everything and I said that I would take every precaution, that we could treat him as someone who had just had intense chemotherapy. I had brought masks with me. They had given me masks, the Support Group, and I had some masks. Eventually he said yes he would sign him off. I was there maybe three or four days. We booked a flight back. Franco had to come and stay at the hotel with me, we got him in the car, put masks on him, and kept making... we were asked questions as we would go through customs. "Why? What is this? What's going on?" and I said, "He's very susceptible to other people's infections. We need to try to keep him away; if we can sit in the back of a plane, wherever we could be most isolated." We had two planes to take, one to Rome and one to Italy and he was not cooperating at all... Franco, he just wasn't, he just kept trying to take the mask off.

We got Franco home from Italy eventually, to Logan Airport. Yet again we had an ambulance waiting for him, took him to the hospital, turned out he did not have pneumonia, so no-one was at risk, no-one on the plane. And he pulled through it. Franco maybe lasted another year, year and a half after that incident and then he died. Franco had lived here in Provincetown, lived here year round, he had a restaurant, he had several restaurants, Franco's Hideaway, he had a restaurant where the Mews was. He was a big, big part of the town. He is the person that, in another video, because he became blind at one point, in one of these other tapes Katina and

Janice were talking about, who drove his little Miata, blind, through town. They talked about someone, I'm naming him. It was Franco. That's who it was.

(Catherine Russo, director," So some people in Provincetown really took care of whoever was in their circle.")

Absolutely, probably like....I don't know of any other place that did. I remember way back then, people kept moving here with this because they heard about the services, the treatment and mainly the non-fear, eventually, in the very beginning there was a little fear with the white gloves and, "How do you get this?" But once it was clear, blood to blood, every segment, every part of the community was on board with this. And so it was very safe, healthy, an advanced place to be with HIV, cutting edge; partly because of Lenny Alberts, Doctor Alberts who was up on every new possibility, on his own time, doing his own training. And then our access, because of the van, our access to the best hospitals in Boston, the Deaconess, Mass General, Beth Israel, so people were able to live here in a comforting community, with a lot of love and still experience to top quality care.