

Kim Crawford Harvey October 2008

I'm Kim Crawford Harvey, I served the Universalist Meeting House in Provincetown between 1985-1989 and I think when I got there AIDS was still GRID The Gay Related Infectious Disease in California. None of us really knew much, it didn't sound good, the news out of California wasn't good but this was before the web, before the internet, so the news was pretty slim to say the least. We just kind of heard it from the guys who were coming in from San Francisco on vacation. Then there was a call from somebody that I didn't know, I was brand new in town, who said that his lover had just died of AIDS, some place in the Midwest and no funeral parlor there would touch the body and could we help. I have no idea how he got to me but I called Dave (David) McHoul was also new in town and, bless his heart, Dave said "Yes." that we could help. So I knew I could help. So the first service and the first caretaking that we did was the body; and there weren't people there for that, it just arrived and we took care of it. But, I think, Dave and I knew that it was something terrible that was unfolding. He had never heard of one of his colleagues not being willing to take care of a body, I think that that's part of their code of professional practice.

So, very soon after that, it could have been within weeks, Bill Ouellett, who was a bartender at the A-house, had something that looked like a terrible bruise on the back of his calf and it was Kaposi's sarcoma and we didn't know that then, and he went from young and wild and healthy to....to dead, very quickly. And he was the first person that we buried out of the Meetinghouse, the first person with AIDS and HIV that we buried out of the Meetinghouse. And I remember having the feeling that a Titanic ship wreck, of dimensions that were really inconceivable was

happening and that the first victim had just washed ashore...so we braced ourselves and we didn't even know what we were bracing ourselves for.

So Preston Babbitt who owned the Rose and Crown guest house in the West End was the Chair of my Board at the church and he came to dinner at my house and they were just putting together the Provincetown AIDS Support Group and we definitely wanted to marry the two institutions and think about how the church could be supportive of this effort, we had Billy, we didn't have anyone else at the time but you know we were bracing ourselves. The thing I remember about that dinner is that he came with his then boyfriend, Woody and as they were leaving Preston said, "You know, none of us really know whether we have it or not and you should probably wash our dishes separately." And I remember just being horrified by that and also feeling like, okay, well lets not be stupid either, we have no idea how this is being transmitted. So boiling water and pouring it over the dishes and just feeling really sick about it; but also I was just doing what he wanted. And I know years later, before Preston died, he just made it so clear that for him, it would have been the worse thing if he had known that he had infected someone else, after he knew how it was communicated. That was sort of his earliest gesture of trying to contain things.

I love to visit, there's no better place to vacation, it's so beautiful. You know it's hard to make a life and make living out there. It's beautiful and powerful. It's interesting, two of my three kids are of color, and I was really glad to have raised them in the city but it would be nice to move back out there now. I get why people do that, in a heartbeat. I miss my people out there a lot. Let's see where were we?

That was that and then it just hit full force, I think that's the last moment that I remember before my own boys, my people started showing up with it and in those days they would tell you they were sick and then they would be dead. Everything just happened so fast and you would be caring for one person and they'd be in the throws of the end game and then someone else would get diagnosed and you couldn't even give them the proper sort of heart or attention because you were so busy trying to take care of the person who was dying. So there's a lot of memories about that.

I remember Stephen Clover who owned 'Small Pleasures' he's a very close friend of Jimmy Rann's actually Jimmy will talk about Stephen. But Stephen got into recovery from alcoholism. He would want me to say that, it wasn't a secret. And he went to do his training in divinity school, he was training for the ministry and he was interning in a black Baptist church up here in Boston, in Central Square (Cambridge) and it's through Stephen that I met Jeffrey Brown who has now been a wonderful colleague for these past twenty years. Stephen's first sermon was called "Come, come to, come to believe" based on the first steps of Alcoholic's Anonymous. And I can still remember Stephen coming into my study one Sunday morning before services on a Sunday off saying, "I have AIDS." And when someone said that to you what he was saying was, "You and I have a very small amount of time left together." There were a lot of gifts of that time and one of the gifts was that people were actualizing spiritually so quickly. Living a kind of forgiveness and awakens that was just extraordinary, it was unrepeatably and powerful. Stephen was a great example of that, he...I remember him in church lying on a palette on the floor in front of the pulpit. He wasn't well enough to be up but he wanted to be in church. And after he died, Jeffrey came, Jeffrey Brown came down from the Baptist Church in Central Square

with a bunch of his people and we had a church service together. They brought us hymnals as a gift, Baptist hymnals, and they were all dressed in white. They came in looking like angels and that was one of Stephen's great gifts to combine his two communities, really powerful. And I feel like both Jeffrey and I feel like our friendship and mutual relationship is a tribute to Stephen and it's a way that he continues to live in us, which was very powerful.

I remember being with Dennis Thibadeau, young artist, you know they were all young. I was 27 they were 27, everybody was a baby and I remember Dennis saying to me at some point, "You know Kim, don't say hate, there just isn't enough time." Like there's not enough time to fix it or to get it right, like once we go down that road and, yeah, life is too short to say hate. An incredible lesson, I've preached it a lot and I think of Dennis, it's been really important in my life.

Paul Richards was a hairdresser, raised in the Midwest, big Baptist boy. Paul taught me a lot about hospitality. He used to invite people to brunch. He had a beautiful condominium right on the bay and he used to invite people to brunch but you could only come if you joined him at church first. So he'd have a pew full of newcomers whom he'd introduce during a sort of joys and concerns. And he built that church five men at a time that he'd bring in wanting to share the good news with them, share that spiritual community with them. And Paul really took AIDS to the next level for all of us. He connected with Louise Hay in California and went and did her healing workshops and the thing that Louise taught and the Paul really brought to us was that healing didn't mean physical healing. We weren't really anticipating a time when that could happen. The cocktail was unimaginable at that time; this was even before aerosolized

Pentamidine. There was nothing. So it was really about loving yourself and forgiving yourself and loving others and forgiving others and just dying peaceful. And it's not that Paul didn't fight right to the end cause he really wanted to live. Our relationship was so special, first of all because I was just crazy about him. There's a picture that I love, that I have of Paul with his arms around me at the March on Washington in 1987 March for Lesbian and Gay Rights. In the picture it looks like he's almost twice my height, he's such a big guy, hard to believe anything could bring him down; but he fought hard and he really lifted everybody up in his fight. He created the healing circles that we had every week, Victoria Stall and Nuala Murphy both helped to run those and did a beautiful job, worked with him, then worked beyond him. Paul did things like in his death he left his salon to two of his hairdressers, Eileen Bidel, who's gone now herself, bless her heart, and a woman named Jackie. They hadn't always been the best of friends and even in death Paul was sort of teaching people, you got to lift it up, you've got to get beyond this; we gotta learn to get along. Paul's death was really hard on the community. He brought his brother in. That was another sort of reconciling that went on. His brother, Baptist brother, was very afraid of gay people, very angry. His brother was a really good person but he didn't want any of us around so at the very end Paul got really isolated from the people he loved the most. John Culver and I were really shut out, just the last few days, just heartbreaking for John... and for me. Anyway Paul was a great force.

Patrick Grace another great force. He'd been diagnosed in Tucson where he had been part of the Tucson AIDS project, came to Provincetown, worked hard for the Provincetown AIDS Support Group. We had an amazing journey together. I remember driving Patrick up to the hospital; these were the days when we still bothered to go to the hospital. Like after a while we

sort of realized “Why are we going to the hospital? They can’t do anything.” but were of the Elizabeth Kubler Ross generation where every infectious disease has been wiped out in the developed world. Surely they’ll be able to treat this symptom, but of course, nothing was treatable. But anyway, I was driving Patrick to the hospital in my little red Volkswagen Golf and I had the roof open, the sunroof open, a beautiful dome of stars, and he was in the passenger seat fully reclined, he was really sick. And I remember coming up on that long stretch, kind of Provincetown through Truro, coming into Wellfleet thinking, “We’re going all the way into Boston and it’s late at night and I just wonder if we’re even going to make it.” Patrick had been quiet for a long time, was in a lot of pain, the stars were so beautiful, and it was really, really quiet and he said “Kim, it doesn’t get any better than this.” And I’ve never forgotten and I’ve preached that too. He lives on in me and all the people that those words have touched. It was so terrible; his suffering was so terrible but he found this gateway that he walked through to look at all that beauty and just to take it all in. And I’m sure part of him knew like, “This could be my last ride out of here, I better take in the Cape sky one more time.” and he did. It was just incredible.

So many names, so many people and I’m really glad you’re interviewing Jimmy; Jimmy was there for all of it with me. He was incredible. John Culver, I hope you get a chance to talk to John. They were just amazing and so courageous; these were their lovers that I was burying. In a way they were my boyfriends, but they were their lovers, so it was just another whole level and, of course, always waiting to be diagnosed themselves.

Once we got how it was being transmitted and once we got ourselves kind of on to the map as a place where people were getting good care. The Fenway did its Pentamidine trials there. I can remember the last pneumocystis pneumonia death, one more guy, a guy named Ben just panting to death. His heart finally gave out, he had such a big strong heart, so young, but he couldn't breathe. And then that horror was over thanks to Candice Pert who aerosolized Pentamidine and AZT and some of the earliest drugs. You know I know now my guys that are on the cocktail are taking one eighth of the amount of AZT that the guys were taking in those days. It's a wonder we didn't kill them with the drugs, kill them with the cure. But there was one woman in the midst of all the guys, a woman named Linda (Moran), her dad, Eddie may still be in town. Her boyfriend was a drug dealer, she was in New York. Her dad was a gay man, I think it must have been horror on horror for him that this disease that was just decimating his community had gotten to his daughter. We buried her. She's right up there in the graveyard there's literally like a whole row that I buried, it's just incredible, all of my people. I can walk and tell a story about each of those gravestones, each of the people that we buried there, Jimmy can do it too; we were all there for that.

One of the most amazing lives and deaths down there, ended up being Rogers Baker. He owned a guest house on Center Street and Rogers eventually became Preston's lover, Preston Babbitt's lover, they were at the end. Yeah Rogers at the end was at the Rose and Crown but the thing about Rogers was that he'd seen enough of it to be really conscious and to know what was happening not a shred of denial for him. He was my treasurer and he was the treasurer of the AIDS Support Group so he was eyes wide-open going into his diagnosis. I remember a couple of things, one was that after his diagnosis he felt good exactly one day. He had one day that he

felt good and what he did, he got up and he bought birthday and Christmas presents for Preston, as many as he could find. He was just walking on Commercial Street with his arms just loaded with bags, because he knew it might just be his only shot and it was. And I just have this amazing memory of Rogers with this huge smile on his face. He was so happy, not even happy for himself to feel better but happy just have been able to buy Preston presents, Preston had been so good to him. The other thing I remember is that Rogers took me to lunch at the Red Inn and his ulterior motive was that he wanted to know what I was going to say about him at his memorial service. He was like “what are you going to say about me?” It was really funny and you know I was tired and I didn’t want him to die and I said. “Rogers, why don’t you just show up and find out.” Like why don’t you just not disappear on me, basically. And then he and I hatched this idea out of this joking around; that we would actually hold his memorial service before he died, so that he could attend it. So we planned this big party at The Red Inn with wings and nachos, stuff that he liked to eat. And unfortunately right at the very end, he was too sick to make it. You know, it just went so fast in those days. But we had a mike set up and we made a tape, we ate his food and thanked him for that and talked into the tape about what it was that we were wanting for him and remembering of him. I wrote his eulogy and gave it twice, gave it then and gave it again a week later. But when the party was over, we took the tape over and put it in and from the time that the tape first went in the time that he died, it ran on a continuous loop. We knew that he was still with us because every once in a while, he appeared to be comatose, but every once in a while he’s say, “Can you rewind that and play that part again, that was awesome.” So, we’d stop the tape and rewind it and we’d play it again. It was incredible, it was just absolutely incredible.

Bernie Siegel came down, did a beautiful conference for us. We actually held the conference and we invited the Mass Bay and Blue Channing districts of the Unitarian Universalist Association. My guess is that we invited the Massachusetts hospitals, I can't remember who was on the guest list but it was a week-end long conference, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Bernie was our keynote speaker and he was absolutely spectacular and very loving.

And by then it was beginning to creep off the Cape so I was doing some speaking. I remember getting flown to Columbia University in New York City to speak at the Teacher's College there. Just trying to get the word out about how communities could gather and support their people through this end game and to understand that it was very short and the things that were important. What wasn't important was trying to figure out how to get to the hospital, for example, but what was important was to make beautiful home environments. And to have people stay with the guys who had dementia, and to make sure that the volunteers weren't getting used up. I guess stuff that now sounds sort of stupid and plain but we were figuring it all out, we made it up as we went along.

The Provincetown AIDS Support Group was meeting in our building and held their support groups in our building. I remember really clearly, Alice Foley and I were doing a workshop together, think it was on multiple bereavement, and as usual, this is just how it was in those days, we started the workshop and Alice was to go first but probably five minutes into what she was saying, she was needed, everyone needed Alice all the time. Alice and Doreen Devlin just got called out, you know we all were getting called out at all hours. So anything you'd plan like that, you know, you'd plan a wedding and a third of the wedding party would be dead by the wedding,

maybe including one of the grooms. But you just went ahead as best you could. And I think one of my most important insights from that time, one of the things that taught me to get through that time was realizing at some point that we couldn't just grieve. First of all it was too painful for the guys who were dying to only have all this sadness around them and not be reminded of the beauty. But also, it was just too exhausting and so devastating for all of us. So Provincetown has always been good at a good party and man we had some amazing parties. David Gallerani from Gallerani's, bless his heart, he's gone now too. David, if somebody didn't have money in their estate or didn't have an estate, he would just provide it. It was really just between him and me, nobody else would know. But there would be food and we would do a service no matter what, we would do a service if there were one person. If there were five hundred people, we would do a service. And there was always a party, we were doing a lot of partying. We didn't serve alcohol at the church, which I think was great. A lot of people were trying to clean it up especially the people with new diagnosis feeling like it might extend their life if they weren't drinking and drugging on top of it, that was pretty powerful, we just partied without alcohol.

There was a painter, his name was also Paul, I'm sorry I can't remember his last name right now but. I remember, when he was diagnosed, he decided to get sober and he'd been a really low bottom drunk. He'd had real misery with his addiction. He got sober and every week he'd stand up in church and tell us how many days he had, and he had thirty days, and he had sixty days, and he had ninety days. His goal had been to be sober for ninety days before he died and I think around 70 days he couldn't make it to church anymore, but at ninety days we all went and held the meeting in his kitchen. Some of us in AA and some of us not in AA and I remember I sat on the stove. I was kind of wedged in between the burners on his gas stove and Paul had

memorized the promises for that meeting. So in this little apartment that we had on Commercial Street that we sort of rented, the Provincetown AIDS Support Group rented in perpetuity and we just kept moving people in there when they couldn't afford their own place anymore and it was kind of a central place that we could take care of them. I remember that meeting, it was very powerful with Paul making it all the way through, reciting the promises and then dying within a couple of days.

Services were incredible, I am the only minister I know that has memorized all of the readings that you can use in a funeral or in memorial services, which has come in handy because, if you told me right now that we had bury somebody, I could do the whole thing by heart, but I wish that it were the baby dedication rite or the wedding rite. The services were incredible, you know, I did a lot of them. Provincetown was full of artists and musicians and we pulled out all the stops, so for the most part they weren't somber, sometimes they were incredible sad but they weren't somber and there was a lot of live music. I remember when Keith Donahue died we just filled the church with his paintings, they were everywhere, hanging everywhere, and on easels and as you came up the stairs and on the landings, just a whole retrospective of his work, a whole show of Keith's. It was fantastic. And, you know, we'd decorate and we'd get dressed up and party. Usually church in Provincetown wasn't dressy, but funeral services a lot of time we'd dress up. Sometimes we were out on the beach. A lot of people wanted to be buried out of the church but we would go out on the beach to scatter the ashes which was, of course, illegal, but whatever.

I think at first, it was kind of among the guys and I was in because I was their minister but

there weren't a lot of women in the very early stages because in those days the lesbian community and the gay male community were really quite separate. 'Stonewall' wasn't that far behind us at that point and there were two separate communities, back then. Obviously the guys needed us, needed the women, and then there were mom's who were affected and dads and cousins, so slowly but surely the community, the larger community arrived. And, I think, one of the things that built that church was that it became the great community of the bereaved. There wasn't a person that hadn't been touched by it and eventually there wasn't a person in Provincetown that hadn't lost a neighbor or a friend or a favorite hairdresser or a shopkeeper or you know, it was huge. It was like a slow motion bomb that went off, kind of like the way Hiroshima, for many years took people's lives from radiation sickness, it was like that. So the community was spectacular, and I think, other people will have a different perspective on this, it never felt to me slow to ramp up, it felt like it ramped up appropriately as we began to realize the full catastrophe of what was going on.

I have an amazing memory of John Hyman, who was living in Orleans with his wife Julie. John was and is an older straight man and he was aware of what was going on. I'm not sure that John knew anybody with HIV or AIDS, if he really knew that many gay people but he just had a huge heart and I remember being at his house and he said, "What do you need?" And I remember saying, "Well one of the things we need is a TV. We need a TV for that apartment that we have just rented in perpetuity because it's boring to lie in bed all day and it's hard for the volunteers." He literally went some place in his house and got a huge TV and loaded it into the trunk of my little Volkswagen. Just that kind of spontaneous generosity, I experienced it all the time. Everywhere I went.

I remember being up here in Boston for a board meeting and my friend Mal Gobranson who is a dentist in Wellesley, Massachusetts, he said, "Are the guys having any trouble with their teeth?" and, of course, that was one of the big presenting issues was horrible problems with their teeth. And I said, "Yeah." He said, "I've been at some of the Dental Association meeting and I'm aware that some of my colleagues are not behaving honorably and I want you to know that if you can get them to me I'll treat them. It's my pleasure, it's my gift." And so Mal Gobranson this straight white guy from the suburbs, a Unitarian Universalist, just doing what he knew was right. There was a shuttle to Wellesley and Mal treated tens and twenties of our guys with gum disease and other things that happen to your teeth when you're taking medication.

I'd say the community rocked out.