

ILLEGITIMI NON
COALITION OF PEOPLES
DISMANTLING THE DRUG WAR
SYNOPSIS

*There's
the
Pleasure*

REPORT ON RESISTANCE IV



This report is dedicated to
the memory of Rickie Araki
Board member of the
Coalition of Peers
Dismantling the Drug War
and longtime resident of the
Downtown Eastside.



This report was assembled by the Coalition of Peers Dismantling the Drug War, a group of drug users in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside who are committed to the survival and the pleasure of illicit drug users.

We declare our commitment to pleasure because, when it comes to marginalized drug users, there's a prohibition against feeling good.

Not everyone deserves to feel good, they say, only the people who earn it do. They earned their six figure salary. They earned their highrise condo.

We didn't earn our toke of crack, our bowl of meth, our shot of down, or so they say.

If we didn't earn our high, then we must not use drugs to feel good, right? We must use drugs to manage chronic pain, to cope with trauma, right?

Yes, and.

Yes, and because we like to feel good. But they can't hear this. They hold the carrot of housing, health services, cultural practice in front of our eyes and they tell us that if we want these things, then we must do as they say.

Repeat after me. *I don't use drugs to get high. I am traumatized.* We're through with parroting their moralizing line. Not only are we through with it, but it's killing us.

Their eyes and ears are so stuffed up, their denial is so profound, that they cannot understand how much rides on pleasure.

Pleasure is about more than feeling good.

Drugs are in/an excess of good feeling, and the Downtown Eastside is nothing if not a generous place.

So, without further delay: interviews with drug users from the Downtown Eastside, for your viewing pleasure.

All recordings were conducted in person
in the summer and fall of 2021
in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside
before being transcribed to text.

Plain type is from the participant
Italic type is from the interviewer

Interviews have been edited for clarity and
consistency, but an effort was made to preserve
the spirit of the conversation.

In order to protect anonymity, names of people,
places, etc. have been selectively omitted using
square brackets, e.g. [*place*].

Interview One

What's your drug of choice, and what do you like about it?

My main drug of choice has always been heroin. Since the first time I did it, it sort of made me feel normal, complete, like I was missing something before it. And the few times that I tried quitting it, for any length of time, more than a month or two, I had that feeling again, that I was incomplete, like I was missing something. So it sounds kinda weird, maybe I was born without the heroin gene. It makes me normal, and functional. I was pretty fucked up without it before. It really enables me to function, and it hasn't been a problem for me!

So it made you feel more like yourself than you felt before?

It was like, fucking wow, this is how everybody feels normally, right? It was literally like something was missing before.

First couple years of my addiction I didn't stick to heroin, I did a wide variety of opiates, demerol, methadone, you know. Had a healthy fear of being wired, right? Couple years before that my oldest brother had died from an overdose, right?

Heroin overdose?

I think heroin and pills. Mostly the pills that actually put him over the top. Yeah, it was hard.

Healthy fear of being wired at that point, so you were trying not

to lean too much into one thing?

I saw the effects in his life and it was pretty severe, pretty miserable life. He was a bad addict, he did some pretty shitty things. I had a fear that all addicts were like that. A continuing misconception, but you know, I don't think drugs make you a piece of shit, it just brings it out into the light.

So you went from starting out using a handful of different things because you wanted to avoid leaning too much into heroin, but then it ended up being more stable?

My whole family had been addicts at one point, so I was the youngest, my older brothers were 20 when I was born. So they were junkies when I was born. It's the late sixties right, so I grew up around it. So a lot of knowledge that I gained from their mistakes, from being around it right? I picked up on the fact that it's harder to get wired if you mix up your substances, right? I found that on the opposite end, when you're kicking, I found that it makes it easier to kick your habit if you mix up opiates. At one point I had a pretty good recipe for a relatively painless detox.

Holy shit, what was that?

I'd taper myself down, then mix it up, switch to different opiates, do the bare minimum to keep from puking on your shoes, and then you keep lowering it, then the last couple days, some valium and pot, and some booze, and try and knock yourself out for a couple days. It's easier than fucking thrashing around in bed for five days. Cold turkey, I had to do that a few times. I wouldn't wish that on Donald Trump. Well, maybe I would.

But my other enjoyment of choice lately has been crack, because I've been fortunate to get on the heroin maintenance program, so I guess out of boredom and my addictive personality, it opened up cocaine. I used to shoot coke for a couple years, speedballs, it became really unmanageable.

Unmanageable because expensive?

I'd end up taking it all day. It was frustrating because I had my prescription heroin, I didn't really need to chase anything right? It was affecting my ability to work, my relationships and stuff in a negative way, and my veins were really bad and I was having a hard time getting a hit. So decided to pack it in, smoke a little bit of crack instead. It helps with the boredom.

(Discussing the injectable heroin program that he's on, he explains)...

The conservatives tried to make a political football out of it, and they were planting stories like, "Oh my god, there are people giving away heroin in the Downtown Eastside, there's a Heroin Fairy, giving out heroin to children." Making this big issue out of prescription heroin for like, a hundred hardcore addicts right? So we ended up going to court when they shut it down, and it turns out that when you've been given a clinical drug in a study, and it's proven to be beneficial to your health, then they cannot stop giving it to you. So the court case basically enabled us to ensure that we'd get heroin for life, and they can't take it away on that account.

And they have to provide it to you?

Yeah. So there were some good people, Dr. [Name], he's

been a good advocate for us. He's gone down and testified in Congress in the States. It used to be like in Los Angeles in the 30's, it was the same sort of program. Opiate problem down there, and the mayor put this clinical program together, giving addicts fuckin' heroin, and it was shut down cause of fear mongering. It had proven effective. I guess that was around the time when the first drug czar came in, same guy who persecuted Billy Holiday. It's pretty strange. It got closed. It's a shame, because these programs do make a huge difference. A lot of people, some of them are still fucked up, but the good majority of clients have been housed, gone back to work, reconnected with their families, they have a semblance of a normal life. Once you stabilize on the program and it works for you, you can't have a better gift really.

What that makes me think about is the kind of life that you can live, and also the fact that you've been on this since the trials, right? So does that mean that there was less of an allure for getting onto fentanyl for you? Because you didn't have to go to the street to get your stuff?

Yeah, I'm still not wired to fentanyl, I think it's a shit drug and it's a bad drug for the neighbourhood. It's pure greed that's created this monster. I mean, fuck, if 20 years ago people would have told me that there's technicolour dope on the street I would have laughed in their face.

So when people get wired to fentanyl, I haven't met as many people who can hold down a job, or stay in touch with their families.

No, its fucked right? And the really sad thing is there's a lot of people in the program doing fentanyl and the

prescription heroin, it causes a bad reaction, physically. And they get really ill. And it's almost to the person, pack in the fentanyl, or pack in the free fuckin' safe supply, and to the person they all packed in the free safe supply. I couldn't believe it. It's so fuckin' deep-into them I guess. A couple of them have died, it's fuckin' tragic man. I don't know what it is, the combination of them, the fentanyl, and the heroin that they use now, it's not the same as the first program, it was real heroin, and this is pharmaceutical heroin, it's more like a morphine base.

It's like a synthetic thing.

Yeah. If I get it in a vein.... I muscle it, right? If I accidentally get a vein, fuck, it's horrible. Fuckin' turn beet red, skins on fire, like pure hell. It's really uncomfortable.

So it wasn't like that back in the day.

No, you might fuckin' scratch your nose off, but...

Well how does that factor into pleasure? Because we're calling both heroin, but they're completely different things.

I know, it's fucked up. It's hard to get them to admit it. They're pissed off about it, I think they're being deceptive about it. They're still calling it diacetylmorphine, but I'm not sure that's the truth, you know. Maybe I could smuggle some out and get it tested. Or something, I don't know. It definitely doesn't feel the same, which is too bad. The first program, it was nice, getting heroin for free. The shit still works for me, right, keeps me normal. I just don't get the same high as I did from heroin.

But at the same time you were saying the boredom set in in a dif-

ferent kind of way, cause the feeling's not there anymore.

Yeah, it can be frustrating, you see a lot of people using side and stuff, and coke. I wonder if they would be doing that if they had a good heroin buzz on, right?

Such a weird situation, because I just don't think that's something that they're thinking about when they're pumping out all the different safe supply options.

They were talking about getting up there and giving people fentanyl. Right thing to do. Give fentanyl addicts dilaudid and surprise surprise, they're all flooding the market. Selling them and turning them into fentanyl, right? So why not just give them fuckin' fentanyl. They give them the patch now, but not many people can make that work for them. So give them actual fentanyl to fix. It's a no brainer, right?

Yeah, all the people who're on the patch that I've met are still injecting. I haven't met anybody who has the patch, and that's it.

I think it's the whole harm reduction thing, not any one tool works, you need the whole toolbox. Some people are gonna need a couple substances, right, to make it work for them.

So how long has it been since you've had that heroin high then?

Oh, couple months ago I found some real heroin, and some real cocaine, a speedball. I had a bit of it, then I waited three weeks before I had my second shot. I was nervous, I didn't want to get back into doing 10, 20 speedballs a day. So once I kept it for 20 days I figured well, it's not a problem anymore. Same thing with drinking, I used to drink my face off. A drunken idiot. A couple

years ago, first couple years of doing this work and needed to blow off, have a good cry, get it out of my system, so I bought a bottle of vodka. With my old drinking habits, I would have finished that in an hour, and kept drinking for five days. And I realized three weeks later I still had half a bottle. So, you know, I can drink casually now too, which is nice. Cause I like to have a few drinks every once and a while, I don't like to be blacked out drunk, finding out from somebody else... I'm a bit of a control freak now, in my old age.

It seems like there's an interesting difference. Times when you've known you've had an unhealthy relationship to a thing, and times in your life when you've just been stable on a thing, and it just works.

I'm quite comfortable with my addiction now. I knew, almost immediately, that doing heroin, that I wasn't going to quit. The only time I've actually tried to quit was for other people, or because my situation became unmanageable. It wasn't working, I had to take a step back. I knew it wasn't going to be forever. I've always imagined myself... if I was lucky enough to be 80 years old, in a rocking chair, opium pipe, fuckin' rig in my arm.

You said you knew after you tried it that you'd always be a heroin addict, but is it even an addiction...

No, I don't think so, I don't think heroin has any negative effects on me. I think it's the criminality that causes the negative effects.

Well that's a big distinction, right?

Because, a regular supply of heroin, it doesn't do anything negative, I think it probably improves your health. Reducing stress among other things. I can't see any physical things that happen from doing heroin, except being thrown in jail, going to the hospital from having to deal with life on the street. That's the detrimental effects of dope, right?

Interview Two

I know that you already hav the answer on the tip of your tongue, but drug of choice?

Crystal meth.

Can you elaborate? We can do a love/hate, or purely love, or purely hate...

Crystal meth is just a weird one for me, because it's the one drug that got me out of sex work, and it's the only drug that got me out of sex work. Cocaine just made me a bitch. The one drug that actually kinda made me feel better about everything, gave me an awareness of my surroundings and stuff like that, realizing how shitty my life was, and made me more aware of everything else, was meth. It just slowed things down, cause everything was moving at a fast past all the time. So it's helped me with that, and been there through all my different shit.

So there's something that's kind of counter-intuitive, that departs pretty far from the stereotype.

Apparently you can't hold down a job if you use crystal meth, and that's untrue; I hold down three jobs. And I live a functional life, being able to eat everyday, being able to sleep and stuff, being able to hold housing. I'm able to function on it. People fall into psychosis, yes, but that's if you don't have the stability, and that's what the big thing is, I have stability. That's what changed a lot of it for me too, being able to be stable on it, being able to enjoy the high. But I don't really get high anymore...

but just the pleasures of it. Cause now I'm just kind of maintaining, it's maintenance for me now.

But at first, it felt good, there was a high?

There was a high, yeah. I went from snorting it, to smoking it, to injecting it, quite fast. With snorting it, it was a different buzz cause it burns really badly. And if you're someone like me, you bleed easy, so your nose starts bleeding and you're like oh, shit. I don't know why but it was a pleasure thing for me. But smoking it I couldn't do, cause I smoked too much crack and my lungs were already done for. And injecting it was just a different experience, because at first I didn't like it, but then I started getting really into it... so then I just started enjoying injecting it a lot more.

Injecting got me to a place where I'm able to have control over how much I use. I only spend a certain amount on it, every couple days, and I can set that amount, and keep it in my budget. So I'm able to budget for drugs, and still be able to afford food and stuff too.

So do you think it has to do with the stability in your life otherwise that allows you to depart from the stereotype that people have about crystal meth being a destabilizing thing?

Yeah. It's about having stability but also about having those proper support channels too. Having proper housing was what really changed my usage. Because at first, when I moved into housing, I couldn't sit still in housing, it was really uncomfortable for me because I was living homeless for a long time. So having that stability of having housing, after a couple years, I finally got stable in my drug use, and got into work and stuff like that.

It really got me to a place where I'm able to function as a drug user. To use daily but not go crazy on it. By having a certain amount I can use and a certain threshold I can go to without going overboard, or overusing it and overstimulating myself. Or to the point where I'm always fucked up. So now it's just all about maintenance and control.

Another thing that I knew about crystal meth, but which is apparently not necessarily the case based on what you're saying, is that it suppresses your appetite.

If you've been using for a long time it doesn't. It's weird, but it actually makes you eat a lot more, well not a lot more, but you can have full meals on it. It's like, yes, meth does do bad shit to your body, but that's if you don't take care of it. If you're just drinking 'Ensures' for a month straight, then of course you're not going to be well. You have to make sure you have the nutritional value of food, and staying hydrated is a big thing. Yes it will still deteriorate your teeth, but if you stay hydrated your mouth won't be as bad. Because meth mouth isn't really a thing, it's more just dehydration.

Well this is good shit to know, because a lot the things people associate purely with meth have more to do with lifestyle than with the drug itself.

It does, cause sleep deprivation is the main cause for psychosis, it's not the drug. The drug plays a part in it, from keeping you up, but it's doesn't actually put you into psychosis. It's sleep deprivation, cause you've been up for days, and you fall into a different cycle. It's like when students are studying for exams and stay up for days, and start to forget things, and they go into psycho-

sis most times, cause your body can't handle not sleeping.

When you were first talking about it, you said that it allowed you to come to terms with where you were at. In comparison to what? In comparison to using other things that were distracting you from where you were at?

I suffer from ADHD, so it really helped me be able to control that a lot better. I never got access to ADHD meds because my doctor would never prescribe me them. So I never had any sense of control. Cocaine just made me a bitch, and really crabby, not a fun person to be around. Same with alcohol. I was actually able to be calm and settle down, instead of being all over the place all the time. Just being able to sit with myself, and my heads not spinning a thousand miles a minutes, which is nice. That's one thing it really brought me. Clarity to that. Realizing that I can be calm. And not having to race around everywhere.

And speaking of pleasure, it sounds like that would be something that would feel good.

It does in a way, just cause it does feel good in the sense that I'm able to control my emotions now.

More autonomy.

Yeah, and not have to worry about being this emotional wreck all the time, I'm able to express my emotions in a way that are more suitable. Instead of just being a chaotic mess, and trauma dumping on people when I don't need to (laughs).

So you said that you got diagnosed with ADHD. Do you have a

relationship with ADHD meds?

I didn't have a relationship with them, like I tried Ritalin and stuff when I was younger, but it just wasn't, I never really felt anything on them. Ritalin I just don't feel anything. But when I did start taking that safe supply, per say, it did help me to not have to worry about getting my dose in the morning, like doing a shot in the morning and the afternoon. And at work and stuff, like not having to worry about having to go hide in the bathroom to do something. To be able to go and take the medication during the day, and not having to worry about getting a shot in, even though I kinda want to shoot it up, but it's impossible to shoot up adderal, so...

But they call that safe supply?

Apparently that's safe supply, but I don't feel like it is, cause it's not meth. And you can't shoot it, and your doctor controls it. I can be cut off of it if I don't pee dirty, for instance. I have to make sure that I have medication in my body. If I don't take it at all, she's just going to assume that I'm selling it. I'm not though, I just save it. I've stockpiled a lot of drugs (chuckles). Cause you never know.

I hear you, I mean, if they're going to cut you off so easily, then you've got to look out for yourself.

Yeah. And I feel like racism plays in there too. It's like my doctor doesn't trust me cause of being First Nations. And the medical system's always racist. For instance, I broke my jaw one time, and they gave me pain medication for when they were setting it back, but after that they gave me naloxone to wear off the morphine, and

they gave me acetaminophen and ibuprofen, and said this should help the pain, but I was in a lot of pain, and it's like, that's not the proper way to give medical care.

I have a heart problem due to the fact of overdosing on meth a few times. But any time I go to the hospital for that, they want to go over a sober assessment first, to make sure I'm not drunk, or that i don't have alcohol in my body, and I'm like, I don't drink at all, and then they go over drugs that I've used, and I'm like, you don't need to go over this list, my heart's just having issues, can I get an ECG, and they're like oh no, we need to go over this first, and I'm like, no you don't. Racism plays a big part in that. I have a doctor, she's amazing, but at the same time she still has these beliefs that she doesn't need to have, and working with First Nations people, it's kind of troubling.

I mean that's fucked if they just do an automatic alcohol screening.

Yeah, it's kind of funny to me. Every time they do it now, I'm like, "Yeah, I'm piss drunk, I had twenty drinks today," and they're just like, "Are you sure?!" And I'm like, "No, I'm sober as a fucking judge right now," (laughs). Like I may have some meth in my body but it doesn't make me go crazy. It's just funny, you know, that's why I go to VGH, because most times VGH won't do anything like that. But Saint Paul's is really bad for that.

So what would a safe supply look like, if safe supply right now looks like adderal?

But a safe supply for meth would be meth that's cooked cleanly, or just providing disoxone, it's legal meth, they

have it in the states. It costs a lot of money, yes, but it's also meth. And you can actually shoot it too. And you only have to take a couple doses a day and you're fine, because it's a high dose. I've read the research on it, it's really interesting, it's pretty much just meth. And you don't need to take a super amount of high doses, you just need a certain amount and you're good to go.

What do they use it for there?

A lot of people with narcolepsy, ADHD, and they've been testing it for treatment for meth use, and it's worked for some people, but not for everyone. Because everyone has different relationships with meth. And the meth down in the States is different from meth in Canada, cause meth in the States comes from cartels, so a lot of the times it's brought over in diesel tanks, which gets dissolved, and then gets recrystallized when it comes over the border, which is really gross. Like you taste diesel fuel and stuff like that. You can wash it out but you can still taste the diesel. And they also don't have access to pseudofed like we do here. Here we have more access to it so our meth is cleaner than in the States. Which is kinda funny, because a lot of their shit is made in bathtubs, and our shit is made in backyards and stuff, but it's also not as dirty, because they add a lot more chemicals to it in the States, because they don't have access to pseudofed, so there's a different high to it. Which has always fascinated me, it's really interesting.

So what's the Canadian situation?

We have more access to pseudofed, and just because we have more access to that, there's no meth watch program here, so you don't need to add more chemicals to

it, like more chemicals than they already put into it, just to line off the base to make sure it crystalizes and stuff. Here you just add whatever and it's perfectly fine. But in the States they have to add cleaners and stuff like that in order to make a proper batch, enough to make it for people. Here you don't have to do as much because you can buy tons of pseudofed without anybody really saying anything.

People always say that when a meth addict sees meth being produced, they would never ever like it again, but it actually fascinated me more, how meth is produced. It made me really curious which type of meth I'm taking. The chemical process is so fascinating, it takes a long time to make it and you have to be so careful with certain steps cause you can blow things up. It's just fascinating. How meth is produced, and how different it is here. The smallest little shake, or opening up a window, can blow up the whole place. You have to be extra careful.

It sounds like you have a love affair with meth.

I call her my on and off girlfriend. The only woman I've ever truly slept with, I guess, is a good way to put it. It's also a drug that's helped me through things, because it's not one that I've had things go crazy on it. I've had my moments but it hasn't gotten me to a place where I'm totally off the edge.

If it's been a companion for a while, then just like a relationship, they have their ups and their downs, they have their moments that are crazier than others.

I've been using constantly for the past three years and

coming off of it would probably be really weird for me. My withdrawal from meth now is a lot different from what normal people would do, like just a few days and you're good to go. I come off like it's heroin, I get the shakes, and I get really sick and stuff, not a fun feeling.

The conversation with opiates often has to do with safe supply being pharmaceutical grade and synthetic. And injecting synthetic opiates feels different than heroin, right.

Well I've shot morphine before, it was not a fun feeling, it fucking gives you pins and needles really badly. There's a lot of focus on opiates because yes, we're dealing with a fentanyl crisis, but it's also that people need to realize that we need a safe supply of stimulants so that people who don't use opioids don't end up dying because they took some meth that had fentanyl in it. And they're still at high risk for that, but they're put on the backburner, so it's totally frustrating.

We can get into the question about medicalization and pleasure. I mean it's a different conversation with the pleasure related to safe supply.

Yeah, cause they don't want you to have pleasure. When you're a drug addict you're not supposed to feel pleasure, when it's like no, it's the opposite. People should be able to feel pleasure when they're using drugs too, they don't need to just feel this numbness. Some people use for pleasure, people use recreationally, for different reasons. And yeah, some people do go a little nuts on meth, but it's just how their body reacts to it. And some people I know use it perfectly fine, like I do, and are able to function on it, and work jobs and stuff like that.

In terms of talking about safe supply for stimulant users, how does pleasure factor into the way you're thinking about that?

Well just cause there are so many functional stimulant users who don't want to talk about it because the demonization of stimulant users, especially meth users, is so present. People think that there's 'no way that there can be functional meth users', when there're actually a lot of us. There's a lot of functional stimulant users who use caffeine, for instance. Or smoke cigarettes. We need to get rid of the demonization of it, and the scare tactics that were used on it. There's a whole different side of it, of being like, meth, do it once and you're addicted. That's not always true. You can do meth a few times and not even like it. It all depends on the person. A way to show that meth is not as troubling as people is, and by counteracting the messaging that's out there about meth, to go against it, to parry it. 'Meth will make you sell your sister!' I'm like, no it won't! Maybe in the states, but not here! Or make you beat up your mother, for crying out loud. I'm like, I've never... my mother doesn't even... she knows I use, but we don't talk about it. I wouldn't beat her up for another hit! I know how much I have for another hit, I know how to budget for drugs well enough so I don't need to worry about that. It's funny how people assume that all meth users are these tweaker criminal addicts that are breaking into places all the time and looking for the next fix, and I'm like, not all the time.

I guess the thing is that there's more stigma with meth that's involved with disentangling what the drug does vs the kinds of lifestyles that are associated with it.

Yeah, I know people who drink everyday and they look

terrible. They look way worse than they did a year ago. Anything can do that to you though. Even drinking caffeine can change you, in a way. Same with smoking cigarettes, with anything and everything. It's kind of just fascinating that people assume that because someone does a certain thing, that it makes them different. I'm like, no it doesn't, everything can make you change. Even not eating properly can make you change.

Living some place different. Sleep cycles. Hanging out with new people. The world is a very psychoactive place, and it's not solely drugs that are psychoactive.

And it's not always drugs that change someone, it can be anything. It can be new friends, it can be old friends, your environment is really what changes you. Especially for people that are really adaptable to environments, you change into what needs to be done.

Like you said earlier, people don't want drug users to have pleasure. There's also a pleasure question that has to do with race, I think.

With that, for instance, I can give you an example of that. The first time I saw a liquor cabinet was really weird to me. Cause I grew up in a household where my parents drank, but there was never alcohol in the house, because they drank it all. The first time I saw a liquor cabinet, and realized that people drank for pleasure, like drank on the side, had a few drinks here and there, was weird to me, because it was something that I never knew growing up. Also it was just weird to me to that they didn't have to hide their alcohol, they could have it out in the open. It's still like that today, a First Nations mother has alcohol in her fridge, her kids will

get taken away, it doesn't even matter if its hers or not. They'll still get taken away. But if a white person has a liquor cabinet, they don't get their kids taken away, for instance, they can drink openly, like 'wine moms' and stuff like that. I guess it isn't a good example, like these mothers are drinking wine and they're taking their kids out to the hockey game. It's like okay you can do that, but if a First Nations mother did that she'd have her kids taken away.

And that is always the assumption too, that every First Nations person does drugs, and every white person just does cocaine or something, and that's just not always the case. I know a lot of white people that are really out of it, on certain drugs. Race plays a big role in it, because for someone that's First Nations, you're not suppose to have pleasure in drugs, it's just meant to deal with trauma and stuff like that, in a sense. But some of us do use it for pleasures. I do use it for trauma and stuff like that, but it's also because it's helped me in a lot of ways too.

I mean I think that that really gets at something pretty critical about this. The relationship between what can be therapeutic about drug use and also pleasurable. I don't know if there's any feasible way of totally disentangling them right? Sometimes they go hand in hand.

Yeah, they do. Cutting for instance, when I used to self harm, it was a pleasure thing, but also to release things too. I got a pleasure from opening myself up, but I also got a release from it too. It was a sense of... I guess dopamine comes out of that, but it's a way to release things that also gets a feeling of happiness out of it too, I guess. And that's how it is with drugs. You get, not a pause, but

you get to not think about everything that's storming up in your head, you can take a break. Not take a break, but leave it on the back burner, and come back to it if you need to. And be able to numb it out, but on top of that you're able to feel better because of that.

Because people can say yes, it's a good thing to be able to let go of your trauma to the point where it doesn't bug you, but like, hey, actually, that feels good.

And trauma can sometimes be its own type of drug for some people too. It's a weird thing. Trauma is such a complicated thing that a lot of people don't understand, still. And noticing that intergenerational trauma is such a real thing for a lot of us too, and a lot of people don't realize that. My grandparents went to residential school, and that still affects me. I grew up learning about it, and it's engrained in me. I have a friend that grew up when Afghanistan first went into war, and his kids will be learning the trauma of that. It's a real thing that a lot of people don't acknowledge still. It passes on for generations. It's like how crows remember faces for generations. Kinda frightening. I think they stop at the sixth generation, but I'm like, that's still frightening, because if they can remember you that long, it's quite a long time to remember someone's face. Because crows can live for quite a long time.

Interview Three

So then, what's the love story with heroin?

Heroin, from the first time I did it, it was like a warm hug, a warm blanket put around you on a cold day. It was the best thing I'd ever felt. And I loved doing it. I did it intravenously for 15 years, up until this fentanyl epidemic. I can't quite put it into words how much... it was like a part of me, fucking best thing since white sliced bread.

It came into your life at a time...

It came into my life at a time when cocaine wasn't doing it for me anymore. I was drinking, I got into booze and marijuana, then cocaine. One day a coworker introduced me to heroin, and from then on out, it was like a love story.

There was this love affair for 15 years, and then fentanyl hit the streets. I couldn't deal with it, it was so unpredictable, there was no quality control. Therefore you have no idea what you're getting, whether it's benzos or fuckin' blah blah blah.

Like any other love story, things have ups and downs, but generally, it was sustainable, and you could live your life, before fent kicked in?

Before the fentanyl kicked in. Then when the fentanyl kicked in, I became homeless. I had lost my job at that point.

So were you wired on fentanyl at the beginning of the pandemic?

Oh yeah. Because there was nothing else available on the street and I didn't have a way to get clean dope. So, homeless. Lost my job. Wired. Doing crime to support my habit. I mean, the most socially responsible crime I could, I was boosting from corporations, like big box stores (laughs).

I can't blame you.

I don't like to steal from people that work hard for their money. That's not okay in my book. The fentanyl wiped out any semblance of social normality. Yeah, it really fucked me up.

Just because the rhythm of the drug itself makes other shit unsustainable?

Yeah, totally. With fentanyl, you have to do a shot every four hours. Whereas with heroin, I could do a shot in the morning, and be okay until tomorrow morning, and still feel it tomorrow morning. Whereas with fentanyl, you have to do a shot every four hours, or else you're sick. It's unsustainable.

And beyond that fact that it makes holding down a job and staying housed really fucking difficult.

You bet. How can I hold down a job when I have to shoot up every four hours? You know? And have to supply an at least, minimum, 25 dollar shot every time I'd shoot up.

That's a fucking expensive habit.

Yeah, its not possible.

And what about the pleasure component?

It wasn't pleasurable at all, fentanyl. Not pleasurable at all. With heroin, like I said, I could do a shot this morning and still feel it tomorrow morning

Like you still felt the hug.

Yeah exactly, the warm blanket. But with fentanyl, I would get high, literally, for two minutes, and then I just felt normal. It was such a waste of money, and time, and effort, and everything else.

So it's like one blast, and you're back to feel normal, and you're just waiting for dopesickness to kick in.

Yeah exactly. And struggling to make more money so I can do another shot. Nightmare. Fucking nightmare.

In the last year, now I'm working at a unionized job, I make good money, I've got a place to live. Things are doing really good for me. But it's all because I somehow managed, I don't know how... well probably through drinking (laughs). That's the only way I managed to maintain this relatively normal lifestyle, is by cutting out the fentanyl. It fucking ruined me, now I'm climbing my way back out.

It seems like you're in pretty fucking good shape!

I'm trying.

Did the booze help with cutting through dopesickness?

Well, it mostly... I mostly attribute that to the metadol D. That really helped me out. Recently I've cut down from 17 mL's to 10 mL's. And I'm gonna try to keep it there.

It's inevitable that I'm gonna have to come off this shit eventually. If I'm gonna live any semblance of a normal life, I'm gonna have to come off of it. I attribute mostly, coming off the fent and the opiates,, to the metadol D.

What do you have to say to people who come to the neighborhood and are wired on fentanyl, who have never tried heroin? Do those conversations happen? What do you have to say? How do you talk to them about DULF, and that safe supply?

To be quite honest I haven't really had too many of those conversations. Most people I know know the difference between heroin and fentanyl. I haven't had too many conversations with younger people, it's mostly people my age that know the difference. That've experienced the change. A good friend of mine told me, 'I didn't get into heroin for this. For this bullshit, which is fentanyl. I got into it because I loved heroin.'

And I could so relate to that. Fentanyl has changed the game. It's fucked everything up down here. Violence has gone up, crime has gone up, everything has changed, in my opinion, as a result of fentanyl.

And on top of all that, because of the benzo-y dope, people are getting robbed all the time.

People are getting dug all the time. I work at an OPS (overdose prevention site), and people are saying that the moment they pass out, they get dug. Stealing their shoes. It's turned street life into a nightmare. When I was homeless, it was just the start of this epidemic, and luckily I pulled myself out, with help. But fuck, it's just ruthless how people, through desperation, have to act on these urges in order to maintain their fuckin habit.

It's crushing to see that. I see people on a daily basis that have been dug, and complained to me, last night I was robbed, and the next time I see them, last night I got robbed, and the next time... it's just rough, so rough.

It's super fucking rough, I feel like it wears people really thin. So it didn't used to be like that?

No, it didn't. I've slept in doorways and the whole shebang. Never once did I get dug. Heroin didn't... there wasn't a need for that sort of behaviour with heroin. It still happened, but not on the scale that it happens now. Nowhere even close.

It's interesting, the way a substance shift leads to a culture shift.

Totally. 100 percent.

The benzo's don't help...

The minute they black out... I've gotten high with people, and we'd do a smash together, and it turned out to be super benzo-y dope. They would black out, and I'd be relatively okay, for whatever reason. But they'd black out, and I would come across them the next day, and buddy would say, 'Hey, so why did you leave me? What the fuck happened yesterday?' And I'd be like, 'What are you talking about? We hung out for however many hours and then you were so fucked up I had to go.' They just had no recollection of anything. The benzo dope leads to black outs.

Some people use because they appreciate the feeling, that's the story I get from people who have a relationship with heroin, who get it. But a lot of people who are really wired on benzo-y dope, they're often people who don't want to be around that much, they

want to get as fucked up as possible.

Yeah they don't want to feel, so they seek out the benzo dope. It's a common story. Yeah absolutely. I was into heroin because it allowed me not to feel. I've got severe PTSD and blahblahblah, and heroin allowed me not to feel. But benzos reallllly make you not want to feel. In all caps.

Heroin allows you some space from bad shit, but also to feel good. Benzos... they give you the space from the bad shit but you're not feeling anything...

You're just totally blacked out with your arms out.

We talked about safe supply options, and it seems like theres nothing that really does the trick.

I went from methadone, to suboxone, back to methadone, back to suboxone, and then onto liquid hydromorphone, which is injectable, and throughout it all, none of it allowed me to get high. All it did was eliminate being dopesick. I mean, that's the wrong reason for safe supply.

People want to get high. They get high for a reason. Because they wanna fuckin feel something. Or experience something. And all the safe supply is doing is allowing people not to be dopesick, and that's simply it. For me, being on liquid hydromorphone, at first I thought, this is the ticket, this is going to be great. I thought it was going to be the same thing as diacetyl morphine, which is heroin, but no such luck. It was just... not experiencing dopesickness. It was the same thing as methadone, except I was just putting holes in my arm. And getting crazy anxiety as well.

To me that's not safe supply. Safe supply is giving people what they want, which nowadays is fentanyl. People don't know, they haven't experienced heroin, I don't think, a lot of the young folks. Ultimately what I feel like safe supply needs to be is giving the people what they need, and what they want, and allowing them to get high. Not just a sense of, oh yeah im not dopesick, so uh, go to the library and read a book? No, fuck, people want to get high, that's why they're doing it, so allow them to get high.

And live their lives.

Yeah, totally, that's the ticket.

And its not like they're mutually exclusive, like getting high means you can't do other shit.

Of course not. The only way I can go to work and do my job is because I can get fucked up and then go to work. And now I'm unionized, so I can't get fired, I mean I'd have to really fuck up. But I mean, I go to work fucked up all the time, and it allows me to do my job better, because I'm more adept at working with my peers, people who are also coming into the site and doing their dope. It allows me to connect on a level other people can't connect on. And it makes the whole thing easier.

To say to someone that doing drugs is bad for your job, or is going to make you do your job in a bad way, that's so fucked up. If somebody wants to get fucked up and do their job, let them get fucked up and do their job, they'll probably be ten times better at it. Do sales up to here, and blah blah. At least that's what it does for me, what it's always done for me. If I couldn't

get fucked up and go to work, I couldn't go to work.

There are lots of different kinds of work, but people have one idea of what it might mean to get fucked up and go to work, like getting wasted and driving a truck.

Yeah, I don't do a bunch of molly and go fly an airplane. No fuckin way. It's very black and white. I'm way more functional doing a little bit of whatever and then going to work than I am not. If I was stone cold sober and I went to work, I would be a nightmare, nobody would want to work with me. It would be a fuckin shit show.

I like the idea that safe supply should be whatever the fuck people need it to be. Do you think its feasible... even if the people were to be able to get fentanyl all the time, it's still a harder drug to work with, to hold down something like a job, right?

Well, let's say they were able to get a fentanyl patch, and that was able to hold them over for 12 hours. And then they had to get another patch, and that would hold them for the next 12 hours. They would be perfectly functionable. They would be able to do the job, probably better than the person who was stone cold sober.

And maybe their kick, they would keep the patch on while theyre at work, during the day, but then also inject.

Or maybe they get enough fentanyl to do a smash every four hours, and then work a 12 hour shift, who knows? I don't know what it looks like for everybody else, I just know that now, for me, I'm incredibly lucky, and my job allows me to get fucked up the way I need to be fucked up to do my job, and im better at my job, it's better for everybody.

Safe supply has nothing to do with that, unfortunately. I wish it did, because then I could say, thumbs up for safe supply. But it's not doing it. The options are not available.

That's part of the story behind the kind of activism that you do.

Absolutely. Ultimately what I want is, people can go into one of these weed stores, a dispensary type model, you get whatever you want, whatever it is you need to function. You buy that, you walk out, you fucking do it, A-OK. Ultimately that's what I want. People's legal rights to do whatever they want, whenever they want, however they want. It would cut down on crime, you would see less overdoses because you have quality control. It would make a world of difference. Maybe I'm not quite explaining myself as well as I should... but that sort of model would change the whole picture.

I've seen so many friends die from cross-contaminated methamphetamine. I've seen three good friends die... they went to do a shot of meth, and the baggie that was used to hold their meth had a little bit of fentanyl in it, and they had no tolerance whatsoever, and they did the smash, and that was the end of the story. At least three very good friends, that's happened to. End of story.

I've heard of people grabbing a straight shooter off the ground in order to smoke rock, and the person who used it before them had done a dragon, and they go down.

It doesn't surprise me in the least. I've watched somebody go down doing a wash of a wash of mine. I washed it out once, and I washed it out a second time, and gave

them the cooker to use, and they went down and I had to Narcan them. It's so fuckin potent it's ridiculous. It's really fuckin scary.

Contrast that with heroin... to back in the day, very different situation in terms of people going down.

Totally different situation. Luckily I've never gone down from doing fentanyl, because I've been super, super careful. But the only time I ever went down is when I mixed heroin and alcohol. When you mix those two downers it's a bad combo. Luckily I managed to survive due to whatever circumstances. But the rate at which people go down on fentanyl... people do a tiny dragon sometimes and go down. They think they're getting fentanyl but they actually get carfentanyl, or some crazy analog. Fuck, it's so nuts. It kills people left, right and centre. I feel like with heroin, people were more responsible, there were far less overdoses with heroin. It was more a case of, we need to get people harm reduction supplies so they don't get hep C and HIV. That's what was killing the population as opposed to overdoses. But that was back in the day. I feel like fentanyl has totally flipped everything on its head.

As far as busting some stereotypes... let's say you do get good heroin through DULF or through neighborhood sources. People have all these ideas like, you do it once and you're wired.

No, no, no. When I get very good quality heroin, I'm lucky that I don't shoot up anymore. I'll just take a dragon, or take a little fuckin snort, and I can put it down for a couple days, and just be fine with that. It's just a nice little benefit, you know what I mean? It's not sustainable, the way it's coming in, and what not, but it's so

much better than whats going on in the street. I have the money, but I don't want to go out there and buy dope. I have no desire to go out there and buy dope, none at all. It's fucked up.

The kind of safe supply that people get on, it doesn't feel good, they don't get high. People who used to be happy on heroin, and who get on whatever kind of synthetic morphines...

Hydrocodone, hydromorphone, whatever...

This is boring, and I'm gonna start smoking rock, because it feels good.

Exactly, and they start doing crystal meth, or some sort of upper, to cut through the boredom of whatever. And then they have a different habit, and they're wired to something else, plus something else. Then they're wired to two things.

I've always loved to be high on both opiates and uppers. I used to do lots of cocaine, and lots of heroin, and then I moved to lots of heroin and lots of crystal meth. But it was just that the safe supply that they offered me, liquid hydromorphone, guaranteed I would seek something out. Because that's just baseline, it keeps you normal. Without any high.

It just stops you from getting sick.

Yeah exactly, and so I would seek something out to fuckin feel something, you know what I mean? Absolutely. It would be 100%, and I know so many people like that. I was one of the success stories of the people that were on the program, at that time. I got on it right when it came out. I was considered one of the success stories

because I managed to hold down two jobs, and get my shots on a daily basis, but still, I was doing other things, because it wasn't enough. It was just flatlining me. Just meeeeeeee (the sound of a machine droning), boring.

What about the connection between... what about the thrill of the illegality of it? Are you just over it at this point?

I don't think the illegality has anything to do with it personally. Nor do I think the ritual of shooting up has much to do with it either. I think that once people have the ability to get what they want, they will fulfil that need, and go about fulfilling other things in their life. Other goals, other wants and needs. Personally. This is just my own personal opinion, because that's just how it worked out for me. Maybe it does for some people, I don't know. I think if you allowed people to get what they needed, those would become secondary, and they would probably drop by the wayside.

But people need to get their dope tested. Get your dope tested, and be honest about what you're selling to people. I wish there was some way to quality control what was going out on the street, because that would change the whole fucking thing. That's been obvious to me since day one. I wish people could get a little package, and on the side of it see, percentage of blah blah blah, percentage of blah blah blah, and so on and so forth. But that's not available, and fuck, I really wish... that would have saved me so much hassle, and so much heartbreak, and so much being ripped off. I've spent my last ten bucks on fucking bunk I don't know how many times. But if I was getting it from some place that allowed me to get quality controlled shit, I would spend my last ten bucks on something that would help

me feel okay, and helped me be a fucking participating member in society.

Were not looking at doctors that wanna fuckin prescribe you, oh you go up one mL this week, and one mL the week after and another mL... but the whole time you're just gonna feel normal, and not get high, fuck that! What's the point of that, nobody wants to do that.

That's what I'm all about, is helping people. I want to help the people that are struggling and that are fuckin dying. If we could somehow organize a model that would do this, I don't know what it would look like, or what the necessities would be, but that would be the ticket. Somehow making this model functionable in a grassroots sort of way.

Interview Four

What's your favourite drug and what do you love about it?

Fentanyl. There's a lot of opiates that I can't feel anymore, just because I have such a high tolerance. I'm on a really high dose of methadone. Fentanyl would probably be my drug of choice, because it's the only one I can actually even get high on. Then cocaine. I don't do side, but I like coke every once in a while, I like to mix it with my down sometimes.

I like GHB (laughs). But I haven't been able to get it since buddy ran out. When I was living at the shelter there, I was having it a lot of the time. Fuck, it didn't help with my taper neither, because it's acting on the same receptor as the benzos and alcohol. Same as GHB. They can all kill you in their withdrawal.

When you ran out of GHB, did you have GHB withdrawal?

Well here's the thing. I was still shooting benzo dope, but I was at a much higher dose of Valium than I'm at right now, so it was much easier to quit it. It's the benzos that are harder to quit. Right now I'm on 8mg of diazepam, which is a really low dose, cause I started at 40.

How long ago?

This is when I caught Covid and I got put in [hotel name], and they asked me what street drugs I was doing. I was doing benzos off the street and they started me, straight up, at 40mg of Valium a day. I was like, 'woah'. Fuck, I

could take half of that and be flat out... at that point. I wasn't doing benzo dope every day like I'm doing now. 40mg and I'd be sleeping all day. And then they gave me 14 Dilly 8's a day, and a six pack of beer and an 8th of weed. I was like, 'holy shit, okay'. And I'd brought a quarter ounce of down, so I'm like, 'I've got every drug here that shouldn't be mixed together.

And they didn't worry about it?

No! They were so scared of Covid at that point, they just didn't want people to leave, so they were willing to give people whatever they want. I didn't have any symptoms, so I just binge watched Netflix and fuckin' got high for a week in a nice hotel.

At this point fentanyl is your favourite because it's the only opiate that gets you high?

Yeah, and because it has the least side effects. I don't get those pins and needles, which I hate. I used to like them, when I could get a rush from the pills. I was on the hydromorphone program when I was living in Calgary, but I was never on a high enough dose where I'd gotten pins and needles. They get you up to 120mL's of liquid hydromorph in this program, and I didn't even know you could get pins and needles from hydromorph. It takes you a lot higher of a dose to get to that point. But that's all I was getting, was the flush effect, and I didn't like it. Cause it would just make me want to go use more. I wasn't getting any type of effect that I wanted that would make me want to not use.

So it didn't feel good, but you didn't get sick?

Yeah, so I got off that, cause I felt it was going to raise my

tolerance even more. I was already on 240mg of methadone. But I seem to have found a source that's clean... well not clean, you know, street drugs. But I tested it, and all it has for a buff is caffeine. And it's fentanyl and etizolam, the benzo. They found trace amounts of carfentanyl, but then in a different piece of it, it wasn't detectable, so I think there might be just a trace amount of carfentanyl in it. Which might be why I can actually get high off it. Because before I was shooting quarter grams at a time just to get high, but I can do a point of this and I'm good.

If I want to go to bed, I can do a quarter gram and I can barely get my head to the pillow before I'm out. Because I have such a high tolerance to opiates I don't worry about overdosing too much. And I'm on benzos too. So I think the reason why I've never overdosed...

You've never overdosed?

Yeah. It's cause of my high tolerance from Methadone. That's why they try to get you on methadone, they give you a tolerance, so you're less likely to OD. The iOAT (injectable opioid agonist treatment) is just supposed to be a breakthrough drug to get through the day.

Fentanyl actually has some of the least side effects of any opiate.

And you get high?

And you get high. That's why the hospitals use it in surgeries, it has very little side effects, and it wears off quickly. It's powerful, comes on quickly, wears off quickly. They can get people out of a drug induced surgery pretty easily, without too much withdrawal, with-

out having people in the hospital on a morphine drip for like a month or something. Like within a few days after the surgery they usually switch to something like a hydromorph but during the surgery they usually use fentanyl as the painkiller.

I think maybe we've talked about this before, but you never got the chance to do good, real, natural heroin before you were on synthetic opiates?

Actually, I did. I had been living in Vancouver for a few months, and this is before the fentanyl thing. I had been able to try heroin before I had any tolerance. At that point I would have rather chosen to do heroin. It was a lot better of a high, lasted a lot longer.

And you wouldn't get the pins and needles?

You could get the pins and needles from the heroin too, but from a lot higher doses. But back then, it was so strong you wouldn't need to get to that high. Nowadays, you'd be lucky to find heroin at all, and if you do it's got fentanyl in it.

The people that I've talked to on [name of program] usually say that if they hit a vein, pins and needles, intense, so a lot of people muscle it.

When I got the free legal drugs, I got the pins and needles from it. But that usually means that the morphine content... Heroin is the only one that turns into 6-MAM. It turns into 6-MAM and morphine. The morphine could be what causes the pins and needles. The 6-MAM is what makes it unique. The high, the euphoria. It's the reason why it used to be the opiate drug of choice. That what was giving people the transcendent euphoria.

And you had that when you first tried it.

Yeah. But now, I can get that from fentanyl, but that's about it.

So it's the kind of situation where if you could, you would...

But now there putting benzos in it too, so I cut my dose down even longer. At this rate, there's benzos in everything. There gonna have to come up with a program similar to OAT, but with benzos. Cause so much of the street drugs are tainted with benzos that people get hooked on them, then have seizures and die from withdrawal.

Opiate withdrawal can't really kill you, but it sucks like hell. Unless you're at such a high dose that the side effects of withdrawal would give you a heart attack or something. The older you are, the more susceptible you are to those side effects. But someone as young as me will mostly be sick (giggles).

So how does coke enter the equation? Has it always been a thing that you liked?

I've always liked it. It was the first hard drug I was addicted to, way before methadone. I'd smoked crack way before I'd even done powder cocaine. That was a big thing for me in Calgary. That's why my credits fucked, and I can't get a bank account anywhere. Cause of crack. For three years, all I did was burn every bridge I fucking had, and fucking... this is when you were allowed to put checks into bank accounts. Defrauded every one of my bank accounts. Got all the overdrafts I could, credit cards and shit. So my credits all fucked like that. I sold a lot of fake drugs in Calgary and shit. And eventual-

ly I left Calgary and went to BC, and then I tried opiates, and I knew that that was my drug of choice, after that. My usage of rock went down a lot. Sometimes I'd mix some coke into my down, but mostly, I turned to straight opiates.

Then when I left Vancouver, this was in the heroin period, I came back to Calgary, where I was from, and cold turkey'd it for a week, got off the heroin. Then pretty soon I ended up running into those fake oxy pills, or fentanyl, and I started doing those. And then I did that for a good nine months and got myself into a detox at my grandma's for ten days, then into a recovery place. I was there for 45 days before I got kicked out for smoking weed.

Fuckin' eh!

There was a guy who got kicked out the day before for doing fentanyl, but they let him back in cause he came and apologized the next day. And then I tried to do the same thing, came and apologized for smoking weed, but they didn't let me back in. But they let guy who does fentanyl back in. So they sent me back on the street, and I didn't do opiates for 9 months, when I was living on the street. But that's when I started doing side. And then every since I quit side, which is in the end of 2015, I haven't really been into it anymore. It makes me sick every time I do it. The only stimulants that I really do, if I ever do them, is cocaine.

You're not into the amphetamines.

Back in August there was somebody selling coke that had no cocaine in it, it was just etazolam, like pure ben-

zo. But coke has a distinct smell, if you can't smell it, then it's probably not worth buying.

There's people I talked to who really started loving crack because the opiates that they were on for their safe supply was so boring, they weren't getting high off anything, even the injectables, that they were like, 'I'm bored, I'm gonna start smoking crack'. Because they get high.

I found a good source for down, I prefer something strong enough for me. But sometimes I like to put a little bit of powdered cocaine into it, give it a little extra. Because the cocaine usually hits you right away and then the down hits you afterwards. I can't do coke without having some down to do afterwards, otherwise I get panicky, anxiety. I have to have something to bring me down. My brains always on hyperdrive, that's why I think I use opiates so much, is to slow it down and so I can sleep. Without it I couldn't sleep, I don't think.

What was it like as a kid?

Before I ever? Everything was normal. If I would have just stayed off of opiates after I got kicked out of rehab, and never... I wouldn't be in this situation. But it was when I quit meth and started... the girlfriend I had took care of me for ten days, but she was going out and getting me morphine pills for the whole 10 days I was stopping doing meth. So I slept for 10 days and did morphine pills, but the time I'd cleared out the meth, I was hooked back to opiates again. And that's been since 2015. In total use, I have probably close to 8 years of total opiate experience.

Before I went to rehab in Calgary I was snorting the pills,

I wasn't shooting them. When I was doing real heroin here, was the first time I had shot up a drug, which was real heroin. But by the time I moved back to BC I had been shooting opiate pills for quite a while in Calgary.

When you tried heroin for the first time, were you on any other opiates? You weren't on Methadone or anything?

No.

So you got a full taste of it, there was nothing else going on.

That's when I was like, 'fuck all this, fuck cocaine', because I had been smoking a lot of crack too. It's like, everybody has their, in recovery, they call it your burning bush drug. They try it and they're like, 'this is the thing I've always needed'. Something missing in their life. I found I liked being calmer, not fiendishly ripping off my friends. It was easier to maintain. The only thing I didn't like was the withdrawal part. I didn't get that with the crack, it was more psychological.

The first time i had physical withdrawal, that's when I realized I was fucked. Going cold turkey off fentanyl the number of times that I have...

How do you feel about living in the Downtown Eastside?

It definitely keeps my drug use using. But there's a lot more services in this area, and they're close to home. My pharmacy's only a couple blocks away, my OAT is only a couple blocks away, and my dealer lives in the same building I do. So, it's a lot easier. But if I ever wanted to stop, I don't think I could live where I live. Cause it's a very drug friendly place to live [names building] (laughs).

There's raids all the time on that place.

One last question... what would be your dream situation?

Being on a program, where I got to choose my drug of choice. Obviously with a pharmaceutical level of cleanliness, but still my drug of choice. Being at a dose where I feel comfortable. When I was on the hydromorpha, I wasn't getting any of the effects that would make me not want to use. All I was doing was getting side effects. My dream thing would be to be on an iOAT program that was like a fentanyl iOAT program, because that's the drug that I'm addicted to. So why not give the person the drug that they're addicted to? Cause that's gonna help more than something that's 100 times weaker. And if I was actually getting the effects I wanted, I wouldn't have to go out and pan every day to get somewhere. If I was distributed a dose that was a good dose, that was given to me bi-daily, once in the morning and once before bed, I'd be good. Cause lately that's what I've been doing, using once to get up in the morning, and then using once before bed. That's with fentanyl and benzos, for instance. I doubt there will be a safe supply place selling fentanyl with benzos in it (laughs).

Interview Five

Favourite drug?

I won't say weed (laughs)... crystal meth. As an artist, it inspires me to create a lot. On crystal i like to paint, draw, or do music. So i like it the most. It's really inspiring and it keeps me up for a long time so I can put a lot of hours in.

Used to think each time I had a show that staying up three days would be wise but it wasn't... I'd be on stage making funny faces, you could see my eyes were so big.

How'd you fall in love with it? What was that process like?

First time I tried it I didn't like it too much. I've got a sleeping disorder where I sleep too much. First time I tried it I stayed up three days and I was like, 'Oh my god'. Even on cocaine I would go to sleep after a day. With this sleeping disorder I can go to sleep on basically anything, by crystal meth, especially back then, was really strong. Shit man, it's not really healthy, staying up that long.

I stayed up 21 days once. I worked construction every day. It was funny, every day I'd have to make a new hole in my toolbelt. And I got right to the end of the thing!

Because you were shedding all this weight?

(Laughs) Yeah. From not sleeping, and working so much.

I can't really tell that I'm high so much now, but it keeps me functioning.

Do you still get high from it?

I still get a bit high, but it's not as strong as it used to be. That's why I mix it with cocaine now. It's funny, I'm hooked to opiates too.

Goofballs (an injected blend of meth and opiates)?

Yeah. I can't smoke it. My lungs are really fucked up from black mould from the reserve where I was living. Fucked my lungs up big time. I used to smoke a lot of crystal too, and keep it in. I think it crystalized in my lungs or something. That's why, if I smoke crystal meth I can't breathe for like a month, I get panic attacks. It's pretty scary. So I inject it now.

I used to be scared of needles, it's funny. My dad too, he won't go see the doctor in case they give him a needle, but he's diabetic. I think it's more the fear of somebody else giving me a needle. I used to do it with this girl, and I wouldn't even look, I'd turn around. But she was always on the nod, and I'd be waiting like an hour with my rig. And she was nodding off, so I didn't trust her so much to do it. So I was like, 'Okay, just tell me how to do it'. She was like, 'Make sure to flag, and then you know you're in your vein'. So I did it, and I had no problems at all, it took me two seconds. I was like, 'Fuck, I'm good at this, I'll do it myself now'. If it's with somebody else, I can't trust them because they can't feel what I feel. So my fear of needles is gone.

So you like to do it yourself, that makes sense, you can stop part way, if it isn't right...

Yeah totally. I always stop to make sure, cause I don't wanna die from overdosing. So I push half in, because I OD'd twice actually, lately. Made a stupid mistake, I used my wife's fentanyl. I thought it was my shot, I had a shot made for work; cocaine, jib, and dillies. Cause I'm hooked to dillies now, since I went to the hospital.

For the leg thing?

Yeah and now I'm super hooked to dillies. My doctor tried to wean me off it, but it kinda balances up my cocaine and my jib. My heart was gonna explode, just doing cocaine and jib is really bad for your heart. I'm scared to get a heart attack, it's my biggest fear. It balances out perfect.

So I thought it was the rest of my other shot, I was half asleep. I had like four different drugs in the rig. I went to work and at 3 o'clock I did the shot, and as soon as I took off the tie I fell right on my face. It was weird, they Narcan'd me and I didn't remember anything. And as I was waking up, I had this weird vision where I was floatin' upwards. These ghosts were pulling my legs, pulling me down. It was so weird, and when I woke up, I was going backwards, crawling backwards on my back, I was like, 'Help me'. It was so weird. I couldn't stop crying, cause I didn't understand what had happened.

When did that happen?

A month before I got married... that could have really sucked. And two days after my wedding, I fucking OD'd again, not severely, but I did benzos. I'm sure it was my shot, because my wife doesn't do cocaine, and I tasted it, and it tasted like cocaine. I thought it was mine. So now

I don't do any shots that are laying around anymore. I put it in a place in my bag where nobody else would put it. I don't wanna guess and end up dying from OD'ing. I certainly don't want that.

She makes me really nervous, I don't wanna see my wife OD. She OD'd last week off of benzos, it freaked me out. Four hours. It makes me really worried, because my two past girlfriends died from fentanyl. They both didn't do fentanyl. One it was her birthday, she was only 26. She was really drunk, and when she's drunk she's careless. I guess her friends gave her some fentanyl, she injected two papers and she didn't do opiates. So my lead guitarist found her on the sidewalk. Purple. They Narcan'd her seven times and she didn't wake up. And the ambulance left really slow, so he thought she was dead. They came and told me the next morning, that she passed away. I was like, it was her birthday on top of it. But she didn't pass away... it took a month before she passed away. The ambulance drove slow because they gave her the shock pads. That's why it left slow. I kept calling the hospital but they wouldn't tell me anything. I broke down, I was crying on the sidewalk, laying on the sidewalk for hours and hours. She kinda ditched me that night. I was waiting in front of the building because after midnight you can go in. So I'm waiting for her, and she left through the back door to go party, I don't know why but...

The one before her passed away too, she smoked some crack and it had fentanyl in it. And died. I was with her at the time, the second one. I couldn't handle it, when she came back she was a totally different person, she gave me such a hard time, she was really nas-

ty, mean to me. So I broke off with her, and then I met [wife's name]. She was calling me cause she had a stroke a week after she had the OD, half of her body was paralyzed. Then the next week she died of a blood clot to her brain. Passed away. Still hurt me, even if I wasn't with her anymore. It was really hard. I've lost so many friends. It's insane how many people. I've lost so many people in the past two years. Not in my whole life put together.

So that's what motivated you to get into this kind of work?

Yeah, I've been working here for five years at [harm reduction site]. And I started working with the [drug user group], making art.

So, if we talk a bit more about your art... Your drug of choice for making art is crystal?

It puts me in a zone where I want to do something. Focused, creative too. I did some really cool drawing on crystal. I never plan what I'm gonna draw. I just start drawing something and... if im painting, I put some colors, pull it together, look at it, let it dry and I see things in it. And I bring it out like that. That process, I don't know what I'm gonna do, and it's always a surprise to yourself. Makes it super original, cause you're not planning anything, not copying anything you see, painting with the spirits, we call it.

And the spirits come out especially on crystal?

Yeah. Used it do it in front of [injection site] cause people would come out of [injection site] and be like, Woah! Cause they're all high and shit. Woah that's a trippy painting man! I tried everywhere in town, right on Robson, like

on top of the hill. People wouldn't even look at me, let alone look at my art. Just walk by me all snobby. I find Granville and Commercial Drive were pretty good for it too. In front of [injection site] was my best place. They liked me doing it there. A lot of people do crime to get their drugs, but art is also... so they said, anytime you want to sell your art here you're more than welcome. And I lived right across from [injection site].

I say that I was going to ask about things that get in the way of pleasure in the Downtown Eastside.

People robbing each other. There are people that are so mad cause they get robbed all the time. That used to be one of our problems at [injection site]. Tables were too close to each other. Let people use like two, three by the table. And we had staff that would rob people. I'd tell them, we should get rid of these people, it's making me look bad, making you look bad. The energy in here was so dark. Just the frustration, you know? You're homeless, and then you lose everything. I think that's why there's benzos in the dope. Once you're knocked out on benzos, you can't remember anything. So people rob each other on that.

Do you think the supply has changed the robbing situation?

Yeah totally. So we moved the tables are further apart and got rid of the staff who were robbing people. It's so not right. I built a box, so that when people would nod off, I'd come with my box and it would fit right on the table. And at the same time you can't see what's on the table. The first time I put the box on the table the girl was like, 'Thank you so much, I had 14 grams of heroin on the table, if somebody would have stolen that I'd be

dead, my boss would kill me'. The staff said it was too much trouble though. Now I just grab their dope, and I lock it up in the locker, and give it back to them when they're up. I've told people that they forgot their dope on the table so many times that they know they trust me. People always tell me, 'If I pass out, you grab my dope, and put it in the locker'.

When we started the interview, before you answered crystal, you said weed. What's the story with weed?

I love weed, I've always loved weed. I always sold weed to make extra money. Moved out of my home when I was 15, when I was a kid. In [town name], Ontario.

On a reserve there?

No, in a small town. It was really hard, at fifteen years old, to survive. No free food or anything like that. As for welfare, they don't give you that much. So i started selling weed. It became easy because I had money. I didn't care if I got busted with weed. That's all that's on my police file, weed, weed, and weed. My last charge was 3 kilos of weed.

Has there ever been a safe supply that's worked for you, for crystal? Or has that never been on the table?

They tried to give me these pills, and was just not cutting it.

Dex (dexadrine) or something?

Yeah, but it just didn't do anything for me. You can inject them but you can't feel them. But I do dillies, I'd rather do dillies than fentanyl, that's for sure. I can't

stand fentanyl. I can't enjoy it, I'm too scared to die. It hits you so fast and hard, I can't control it, I get super sweaty. It's just not for me at all. I just stand up and fight it the whole time. Not nodding off, it's just too scary. I don't want to die doing drugs. It would hurt my parents too much.

For the dillies, do you actually enjoy it or does it just round off the side and the up?

I kinda enjoy it now. I nod off a lot, but I do get nice dreams off it. I have trouble staying up because of my sleeping disorder. It's hard to keep my eyes open the whole time.

So you still have the sleeping disorder?

Yeah. But I don't sleep as much as I used to. I do dillies to make me sleepy. But I do enjoy it though, it does work for me. For a lot of people it doesn't work. People who do fentanyl won't feel it. I only do maybe 3 to 4 a day. I do half an 8 each time I do one. I don't want to go up and up and up, I feel it as much as I used to.

Oh yeah, so you're not building a strong tolerance?

No. I just stay at the same, it's weird, I don't know why people keep going up on their doses all the time. Safe supply, I'm happy we have that program so we can give that to people. I push for that, I go to a lot of meetings to make things better. I really like to find solutions for problems, that's something I like to do. People complain that the needles are barbed. The guy doing it at the time was like, you guys are just too hard on it. What the fuck kinda answer is that, man? Tell you a problem and you fucking come up with an answer like that? Somebody a

bit higher than him, his bosses, came and talked to me, and said, 'Are they really barbed?' And I said, 'Yeah'. So we checked a whole box, and there were like 62 out of 100 that were barbed. The end of the needle is like two little needles like this, if one is bent like this, you can imagine when you put it in how much it hurts. And when you pull it out, it could pull something too. They don't do needles, at the company, so they don't know. She went to the company directly, and figured it out with them. The machine vibrates so much that it goes out of line at a certain time, so they just have to readjust it, so the needles are better quality now. Another problem we had was with the dillies. We used to have the generic brand, they're not made to inject, they're made exactly not to inject. So the program wasn't working at the beginning. You guys need the real fucking dillies. You guys can't do a half-ass job, you gotta do something right. So I fought for a long time to get the real ones, and finally we got the real ones, and the programs became way better. On the generic ones, nobody wanted to do them. So how are you gonna get people to stop fentanyl if you can't even use the dillies, it's like impossible, you know?

I hear you, I feel like so much of the shit around here, people half ass stuff, and the bottom line is money for them. If they can save the money, that's what they're gonna do.

The government too, I had a meeting with them once, I go there and its like, how can we solve this fucking fentanyl crisis. We thought about it all together, and the only way is to give clean supply. And they roll their eyes, they're like, 'Yeah right, we're gonna ask our boss if we can give you guys free dope, eh?' Like, you asked

us, and we tell you, and it took years before we actually got the clean supply. Cause of fucking politics. I had a lawyer talk at that meeting and he just gave it to them, straight up, eh. One of them agreed with us, only one of them out of them all. Looking at us like, 'Asking us, for the taxpayers to buy you guys clean drugs. This is a lot of fucking money, there's no way.' Can't tell people what to do, doesn't work like that. But look at countries where they did do that, how it changed. People don't have to sell their body for drugs. Or do something that they're ashamed of, that makes them feel bad about themselves. Give them free drugs, they can go look for a job. They don't have to hustle for their dope. They're not sick. And people actually quit doing drugs. It's not fun anymore, you get them for free, you put all your life back together, and it's like, 'Fuck I don't need this shit anymore'. The rates, the crime, taxpayers save so much money from the courts, the Drug War doesn't fucking work. It's been proven over and over that it causes so much more problems. You got all these fucking gangs, and since the drugs are illegal they're making all this money over it. Violent gangs and shit like that, it's the wrong way to do it. Such a bad idea. My buddy went to war Iraq, they weren't looking for bombs, they were looking for heroin. He said it was bunkers with kilos of heroin, fucking floor to the ceiling. Full of bunkers like that. And they stole all their heroin. No wonder why they're fucking mad at us, you know? He was so disappointed, my buddy, he felt betrayed. He thought they were gonna stop massive bombs, they didn't give a fuck about bombs, they didn't look for bombs, not once did they say, 'We think there's a bomb there'. But, 'There's heroin there, there's heroin there'. That's how they buy their weapons in the States. Government's so fucking

corrupt in America. They sell it on the streets and they buy weapons with their fucking money. So harsh, eh? Really corrupt. Biggest criminals out there is the government. I always hated the government so much, with a passion. Why should we give them the money if they're not helping us. They're supposed to represent our country, not making money off of people and fucking them around. That's one of the biggest problems I'm trying to solve in my head, but its so hard to find a solution to that. They're so powerful, so how do you stop something like that? It's almost impossible. No, it's possible, but gotta work on a solution to that.

I think Switzerland was the first country to do that, to give out clean supply. That's where they get the heroin-at [iOAT clinic name] from Switzerland. But they got threatened by gansters or whatever, saying that they're 'cutting their grass' or whatever.

I heard the stuff at [iOAT clinic name] was synthetic, that people don't like it very much.

We had a meeting here with them. Like, 'You're shit is not fucking real heroin man, it's fucking synthetic'. Anything that's synthetic, your body doesn't fucking like it. We need pure drugs, like fucking real heroin, your body's gonna digest it better than synthetic. Synthetic's gonna leave something that your body doesn't like too much in your body, you know.

And people don't like it right, people say that if they mainline it, they get all pins and needles and flushed and feel like shit.

Totally, morphine, the first time I injected morphine it was like, oh my god, I felt the hairs on my spine go 'tsk

tsk tsk', my face turned red, my ears went red. I did like a grain, a morphine grain, and just started injecting and I was like, 'Holy fuck this is strong', I thought I was gonna die from it. Didn't like the pins and needles, either. It didn't feel too good.

- You tried heroin, real shit?
- Real heroin, I love real heroin, but it's so hard to get. If we get it sometimes, in our group, I just enjoy it when we get it. I nod off and I get such nice dreams and shit. It's not that strong so I mix it with my dillies and its just so perfect. Last time we got some it lasted me like two weeks. Maybe three points.

My drug habit, I've got control of my drugs now. Before I didn't use to have control. Now I buy half balls of cocaine, and they last me a whole week. That's pretty good. Before I would have done it all in the same night. That's why I'm happy where I am with my drug habit now, it doesn't have control over me, I have control over it. So I enjoy it more: Just do like maybe four or five shots a day, before I would do way more than that. I just use one spot, here (shows). Before I was using all over my body. Now ive come down, pretty much. To reduce your intake of drugs is way better. The solution is not really quitting, its doing less, to enjoy it instead of chasing it.

I guess a part of a question is, how do you support people to get them to a place where they can enjoy it, and have control over it, and use it how they like it, and not have it have control over them.

Reduce your intake. Maybe do half of your dose, half of

the time you use it. So it doesn't become such a habit. The more you do it the more it becomes a habit, just repeating it. That's what I did, I just reduced my dosage, my intake, and I enjoy it way better. I enjoy doing drugs now. I always enjoyed it, but not when I was abusing it, I wasn't enjoying it too much. I was out of it, I lost a lot of jobs because of it.

One of my jobs, each time we'd go buy material, the guy would like go to the bathroom, and I'd smoke like ten tokes of crack. Then he'd come back. Once I remember he came back and I had a mask on, and my fucking goggles, you could see through the goggles all steamed up. He's looking at me like, 'What the fuck are you doing?' I'm like, 'What do mean man?' My mouth was all crooked, I didn't want him to see my face. Like what the fuck, with the mask and the goggles, it didn't do fuck all with it on. The guy who hired me asked me if I did drugs and I said 'No'. When the other guy left for materials, that boss wasn't here and he was there, while I was smoking crack in the bathroom he was standing on the other side of the door. When I came out he was right there and said, 'Hmm your candy smells good eh?' I didn't say nothing and kept going, and I went back to work. The next day, he didn't come and pick me up. I lost my job. His brother smoked crack so he knew exactly what the smell was. Things like that. I stayed in Chilwack, and I said I'd do one toke, ended up smoking 900 bucks, I'd just fucking gotten my paycheck. I had to go home, and my girlfriend at the time, she didn't do drugs, so I would borrow money for the gas to get to work everyday, and I couldn't pay my bills and I just felt like a piece of shit. Wouldn't come home all week, id sleep in my car because I didn't have gas so I didn't park too far.

I just fucking hated myself, like almost killed myself because of it. I was gonna hang myself, but she kept calling me... my parents were coming in from Ontario, and I'm like fuck I can't do this, kill myself and my parents come to my funeral? I just admitted to my girlfriend what I was doing, and it made me feel better, and I stopped doing drugs for a while. It was mostly the cocaine, I didn't have any control, it's hard to have control over cocaine. Now I can. The only reason im doing it now is cause I get it pure, like 95% pure, there's no cut in it. Doing real coke is way different, it doesn't make you jonze for more. You can sleep, you can eat. Real cocaine is way different. For seven months I've had this plug where it's almost right off the boat.

Yeah, I tried that stuff, it's fucking nice.

It's so nice, that coke. Makes a big difference. I quit coke for five years. Then my buddy's like, I got real coke, and I was like, 'No way'. Thirty years I did coke and I got it once in my life. Usually every hand it goes through, they put some cut in it. This goes through two hands before getting to me, and they both don't put cut in it. That's good.

Should we call it? You've got stuff to do.

Sure!

Interview Six

First question, what is your drug of choice, and—

Meth.

Yeah... what do you love about it?

Well, I can't say I love everything about it. But it does work for me and what I love about it is it allows me to keep focused on more than one thing at a time. I'm usually scattered, but when I do meth, I'm more focused. I've been doing it for so long that it's just like second nature.

And how'd you figure out that it worked for you? Was focusing something that was always an issue, and you figured out, 'holy shit this really helps'?

For the longest time I was using it for pain. Emotional, and shit like that. After it seemed to stick around, I got to the point where I got to try to enjoy it. Like I don't enjoy everyday of it, but I do enjoy most days. Cause I don't have a lot of friends, and it's lonely sitting here with just the cat. But then on the other days its not lonely because I play with the cat, I lay on the floor and I play with him.

So how did you figure out that it helps you focus?

Just by colouring. Right now if I was trying to colour I'd be too shaky. Smoke a bowl, grab my colouring stuff right away, I'd be nice and straight, I wouldn't miss anything.

Well that's pretty interesting, because a lot of people, when they think about meth, they think it speeds you up, that it'd make you colour out of the lines or something. But it's the opposite for you.

It makes me more centered on the one thing, and so I can actually do more than one thing at once. Usually if I'm not high, I can do one thing and one thing only. I get cluttered, I get mad or frustrated.

How long has it been a part of your life?

Off and on for say 25 years. This time around its been going for almost ten years that I've been back on the fucking garbage meth.

Garbage meth? Cause its not as clean as you'd want it to be?

No its not. I wish it was 100% clean. The stuff that I have now, it comes back really nice and clear and crystally. I won't subject myself to buy the shitty stuff.

So it's a big issue for safe supply too? What does it get contaminated with?

Not too sure, cause I don't go and get my dope tested. I trust the person I'm getting it from. And safe supply, for me, I'd rather it be like at [event name] where everyone came down here to do their dope, they're around seasoned people who know what to do, say somebody fell. They know what to do for an OD. That's my whole thing too. Safety. I love the fact that people call on me and say, '[Interviewee's name], can I come over there to shoot some dope?' 'Sure, no problem, c'mon over.' Cause then I know they're safe. If I can't do it all alone I'm sure there's someone else who can help me with it.

I prefer the nice, clean, drugs. They're better. I'm to the point where I can smoke a big bowl and go to bed. Or go and eat a three course meal. It may take me a little while to eat that meal, but I'll eat the fucking thing (laughs)!

Some people talk about being awake for three days straight, right?

Really? I wish. If you see that person that's like flailing up Hastings, I'm like, 'How in the fuck do I get that high?' Cause I don't get that high anymore. I get just a little kick in the ass, and that's about it.

And you've always preferred to smoke it and not shoot it?

After shooting it for so long, now I don't ever want to shoot it again. It changes me around to somebody else.

Oh yeah? What's the difference with smoking it then?

I actually enjoy it. I like seeing the cloud. The taste, I feel like I forgot how good it tasted sometimes. You ever done acid? You know the day after, tongue stuck to the roof of your mouth? That taste. Or if you're drunk and you wake up hungover, and you can't get your tongue to the front of your mouth, to me that's good side.

And is there such thing as a meth safe supply in the neighborhood?

Not that I know of.

So they don't do it at any of the clinics?

I don't think so. I'll find out if I can get on Dexedrine. I think you can get it at our OPS.

But then it's not smoked right, it's pills?

Pills. You can shoot it but its really horrible. It makes you sicker than a dog.

That's interesting, because for the opiate safe supply they have injectables, so people can get it the way they want it. But for meth there's no actual good safe supply option for smoking?

Nope. It's gotta be safe use for everybody, not just heroin addicts, not just opiate addicts.

And get it how you want it, right? Like something smokable, safe, the way you want to do it.

If I could get something safe, say, start with an ounce, and then see how long it takes me to go through that. If it takes me a month to go through that. So if I smoke the whole thing in a month it should be a half ounce in two weeks. And to judge by that, so it should be, 'This is what it's going to cost him, and you know that he's gonna be our customer because of the purity, the quality, and the safeness of getting it'. I would like to be able to go into where they do the dope testing and see how they do it. Rather than standing at the door waiting. Cause that way I know, when I see it, that they've done everything, and that it's completely safe.

It's pretty interesting, I've taken drugs to 'Get Your Drugs Tested' and, I don't know what it was like before COVID, but you're just out in the middle of street at this little table. You're really out there. Cops driving by and stuff, and you're handing the guy drugs...

See that's the one thing. They've got to leave us alone.

The cops?

Yeah. They broke my wrist last summer. I was holding a cup in this hand, I was carrying a bunch of food, and the delivery person came by and asked if I wanted more food. So I said sure. I stepped out and grabbed the food, looked and see the cops there. They see me with my arms full, and I started to cross the street, and they come skirting around me, and told me to get six steps back. Okay. From here, to the end of the coffee table, that's not going to take me six footsteps. That's baby steps. So I started to take three steps and the cop came out and rushed me, said I was being aggressive. Rubbed my face in a tree, broke my wrist, and said, 'Bye, fuck you, go.'

How's your wrist now?

(Sighs) It hurts a little bit now.

Did you go to the hospital for it? What did they say when you told them it was a cop who broke your wrist?

They shook their heads, they couldn't believe it. They said that I'm not the only one that's been coming in lately with broken bones from cops.

So as far as getting good meth, how did you get involved with [drug user group]? How come you wanted to work with them?

For the cause. Hell yeah, if I can help somebody get safe dope, why not? Safety! Safe, safe, safe. You can't be too safe with dirty drugs. Even if you want a fentanyl high, well you want to know what's in it, so you get the fentanyl high. How much heroin is in the heroin high. I've done meth that had fucking fentanyl in it. I've been piss

tested to go to detox and they're like, 'How come you're using fentanyl, you're a meth addict'.

I go, "It was the meth".

The next question is, what gets in the way of pleasure in the Downtown Eastside?

The Downtown Eastside does (laughs).

That's the best way I can answer that questions.

Yeah, what do you mean? Wanna elaborate?

When I leave my room sometimes, I know what I want, know where I'm going. But then as soon as I get outside, I lose track of where I'm going, start to aimlessly walk around. Getting nothing done. I'm afraid of people. Major crowds of people, especially on a day like today, I keep bumping into people in every direction. So it stresses me out. There's times when it's quiet, and I'll go out, cause I actually know that it's quiet. So it's a little less stressful.

But you like it here at the same time? What keeps you around?

Having my own place. Someplace to hide. Nobody knows where I live, only [group's name] people know where I live, other than that, nobody knows.

That keeps you happy?

Yeah. I know my door's not going to get kicked in. Cause you need a key fob to get through the front door. And if a resident doesn't recognize you, they won't let em in.

Have you had issues with people coming into your space in the past, in other places?

Yeah, I had my door kicked in at the [place name], beat up in my room the same night. And then buddy that did it came back, and I literally put my hands behind my back and talked to him. Just like I'm talking now, and I made him cry, made him say he was just a little boy in a man's body. And I gave him the sweater off my back and said, 'Here you go, you're not welcome in this building no more.' And I walked him out the front door. Made me feel better that way instead of fighting. Fighting I could get charged for. Not even arguing with him...

When you were talking about walking outside and having something to do, being on a mission and then getting outside and all of a sudden you're overwhelmed by the neighbourhood. What is it about the neighbourhood? Is it the people, having so many people around? Or just memories?

Memories, of having so many people around. Because I can't really... People seem to want to talk to me when I'm walking with them. Me and [name] for instance, walking on the street, traffics going by, and that's when he starts to talk to me. And I don't pay attention cause I can't hear him. I've got to be focused, and it's really hard to focus when you're in traffic. And then sirens, sirens really get to me. They really cripple me sometimes. Even my fire alarm in here really cripples me when I've got to turn it off some how. Literally fan it with a picture, freaking out because I'm hearing it and it's going to drive me even more crazy.

It's like, "Ooh, shiny!" kind of thing. And you never know what the Downtown Eastside has involved

for ya. That's why I usually hold the hours that I do, I'll sleep all day and be up all night. That way I can go out and I know what type of people will be out and about, all the shy and quiet people like me. We're so jittery and when we bump into each other its like, 'Oh sorry sorry sorry sorry!' And keep going our separate ways. Cause there's always that, 'He looks like this person, I'm gonna go get him.' That would really suck.

So back in the day, there was the feeling that neighbourhood people were more committed to the neighbourhood, to keeping one another safe?

The only good think that I think right now, about the neighbourhood, is when there's kids on the block, you hear people hollering, 'Kids on the block!' and even the seasoned fuckin' junkies will turn around, who know what their doing, and hide it. Kids don't need to see that. But there's also a certain age where they should see it.

What are your thoughts on that?

I think if you have kids, and you came from the Downtown Eastside, you should show your kids, bring your kids down, let them see what their parent had to do to get to where they are. Don't keep it from them! That's who you are, that's part of you, right? Like my daughter, she'd never been homeless before, til we moved to Victoria, and we were homeless together. And I told her I'd rather go through it then be stupid to it.

What was that like for her?

She'd like it, but hated it sometimes. You know it was panning, sometimes you don't make a fucking penny, and some days you eat like a king and make lots of mon-

ey.

Well we're getting on an hour here, but we have another question if you feel good about doing another one.

Okay.

Is there a connection between pleasure and risk?

I honestly wouldn't be able to tell you what pure pleasure and risk would be. Cause I go up three flights of stairs, get my dope, and then I come back to my room. I don't take it anywhere with me, and so the risk factor there is... I might fall down the stairs.

(Laughter) That's not part of the appeal to you, its not for the adventure of it.

You know in the evening time, if I get really high, I'll get on my longboard, and that's, you know, kind of no fear, sometimes. So if you wanted that part of the risk factor, that would be it. Pure pleasure is rolling down the hill on my longboard, the hair going, at night, enjoying it. Not having to work for it kinda thing.

Do you longboard a lot?

I haven't been out for a while because my board's a little wonky right now. Usually I'd be out everyday, if not every other day.

Do you usually use before you ride?

Yep!

And it's a ritual, kind of thing?

I'll use a lot, before I go, just in case I do fall, I really

won't feel it too much (laughter). But I haven't fallen yet (knocks on wood).

When did you discover that?

Well I've been doing it for about five years now. When I was on heroin! Smoked a couple of dragons, borrowed a long board, and I was like, 'Ooh wow, I like this!'

So you figured out it works good with meth too, and it became your thing?

It became my ritual.

I'm gonna keep my eyes open for you on the longboard. Would you ever consider riding the longboard without using, or its something that goes hand in hand?

Something, for me, that goes hand in hand. Because if I tried it when I was sober, I wouldn't have the breath for it, I wouldn't have the legs to do it. I'd just kind of get meh. I'd be thinking I should've smoked a bowl.

It's a major confidence booster for me. The confidence to talk to people would be even better. Still that's something in the works.

I need a nice, mellow, chilled ride. I'm not out to show off, or go speedy, I'm out to ride and have fun.

Alright, should we call it?

Sure.

