

Gary Colley (1947-1994)

Gary grew up in a working-class family in James Bay. As our classmate Dave Tubman recalls, he was “the first guy I met when we returned to Victoria from the Yukon in 1955. We lived several doors down from each other on Dallas Road.” Dave refers to himself as a “James Bay rat,” and so was Gary.

I knew Gary through our mutual interest as members of the Stage Crew at Vic High. He was always willing to pitch in where needed behind the scenes in a bright and cooperative way. After graduation he wanted to enter Law at UBC, which he did.

Time passed and in 1992, while I was in Vancouver, I happened to meet the then-Director of the BC Coalition of People with Disabilities: Gary Colley.

Gary was instrumental in founding the Coalition in 1977, now called Disability Alliance of BC. He invited me over for dinner the same day. He and Lynne, his companion, had gone all out to host me. Over dinner Gary told me he had contracted HIV during the Canadian Red Cross’s tainted blood fiasco. Gary was a hemophiliac, something I didn’t know during my Vic High days

After Gary learned he had the HIV virus in 1986, his health and well-being took a nosedive. This big, broad-shouldered man vented his rage before the federal Inquiry that investigated Canada’s blood system. To quote him: “I cannot work because of HIV, my right eye is dead because of HIV, my liver is shot because of HIV. I expect my life will be terminated, but I’m going to go kicking and scratching all the way.”

Robin Loxton, a fellow advocate of the Alliance, recalled: “I worked with Gary as an advocate in the late ’80s and early ’90s. He was a great guy and an excellent advocate.”

In 1991, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities recognized Gary with an award citing his outstanding contribution to the Canadian disability rights movement. There is an AIDS memorial at Sunset Beach – at Beach Avenue and Broughton Street in Vancouver -- with Gary’s name on it.

A special thank you, Gary, for your contribution to disability rights and your fighting spirit. I like to think perhaps Vic High had something to do with it.

Submitted by John Warren, with David Tubman (both VHS 1966)