

WOODWARD'S

Oral History Collection



Interview with:

Patrick Oleman (PO),
Member of Woodsquat

Conducted by Josh Gabert-Doyon (JGD)

Transcribed by
Brit Bachmann

February 1, 2018
Vancouver, BC

CW: Please note this interview includes
conversations about violence and suicide.

“[The Woodward’s squat marches were] a lot about asking for help. Telling the public that housing is needed and help is needed, that we weren’t just going to be pushed aside and forgotten about and that everybody had a voice and that if we did it together, eventually something would come out of it.”

– Patrick Oleman

JGD: Can you introduce yourself?

PO: Alright, my name is Patrick Oleman.

JGD: When did you start playing soccer?

PO: 2009.

JGD: With the Woodward’s team?

PO: With the Portland FC team.

JGD: Which is out of the Portland building?

PO: It was Portland staff who started the team. There’s three teams in the league and they had a lot of people, a lot of people played on the Portland team, like staff from different Portland residences.

JGD: You played growing up too?

PO: Little bit, not a lot.

JGD: Let’s, um, like, with the squat, what were you doing? Where were you living before the squat started?

PO: I was living in Vancouver near the PNE.

JGD: Okay. And what was, like, what were you up to in those days?

P0: I was doing business marketing, business managing, and working at a Home Depot.

JGD: And then how did you hear about the squat?

P0: I was walking by after work one day.

JGD: So there was a Home Depot on...

P0: The one down by...

JGD: Terminal?

P0: Yeah. And I was going to Bentall Centre for university.

JGD: Was that, Pentall?

P0: Bentall, it's on Burrard just by the Skytrain Station.

JGD: Okay, so you just walked by and this was like, would have been September or something? October?

P0: September.

JGD: And did you talk to people there?

P0: I knew some people that were there. I had cousins that were there, that called me over and asked if I would like to support it.

JGD: And what did you... how did you end up getting involved? They kind of asked you to come by?

P0: They asked me and my cousin if we would come help do security at nighttime.

JGD: So what was... would you go straight to living there? Or was it doing security first?

P0: It was just security at night first. I was going to night school, so I would go to work and go to night school, and then I would go sit at the squat for a while, and then go home and get some sleep.

JGD: And then back to work in the morning?

P0: [small laugh] Yeah, and go back to work in the morning.

JGD: Who was your cousin?

P0: My cousin was Amhill Williams¹ and William Peters² who asked me to start coming around.

JGD: What was the security like?

P0: A lot of nights were pretty easy. Some nights were crazy with all the bars around and stuff. A couple nights we had people come from the bars and they were throwing shopping carts on the tents and everything, people were sleeping, so...

JGD: Where do you feel that the resentment for the squat was coming from?

P0: [long pause] I guess because there was so... so much publicity. A lot of times at nighttime people would come by yelling "Get a job!",

1 Spelling unconfirmed.

2 Spelling unconfirmed.

or, "Why don't you get a home?" Yelling other rude things at us, but we would just tell them to keep walking.

JGD: Was there fighting sometimes?

P0: Yeah.

JGD: Mostly young guys that were coming from the bars?

P0: Yeah, younger guys in their 20s and stuff. I was in my 20s too, so... I was a little more stubborn back then. [both laugh]

JGD: How many people would it be, just you and your cousin doing security?

P0: No, there would be... we eventually met 2 other guys there, so there were 5 of us that kind of volunteered to walk around the squat area and make sure everything was alright.

JGD: And did you end up living there?

P0: Yeah, after a while. I had... me and my cousin were renting a place but I told her I liked the idea of the Woodsquat, and that I'd stay down there. Kind of surprised her and my family, like "Why would you stay down there when you got a place?" Because it was pretty cool. It's like, they're trying to help people that need help. We have family down there, some of them need help, so why not try to help.

JGD: Who was it that you were... so like... the politics down there about what they were doing, like, who did you feel was like kind of... um... let me rephrase that. How did the politics around the squat develop? When you first went you were like, this is about hous-

ing. And you were saying that they were trying to – what did you see as the political goal there?

P0: Housing first, was the main thing. And then the farther it went on, was more about, like, trying to get food for everybody the bigger the squat got. More security, more tents, and mattresses, and blankets. First aid. Washrooms.

JGD: What was it like living down there?

P0: Having my relatives, it was pretty fun. We're all the same age, right? [small laugh]

JGD: That's great!

P0: A lot of people down there were pretty nice to us. [pause] At times it was scary. You'd see a lot of dark sides of the Downtown Eastside when you, you have, what, 250 people down there, right? With the drugs. With the people from jail coming out. And then the people from the street not liking... there were a lot of haters. It was, like, they're fighting to help these people – people with mental illnesses, people that, you know, are physically handicapped. People that just ended up in the Downtown Eastside, and a lot of people hated that for some reason. Everyday we heard people just yelling at us, like, [spoken in a lower voice] "Get a fucking job, you fucking bums!" I got a fucking job, man. "What the fuck you doing down here then?" Supporting these guys. "Why?" 'Cause they need help, shit. They're people too. It's not like they decided one day, yeah, I'm going to go live on the streets. A lot of people, it's because of the hospital. They ended up in the hospital, they ended up with cancer, they ended up with something and weren't weaned off the drugs enough. Hit that morphine, oxycontin. They had to find something to replace that once they got out of the hospital. I had cancer when I was 16,

so I kind of understood at that time what that felt like, having that lost feeling of, where's my brain? Always searching for something. I didn't even know what I was searching for. [pause] The more people were negative, the more me and my cousins were like, we're going to stay down here and try to bring more people to come and help with security, more people to help, you know, keep peace at least.

JGD: What are some of the stories you remember best from the squat? First, maybe what were some of the good stories of you and your cousins living down there?

P0: [long pause] I guess, a lotta... we only had a hacky sack, so we played a lot of hacky sack. [pause] Just asking people how they were feeling, really getting to know people aside from drugs, alcohol, mental illness, physical disability, all that. Just talking to them like, "Hey, how are you doing today?" Sometimes that would be all they needed. A group of young Natives walk up and, "Hey, how's it going man? How are you?" They'd tell us what's bothering them, or what happened throughout their day, so we'd sit there and listen. And then after they're done we'd go back to hanging out again. Sometimes we'd volunteer to help cook and stuff, so that was always something cool. We'd have more than 250 people, but we'd be trying to cook all day, right? So those were fun to have my family there, and them understanding that my brain was the same as a lot of the people in the Downtown Eastside, right? My brain was looking for something, too, but I was trying my best to figure out how I could help.

JGD: That kitchen must have been hectic, holy.

P0: It was crazy some days. We had to take breaks, too. [laughs]

JGD: Who was deciding what would be on the menu?

P0: [laughs] We'd just look at all the donations and be like, well,

take the best ones we got and try to figure out how to cook something here. Easy dinners were spaghetti and sauce, right? Sometimes it would just be these crazy-ass concoctions, cans of food.

JGD: Big stew of something?

P0: Yeah [laughs].

JGD: That's good. What were the other jobs that were down there? What else were people doing? I guess there was a lot of construction and setting up tents and stuff, maintenance.

P0: Setting up tents, cleaning spaces. Sometimes there's people who would come and then leave and come back, and they'd stay for a while. Others were like, were clean people. Have dark stories, and so we would offer to grab the metal thing with the claw on it and clean up, just to keep it safe. There was younger people, and my cousin, my cousin was 20 turning 21 at the time, and there were people younger than him, right? And then other people dealt with donations and media and meetings and stuff like that.

JGD: Were you going to the meetings? They would be in the morning, right? Or later in the day?

P0: The ones I went to would be later in the day. The mornings, sometimes I would be at work, right? After that I would be at school, so a lot of my time there was nighttime.

JGD: Yeah, that's hectic. I can't believe you were doing work, school, and then you'd come back and do security too.

P0: [chuckle] Yeah, I know.

JGD: What were the meetings like? Who was running them mostly?

P0: At first it was the Anti-Poverty Committee (APC), and then I guess I would go to like, a council.

JGD: Okay, I don't know the council.. who was a part of that, do you remember who?

P0: It's been so long.

JGD: And the APC, it was mostly, who were the voices there? That was Ivan and...

P0: Ivan for a while, and Todd.

JGD: Todd, right right right.

P0: And another guy, his name was Peter-something.

JGD: I talked to Mike Krebs, do you remember him?

P0: Probably if I see him.

JGD: He's still around. I think he was APC. What.. so, okay. Living there, a typical day you'd go to school, you'd go to work, you'd go to school, you'd come back. You guys would kind of do rounds making sure everything was good, and then you would just call it a day, get a couple hours of sleep?

P0: Yeah, two or three hours of sleep. [laughs]

JGD: Oh my god. [laughs] What side was your tent on, do you remember?

P0: At first it was on the Hastings side when I first got there, and then my cousins were like, how come you're not staying down with us? I was like, I didn't know where your guys' tents were. And then me and my cousin moved our tents to their side on Abbott.

JGD: Okay, and at that point were you guys still going into the building? You had the ladder up?

P0: When I was there it was before the ladder.

JGD: It was before the ladder? So before... so what was it like when you got the ladder? What did that change?

P0: That was kind of freaky, like going inside and it's all dark and they had... they also had security inside the building, so you could hear them working too.

JGD: Woah.

P0: So I kind of tried to stay at least near the windows. Sitting in the dark, a little too freaky. That's why I ended up not doing the ladder, I thought nah, I will stay outside where there's light.

JGD: Were people still sleeping in the building at that point?

P0: Yeah.

JGD: But you would have rather slept outside than in the building?

P0: Oh yeah, I still did. I didn't like the inside.

JGD: What about it was freaky?

P0: The dogs. Just the... [pause] mostly the dogs, I guess.

JGD: Were you finding stuff in there?

P0: I wasn't. I wasn't really looking around when I went in, just to talk to people, make sure they're alright.

JGD: How much, on the day-to-day, how much were the cops causing you trouble?

P0: I don't know how much during the day, I wasn't there.

JGD: But at night? Like, on an average day before the injunction.

P0: We'd see them. Sometimes it was because fights, or dealers would start coming around, or other problems would start coming around and they'd start coming about that. Some of the cops were pretty supportive about it, even though people would try to chase them away they were like, hey, we're coming down to talk, even though we're in uniform doesn't mean that we're here to tell you you have to go. I was like, that's pretty cool. Cops backing it up a bit.

JGD: Well for you guys in security too, you were getting into scuffles, the cops would show up and take your side sometimes?

P0: Yeah. A lot of times when the fights would happen too, after it was done, they'd leave. I remember one night me and my cousin Angel and my cousin Chris, we're walking, asking people in their tents if they were alright, 'cause it was a bit colder, and then this big crew of younger guys came along and started pushing my cousin around, asking like: "Who gave him the right to take care of the people," stuff like that. We were just like, what the hell? And even before we could even finish answering we were just like, man, we're just trying to

help out, they started throwing punches and so it was like, seemed like 8 on 3. We got out of that. That was pretty freaky 'cause while we were fighting one of them started throwing shopping carts towards tents, so we were trying to get to the guy who was throwing shopping carts towards the tents while his friend was punching us, we're like trying to tie their arms and pull them back. Kind of lucky, me and my cousin knew martial arts, tie a guy up, taking shots, trying to run towards the guy throwing the shopping carts.

JGD: Holy.

PO: So that's, that happened maybe 3 or 4 times, with me and my cousins at least while we were there. We had to really, really get into fights.

JGD: When... how were things, like... the thing I'm confused about is how things went from the cops kind of, like, just interacting with the squat normally, to going for the injunction. Like, what was the decline of the squat, I guess?

PO: Probably when you have that many people that are from the street. [pause] Dealers. Users. [pause] Women who are working. You had that aspect with mental illness and physical disabilities and I guess it looked bad. [pause] I guess fires started because drug use. Maybe they just thought the fights were getting worse too, or maybe we were starting them. Could have seemed like a nuisance. The fact that we basically were shutting down the street whenever we wanted, right? We'd fill the street and go marching and stuff like that. That costs money to a lot of people, right? People working all over the neighbourhood had to basically find different routes to go around. It really made the police hurt with the marches they did, right? Probably a lot of that.

JGD: Do you remember when COPE got in in November? Did that change things at all, at the squat?

P0: [long pause] I don't remember talking to COPE, no.

JGD: What were the marches about? Tell me a bit more about those.

P0: A lot about asking for help. Telling the public that housing is needed and help is needed, that we weren't just going to be pushed aside and forgotten about and that everybody had a voice and that if we did it together, eventually something would come out of it.

JGD: When the injunction happened at the squat and the cops came around and people started tearing down the tents, what was - were you around at that point? Was it daytime, nighttime?

P0: It was daytime, I was just getting there after they already had the Hastings side and they were taking, starting to take this side. I guess a lot of people felt lost, right? It was like, all their belongings. All the tents, all the mattresses, all the... just everything. I can remember after they took everything, they put a lot of people in The Stanley. Well first they put them in The Dominion, and then they moved us to The Stanley. Me and some of my friends, we didn't like The Dominion at first, so we just went and stayed down in Crab Park.

JGD: Who was it at PHS³ that just basically gave you spots in The Dominion? And brought you over there? So it was like, you rise in the afternoon, was it instantly clear that it was over?

P0: Kinda yeah. 'Cause like, [pause] normally it felt like a really big loss right? 'Cause you had been there so long, but at the time,

3 Portland Hotel Society

the amount of people that were getting housing was like, yeah we did win something. At the same time, it was just the way it was done, everything was basically thrown away, right? And then, [pause] they were like, [pause] the people they moved into The Dominion, it was alright, right? There was community still there, still had meetings and everything like that, and we would have been okay staying there until Woodward's opened, but I don't know. They decided to move us to The Stanley, which was crazy. The craziest thing I've seen in my life was The Stanley Hotel. We went from like, The Woodsquat was a big community, right, to The Dominion, which was a small community, to The Stanley, which was... [pause]

I don't know who picked that, but it was like they moved all these dealers and dealer after dealer after dealer, henchmen, way more fights and way more negativity. Often go outside and nothing but dealers everywhere. Seen so many people like, getting ripped off by false dealers, but at the same time they moved in people from the psych ward, from jail, which was fucked. That even gave more reason to fight, right? We thought at first when all these guys from jail showed up, they had that bond or whatever, that they did time together, so on the street they backed each other up no matter what. Me and my friends and cousins really thought they were just bullies from jail, so we were like, nah, you're not going to come here and tell people what to do. We don't care if you just got out of jail, we'll stand up. Which made that pretty scary, right? So you had drugs, had mental illness, and then you had jail life, all moved in together, which made it like, probably the - I don't know what the word would be - darkest, darkest of all the SROs in the Downtown Eastside. Even though it wasn't the biggest, I'd say it was the darkest. Seen so many people pass away because of the drugs or mental illness, suicide. So many stories of people being tortured and stuff like that. Kind of made me and my cousins have to change, right, to become just as dark too, to become ready to fight every day, as soon as you wake

up and start walking around it was like, shit, I wonder if I'm going to have to fight that group. And you see the way some of the dealers treated people was disgusting. So I was like getting in scraps with guys who were in jail, getting in scraps with dealers, getting in scraps with all these people who thought these dealers were the good guys. Trying to help some of the people from the mental hospital, or whatever, the psych ward. Trying to help them. [pause] It was freaky, they'd be screaming all the time. And even me and my cousins friend, they'd be screaming in the street and we thought they were getting beat up and we were like, fuck it, if nobody else would help them, like shit, we'll go help them. We go running out there and it's like, they're just standing back-to-back screaming. It was like, What the hell is wrong with you? They're like, "It's our meds, our meds make us this way." Shit man, you shouldn't be doing that. You sound like you're getting killed. We're coming out here to help you. They were like, "Really? You guys came to help us? Boy."

We see too much, man. You get sick and tired of seeing people tortured or taken advantage of or people crying, right? To a point where it's like you gotta band up and say, let's go fight that shit. There's always this threat of like, what if you get stabbed or what if you get hit with a bat or what if, you know, get hit with a brick, whatever, sticks. Everything out there was a weapon. You kind of had to corner yourself to the wall so that you couldn't get jumped from behind if you got into a fight. And fights there were never really one-on-one. It was like four-on-one, five-on-one. Even more. My younger cousin was always like, "You're crazy, why're you getting into those fights?" I was sick of it. I was like, if you think of me, I was like, I should be there too. Like, shit. I got one long... I don't really sleep, so... a hospital. When I got out of the hospital they were giving me, like, 16 T3s a day, right? So it was like, fuck. I was on prescription too, right? So I was just the same as them, but I think I'm lucky. I don't have to use my knuckles to fight back and still

hurt people. I could still help these guys or these ladies. It's like me and my cousin Chris at the time were like, shit it feels like us 2 against 14, and it was like that every day we woke up, go to his place, "How's it going? Let's get out there." Like, okay, we'd go out there and kind of stand around, right? Kinda, kinda make ourselves known but at the same time try to not make ourselves known to the cops too much. Trying not to fight to the point where we'd get 6 months to 2 years. A lot of times it was like, maybe the cops liked it that there were people out there standing up for people, for the mentally ill or fallen into addiction. Also made people kind of scared of us, people see us walking down the street and like, "Why you talking to those guys?" and the people that we'd be hanging out with would be like, "'Cause they're nice. They actually help us. They don't take advantage of us, they're actually trying to help us. They treat us like we're human still. So..." "Yeah, but those guys are... if you're seen with them, they're no good." Like, whatever man, you just see your side of the story and whatever side of the story looks pretty dark for you but for us, we're just, we got a lot of compassion. We might not agree with what all these people are doing or saying but we'll back that shit up. And that's like, 7 years of, when I wake up, like shit, what am I going to go through today, man? Might as well try to have fun. Yeah, might as well.

But dark, dark shit happened there. One of my best friends there, his girlfriend hung herself because she had a mental illness and he found her and... like after that, he came banging at my door. I was sleeping but I woke up and was like, "What's up man?" And he was like, "I found her, man. She's dead." I was like, "How?" "She hung herself." "Fuck, I'm sorry man." And then I hung out with him for 5 or 6 hours, just talking. And then after I went home to try to go back to sleep, I guess he started destroying his house. A lot of people were scared of him because sometimes he'd get in fights with me and my cousin and try to help us, right? So they'd come wake me up and be like, "Hey

man, you gotta go talk to him, he's not letting anyone in his room." Could you guys ask what's wrong? "Yeah, he won't say anything." Alright. So me and him were, maybe born a day apart or whatever, right? And I was like, I walk up, I go get some cigarettes and he's like, "What's that for?" Smoke it if you want it. He's like, "Yeah, alright. Come and sit down." I would just sit there and listen and he'd be like, "Every day, every day I try to go to sleep I see her face. Every day." And I was like, shit. Even 3 weeks after he was like, "I haven't really slept, right? Every time I close my eyes I see her face, every time." Here's when it started getting dark, right? The walls were green and he painted a big picture of her face on the wall. He was a good artist. He eventually, I found him trying to hang himself too. But his door was locked. Everybody was really worried about him, but I just told him, you could go out and talk to a doctor or something, right? But he wouldn't do it. So I found him trying to hang himself, but I busted in and I talked him out of it. But like, 3 or 4 months after that maybe, I found him again. And I was like, fuck, we really gotta get him help. I started trying to talk to staff that worked in the Portland⁴, like how can we get him help? I was like, he's my best friend and it's just destroying me seeing him get destroyed by it. You know, addiction and sorrow, he didn't know what to do. Even on his last day, he was screaming. I was just walking and he was screaming at me, "You bastard. You're my best friend, you're the only friend I've had. I just wanted to say thank you." No problem, right? I didn't know what was going on. And it was nighttime so I went to sleep and when I woke up there were people banging at his door, so I was like all nauseated and I realized, oh shit. I got up and I was trying to pry the door open but he put speakers all the way across so it couldn't open, right? So you could kind of hear his last screams, "I'll show you, I'll show you guys, nobody would believe me." By the time we were able to get a crowbar, we called the cops, as soon as the person ran, 5 minutes later there were like 3

4 The Portland Hotel Society

cops came busting through too. We got the door open and he was already – he was dead by then. It was like maybe 14 people I'd seen kinda die in that building, which changed the way I really looked at people. I already had that I-want-to-help mentality, but seeing your best friend go through dark, dark, dark shit, is one of the reasons why I decided I had to get out of that lifestyle. I had to get off drugs and alcohol and cigarettes and everything.

That same year, one of my best friends from high school came and lived around there too, and he got burned – somebody put lighter fluid on him or something, lit him on fire. He was screaming for me and his girlfriend. I wasn't home so I didn't know about it, and then one of my friends came and told me, and then by that time they told me he was already dead. My lifelong best friend died that same year, so I lost basically all my best friends in, I'd say, 8 or 9 months. So that really put me in a depression, right? It was at that time I was 27, it was like fuck. I already lost everything. I even looked at my cousins and was like, man, now I'm exactly like everyone down here. Before, half of me was like that, but now all of me is like that. I'm depressed, I'm mentally ill right now. All I see is my best friend's face hanging. They were like, what are you going to do about it? I guess I'll quit. I guess in the hood it's not really something people do, right? But I was like, if I quit, my best friends probably wouldn't want to know that I died too, and I kind of used that as fuel, right? So I kinda started jogging. I gave away all my stuff from weed, just everything, I gave everything away. So I had nothing, and they thought I was going to commit suicide, and I was like, "No, I'm just getting rid of all the dark shit." I have a chance to move into Woodward's, so I'll get rid of everything. That was the hardest part. Going straight to Woodsquat. 'Cause my friend, he was at Woodsquat with us, and I got to be really good friends with him.

JGD: Going back there...

PO: Hm?

JGD: Going back there [to Woodward's] after that must have been tough.

PO: Yeah. But I just kept the thought in my head, right? Like shit. I had some really good friends. [long pause]

JGD: So, basically you went from The Stanley, PHS⁵ – they got a spot for you in the Woodward's building once it opened? So that was like, right as they opened or was that awhile after the block had been built?

PO: No, I moved in as it opened.

JGD: Woah, what was that like, moving day?

PO: It was cool. They were like, you can take three bags of your stuff. I was like, I'll take less. [laughs] And then, that's when I started really getting into street soccer, right? By then I was like 7 months into street soccer, maybe less, 6 months of street soccer. And then staying there, me and my friends that were in street soccer, we all just hung out at my place a lot, or at The Livingston.⁶ Like, 5 of us got picked for Brazil for street soccer, like, the Homeless World Cup. And since I stayed in an SRO, they considered that pretty much homeless. So that was cool. It was like 46 countries or something, competing in soccer tournament, Copacabana. It was hard because at that time I just couldn't drink and I had been, like, we drank down there. It was crazy. But I had just been off the drugs for 11 months and when you quit drugs you put on a lot of weight, so I went down there 215 pounds or something, it's crazy.

5 Portland Hotel Society

6 Andy Livingston Park

JGD: What year was that?

P0: 2010.

JGD: 2010. What was the team like?

P0: The team was good. Like, a lot of us kind of were like, the start of street soccer Vancouver, right? Abe Brower⁷ was from Sun Eagles team, and basically the rest of us were from the Portland team.

JGD: That must have been great going down to Brazil. There were people from all over Canada, and then 46 teams that were all, like, were you all staying at the same place and playing in a big stadium? What was it like?

P0: No. Because it was street soccer there's no goalie, like football. So they built a turf on Copacabana and we stayed with Italy, Korea, for a while. Norwegian women's team. Italy, I think. Cambodia. Poland. It was pretty cool. Everyday, like, the tournament was hard, so many good teams. Like, the first, they put us in a hard group with Mexico, Ireland, Finland, Cambodia, and I forget who else. Oh yeah, New Zealand, Switzerland, or something like that. And Mexico. Like, we were taught the old rules, but by then they changed the rules, so we were playing the wrong way, so we got [beat] our first couple games, so we watched Mexico play to learn how to actually play proper street soccer. [laughs] A lot of people, when we got back home, talked about that, 'cause they were following, right? "Why'd you guys lose so much in the beginning?" We were playing the wrong rules.

Nighttime was the best. As soon as we were finished playing in the tournament at Copacabana, we're staying in the Botafogo area, and we found this little soccer pitch. So we'd go eat, do tourist stuff, and

7 Spelling unconfirmed

then come back and go play soccer with all the locals in our neighbourhood, and with Korea and Poland sometimes. Italy sometimes. We'd just mix all the teams and play for 4 or 5 hours. It was fun. It was better than the soccer tournament I believe because it wasn't so hot, right? It's like 46 degrees when we were playing soccer down there.

JGD: Yeah, the nighttime is way better, cooler. When you - coming back to the Woodward's building, and you're trying to sober up - tell me what it was like trying to sober up in that building?

P0: By the time I was there, I was already off the hard drugs, right? All I had to stop was basically alcohol and cigarettes, and after we got back, 'cause we went down at the end of September and we got back October. So by January, I quit drinking. And then maybe 6 or 6 months after that I quit smoking cigarettes. I started jogging 'cause I got injured, injured pretty bad playing soccer. All I could do is move one direction, so I started jogging. Since I was way heavier, I had to just start with 2 blocks, and then work my way up to a couple laps around the Livingston. I met one woman who was an Ironman runner, so she started training me. So maybe, 4 months after that I ran a 10-K. And then 3 or 4 months after that she had me up to doing a half-marathon. And then my 11 months of jogging, she had me doing a marathon, which was pretty cool, right? Because every time she'd be like, "Just come back and see me. Here's all these warm-ups, here's all these things you can do." And she goes, "We'll keep training together, I'll get you to places that you'd probably never thought you could do being overweight." So I kept listening, right? Which made soccer way more fun. Two years into that, I got a serious injury where I was running and the stud of my cleat pushed through and it bruised the ball of my foot, which made the ball of my foot kind of dry and curl like this [shows movements to JGD], and it took 6 months for that to stop and my foot to be able to go like this again [shows movements to JGD]. But it took maybe 2 years altogether for me to actually be able

to wear cleats again, and I spent 2 years with some Latinos playing everyday, but we played barefoot. They were really cool. They put me through like, 8 hours a day. Breakfast, go train. Run. Train. Supper, then hang out. Go to bed, and then wake up and do it again, for 2 years. It was pretty cool.

JGD: What is it like living in the Woodward's building now?

PO: The community there is good. Like, a lot of... even the staff, the staff are pretty good. They're awesome. They helped me make the Woodward's team. Like, the manager of the building. Maybe, like the daytime staff are the best. They're very helpful. But, I would say it was supposed to be, like, when I signed my contract, it was supposed to be for people sobering up. And, like, even 4 years in, you could see, like, they started bringing people in from CTCT⁸ or something, and people from the Portland, and more people from The Stanley, and I guess from other squats and wherever, which was hard at first, to get used to. We're supposed to be people sobering up, people like me. They keep moving in, like, shit. I don't like to judge people, but they keep moving in dealers, or heavy users, or just the opposite of what they're supposed to do, right? But maybe that was the higher-up people, not just the people that actually work there. The people that are on the, like, they even say the floor I live on is so hard, so hard. It's actually a lot of the people from the Woodsquat, right? Still there. I think it's like, I say it's the best floor, just because it's actually people from the Woodsquat. I don't know, sometimes I feel... I feel a bit of depression because of that once in a while, right? Like, fuck. Why didn't they keep their word? Why did they keep moving people in that are, that need life support? Why are they moving dealers in and then complaining about their guests? Shit. I know it's not really my business, but at the same time, I was so excited when they made me fill out that paper to say like, yeah, I'm

8 Community Transitional Care Team

sobering up. And now it's just been like, it's almost been 10 years of me not using hard drugs and it's like shit. I keep telling them, fuck, I've been doing what you guys said had to be done. It's weird. Like, their staff are so nice. But I don't know, there's something there that's weird.

JGD: They're shuffling people around into whatever rooms? Yeah, I mean it's gotta be hard, especially if you're on your own floor, and having to deal with that.

P0: Like, 2 years ago was the worst. There was, on the 6th floor alone, there was something like 16 ODs or something like that. A lot of death, right? I even went up and asked, "What the hell? Shit man, why you put me on [that floor]?" Yeah. I understand the people from the Woodsquat. I understand them, but why you putting these other people in here? Like shit. You think I like seeing these other people getting brought out on a stretcher? Shit. You think I like opening my door and I come out and the ambulance people and the cops and the first-responders are running by with the stuff to bring people back. Or, I even had somebody OD outside my door. And like, what the hell? Shit, I don't even use this shit. Why do I gotta see this shit? Huh. I want them to get housing, but they made me sign that contract. I even talk with my partner about that. I kinda want to keep the place because I fought for this, but they didn't really keep their word, so, it's like, I'm hoping to get a second job. Maybe just move on, right? And that's the hardest thing for me to say, because I love the community aspect there, of the people that I do know. I've known a lot of them since 2002, right? And I don't want to leave my cousin. We've been through hell and back, right? It's like the hard part. My cousin's there, makes everything okay. People from the Woodsquat there, makes it okay. I understand people are using, do it at home, right? I don't care, it's okay, but it does get to your brain. 16 ODs on one floor alone, it's like shit. Almost begin to get cold, right?

Brain's like, huh, ambulance here again, I don't want to go upstairs right now, fuck it, let's go somewhere else. Which isn't the way I should be thinking about going home, right? Once I hit the 6th floor I'm like yeah, I'm happy, but I don't really go to the 10th floor. I don't go to the community kitchen. I don't go to a lot of the dinners they have, 'cause it's different, right? It's not... it's different for me. Everyday it's like, shit I'm sober. I camp a lot, just to relieve stress. 7 or 10 times a year I go camping, rent cabins in the wintertime maybe 4 times a year. Do a lot of, I walk a lot in the woods or go hiking or go fishing, do whatever I can. Pay day's more like, okay, I gotta deal with rent. I gotta deal with food – enough food to last me 2 weeks. Whatever. Other than that, I'm like, let's get the fuck out of here. Go relieve stress. Go hiking, or... at least with being a marathon runner, I had to spend 3 to 4 hours a day training, I had to eat 3 times a day just to be able to do it again, which adds another 4 or 5 hours of my day gone. You add work. Especially when I'm in full marathon mode, I get up at like 5 in the morning so I can be back before 9, and then I go to work, and then I get back from work, and I'll either play ball or eat. Cooking is necessary for me. Food's necessary. I do a lot of physical stuff, so I like to cook at home. I don't put on as much weight as if I'm going out. If I'm going out I find I put on a lot of weight. If I cook it, I do pretty good.

JGD: Who all from Woodsquat is on your floor?

PO: Chris and Jules. Not sure her last name.

JGD: Any other folks on different floors? There are a couple other floors that have people from Woodsquat, right?

PO: Yeah. There's Kirk, he's on the 5th floor. There's Darryl and his brother Scott. My friend, my other friend Scott on the 6th floor.

JGD: That's a bunch of you guys.

PO: Yeah, that's what I mean. Those people, they make it home. It's like, we all understand all the shit we've been through. And we understand what people are going through now. I even talk with my parents about that. I'm like, fuck, these people are so awesome. A part of me just doesn't want to get up and leave and not be there in case they need help. It's not even about life anymore. It's like, whatever kind of help they need I want to be around for that. Me and my mom used to talk for hours about different ways I could talk to people, or different things me and my cousin did. Just a different type of love for the hood than a lot of other people had. Like some people... like, I've seen some people and I was telling my one friend, yeah I've been sober for so long. I haven't been fighting since I left The Stanley, basically. I've been working, hired like 7 people at the White Caps and in 2 years, I basically hired 10 people at the White Caps, some of them didn't work out, and they're all from the Downtown Eastside. I was like, giving back that way. And I trained some people for half-marathons and 10Ks that were users or quit using. I'm just trying to keep helping this community with whatever I can, and then some people were like, "Nah, that guy. Him and his friends were harsh. His friends would drink and use. He wasn't always good." And I'm like, didn't you just hear what I said? It's almost 10 years man. They're like, "Yeah, it's just a story." We're like, whatever, right? Walked away. So sometimes it feels like some people see the good, some people just get stuck in the old, or whatever.

JGD: Tell me a bit about the team. So that started a few years after you got to the Woodward's building?

PO: About a year after, maybe a year and a half. After I went to Brazil, my friend Sarah asked if I would start a team too, and I was like, "Shit, you want me to start a team? I can try." I started out

by pitching in on jerseys and stuff like that, and basically the uniforms and the logo and soccer balls. It was all we started with. We got a deal, 700 for the uniforms and that, and a couple 100 for all the numbers and logo. And then the soccer balls, we went to Victoria 'cause some guy wanted to donate them to us. And then that's what we started with, just walked around the community and asked people if they wanted to play or wanted to learn to play street soccer or seven-a-side soccer. My friends were pretty proud so a lot of them came to play. For a while we had the most different nationalities on the team. We had a German guy, Norwegian girl. A guy from Iraq. Honduras. Mexico. Chile. Italy. And then 3 or 4 Natives, which was cool. We also started hanging out with some of the people from Covenant House, we were getting their players to come and play on our team. One of the volunteers there asked us too, "Hey, you guys are always doing good things. Why don't you come to our practices and show our players how to do things?" Sure, if you want. Haven't really worked with youth before [laughs]. For a while the league went big, 10 teams or something, but for some reason they stopped having tournaments, which was hard. I asked them, I asked the volunteers quite a bit, "So you don't do street soccer rules? You don't use seven-a-side rules, and you don't use a full field? You don't have tournaments? So, what's the league for now?"

We used to have 2 or 3 tournaments a month. And I guess, I don't know. Hopefully they get back to that. They had a pretty good team of supporters when I first joined, like Sarah Blythe, who was with the Parks Board, and Alan Bates, who was, I think, site doctor or something, and worked at UBC. Kurt Heinrich, he was with the School Board. Also hung out with Gregor Robertson. Andrea Reimer from City Hall. They had a very good support when I first got into it. That support actually made me and my friend be like, "Yeah, the mayor supports this shit. Fuck yeah, we'll play."

JGD: And the sport stopped?

PO: Hm?

JGD: And then the sport stopped? Like, how did it?

PO: After, I think Kirk and Alan and Sarah were in so long. It's like, I guess, they need breaks right? Getting that much funding, gotta be a lot of work. For tournaments, that many tournaments for 4 or 5 years straight. It's pretty good.

JGD: And so now, the Woodward's team is no longer. What do you play, are you playing in a league now?

PO: I brought it back for a bit. We're playing in Urban Rec and we played 3 seasons there. And then, I don't know. The team was like, they decided after playing one winter that "Nah, we don't want to play in the winter. Maybe Spring or Summer." So it might change some of the roster. It is hard, though. Having a team. Uniforms. Sponsors. The price alone. Up front, my partner probably put 3-grand into the team, but our sponsors eventually gave it back. That's what a lot of the players didn't get. They'd get mad at us. We'd be trying to call pals and outsides and everything. We're so used to street soccer, they'd be like, "Why do you care about that?" Because this is the league, you have to call. And they thought we were just being... well, she was a referee for one, like a soccer ref. So everything she sees she calls it, she was the Captain of the team, so. And I was always giving, like, we'd have to pass. Do a passing game, and together we could play at this level. But I guess a lot of them thought that ego was coming out. And we were like, "No, we're trying to support you guys and get you used to playing at this level." 'Cause we got up to like, I don't know, 3rd division or something, and then they just started getting stressed out. We invited a lot of

the street soccer guys, right? Even though we have friends we could have picked and just stacked the team. We were like, no, we'll just stick with what Woodward's is about – street soccer. So we'll just invite majority street soccer. It seemed like a lot of people were just getting mad at us. C'mon man, do you guys not get it? We put 3-grand into this team, all we ask is that you call the fouls, if you get fouled, and you call outsides, and pass the ball. Who cares if we win or lose, all we want is the team to play as a team. If everyone's getting passes, we're playing as a team. If we defend together, we're playing as a team. Simple. C'mon. We even tried having team dinners and team meetings, and 1 or 2 people would show up. We even won the championship too, right? And so, like, we had a hard time. We'd play 5 or 6 people against 7, right? And we still managed to get into the playoffs, and then we managed to win our t-shirt. So the next season after that, like 20 people showed up. We're like, where the hell were you the first 2 seasons, we were struggling. Like, shit. And so they started getting mad at us because we were like, you have to sign a waiver. You have to sign it. If you're not on it, and technically the ref could say you can't play. The league can say you can't play because you're not on the list. I was like, this isn't street soccer, even though Woodward's is street soccer. That was harder than my job, right? Running a soccer team was harder than work. Shit, I didn't think that.

JGD: Where do you see the future going with Woodward's and with soccer stuff?

PO: Woodward's has great staff, so I think... and they do, like the staff there really make it community. They do help the people who need the help. They do go out of their way sometimes to help people with mental illnesses and people with physical disabilities. So that way, you know, I think they're awesome. [pause] The tough part is... the deaths, right? It's like, shit. Like once the fentanyl hit the

streets, like shit, you really notice it when you live on Hastings. You really notice it. And that's, I don't even know who to blame for that. There's no one to blame, right? Just showed up one day. That was why I quit smoking weed, because one of my friends was smoking weed and ended up having fentanyl in it. And then one of my relatives and one of my friend's daughters, they were both the same age. One was in the Interior, one was here in Vancouver, and they ended up OD-ing off of smoking a joint. And I was like, wow, that's dangerous. I'm not smoking weed ever again. My friends, I just told them it was from marathon running, I'm quitting weed for marathon running to see what I can do, but I told my really close friends, yeah, I quit because of the fentanyl being found in weed. It's too dangerous to smoke a joint, you never know. And with soccer, shit, I don't know. I love to play. My partner loves to play. We'll probably... depends. Depends on if I get a new job too, right? Trying to balance being a marathon runner, a soccer player, having hopefully 2 jobs. The White Caps job is easy. It's hard, but it's easy, right? So if I have a city job that's part-time and White Caps is pretty part-time, I can still play soccer, and I could still marathon-train. Soccer, I'll probably keep playing, keep trying to get better.

JGD: I think that's a good spot to stop it.

◆◆◆

Produced in Response to:

Direct Action and the Archive:
*A Screening of Sid Chow Tan's Video Journalism
& Woodsquat Open Archive by Josh Gabert-Doyon*
@ Pollyanna 圖書館 Library
02.11.18

This interview has been edited for clarity.

Thank you to Patrick Oleman & thank you to organizer Vincent Tao, whose leadership and support was essential in realizing this project.

Vancouver Independent
Archives Week 2018/19

Recollective

archivesweek.ca



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada

221A

<http://www.221a.ca/>