

Nérée becomes radicalized and increasingly critical of institutions

Nérée: I'm a professor now, I finished my PhD, and I'm a professor and I ask myself these questions, and in class—there was maybe forty students in this class— and I ask them, “If anyone is interested in knowing what’s going on, in this world of psychiatry, I’d like for you to do a field placement, a street placement.” So, Annette shows up after the class and she says, “I’m interested.”

Annette: I was interested in mental health issues and we kind of just thought of this idea of starting a support group, but a peer support group, for people who had been hospitalized in psychiatry. And he supervised that practice work for that summer, it was April to September. So that’s, you know, how I got to know Neree. And Gene started with the group that I had started. He started a bit once I was away from the group, because I had been studying and working and Neree had found another student to take over the supervision of the group, or just make sure that things were going smoothly. And so Gene was kind of introduced to the group when I wasn’t there, but then I always kind of remained obviously interested in the group. He kind of came and got me at one point for some questions, and we met like that and I just never went away. And I was a part of the board for the group, a bit of a founding board for Gene when he needs to kind of bounce things off somebody.

Eugène: I heard that there was a support group out of the basement of a church, so I went to see what was going on there. There was a student with whom I’d gone to school with and she was going back to university in September and she said, “We’re looking for someone to replace us, and from all the members here you seem to be more functional than the others, are you interested?” And I said, “Yes,” so she said, “I’ll introduce you to my supervisor, Neree St-Amant.” And I went to university to meet Neree, I was feeling quite important all of a sudden, because I was meeting someone who had an office at a university. He had hired me and said, “I’ll let you try out for four months.” My first operating budget was \$88.13 and that’s where it all started and Neree has been a support person for me throughout the years and someone who I confided with. Especially in the early years, I think he was like my second psychiatrist, without asking me for my medicare number. So that’s how the marriage of academic expertise with street-level experience, getting together and creating ideas, attempting to change and transform people’s convictions on mental health.