Defining Moment

January 1, 2001 By Marion Banzhaf

In 1989, the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) definition of AIDS included only certain opportunistic infections (OIs) -- a list developed through studying those first hit: gay men. Of course, women, people of color and IV-drug users were also dying -- but from other HIV-related killers such as bacterial pneumonia, pelvic inflammatory disease, TB. Lacking an AIDS diagnosis, many couldn't get benefits, decent care or entry to clinical trials. They not only died faster, but their deaths weren't even counted as AIDS stats. ACT UP joined with AIDS service providers nationwide to launch a campaign of speak-outs and sit-ins calling on the government to add a dozen new OIs to the definition. We put on our **Women Don't Get AIDS, We Just Die From It** t-shirts and marched -- for the next three years. Working at the New Jersey Women and AIDS Network, I loved and grieved over women who died of AIDS without having the CDC's version. Katrina Haslip had not-AIDS AIDS. In 1990 she was released from Bedford Hills, New York, women's prison, where she had helped found the groundbreaking peer-advocacy organization ACE (AIDS Counseling and Education). As her body wasted, Haslip focused her clear, hot energy on fighting for a new definition of AIDS. I remember her at the center of a demo in Washington, DC, calling out the names of her many friends who had died bereft of a diagnosis. We all knew she'd join that group, and on December 2, 1992, she did. Three weeks later, New Years Day 1993, the CDC finally reported that it would expand the definition -- then postponed it again, until April 1. The irony was not lost on HIVers. "April Fools," the late novelist David Feinberg wrote in a column to mark the day, "I've got AIDS!"

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