Mourning Star

There is a light and it never goes out

July 1, 1998 By Shawn Decker

Keith Christopher's passing last February called to mind a host of memories: Keith dancing in The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas, Keith singing with fellow PWA Michael Callen, Keith bringing AIDS into living rooms through his roles in the soap operas Another World and Guiding Light. Now, take another look at the profile of Keith in the March POZ—still on newsstands at the time of his death—and the phrase "He switched from saquinavir to ritonavir to Crixivan before near-fatal side effects convinced him to cease all antiretrovirals" leaps out. Keith, 40, valued quality of life over mere survival, and died with his premier CD, The Naked Truth, a chronicle of his 16 years with HIV, just short of completion. A taste of Truth is on The Daniel Murphy Project, a benefit CD produced by POZ columnist Shawn Decker. We asked Decker to discuss their collaboration and pay tribute to his friend.

Keith is the first person I've lost to AIDS, though in the past two years I've made so many friends with HIV that I'm lucky I haven't lost more. I met him about a year ago, after he contributed to The Daniel Murphy Project. The song that hooked me into his music was "Pieces of Lives": "These are more than pieces of lives, more than memories left behind/We cannot mend what's been so torn apart, but we can embrace each man and each man's heart."

We met to discuss the project, but we ended up sharing our life stories instead. A seasoned professional, Keith no doubt knew that I was clueless in playing "producer," but he never showed it.

I noticed that Keith was tiring of fighting AIDS. But he never gave up on trying to reach others through his art. That's why he stuck with the benefit CD project—he certainly had nothing to gain monetarily.

The last time we spoke was the night he got the finished product. He called me, furious that he was represented by an unfinished song. I was stunned. The simple truth is, we received the wrong tapes, but he didn't know that at the time. He was pissed at me, but never brutal. He could have been; he wasn't.

Later I sent him an e-mail apologizing for the mixup. He responded in kind: "Thanks for your e-mail…Please accept my apologies if I said anything last Monday night that upset or hurt you…I

think we both realize that life is way too short to harbor ill feelings."

Growing up with HIV, I learned to never leave a friendship on the rocks. All I can say is that I'll miss Keith.

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