RPF

When is enough enough?

October 1, 1994 By Richard Perez-Feria

We all know the drill. *When did it happen? When is the service? I know, I can't believe it, either.* Everything we say when someone passes is so meaningless and hollow; yet, what can we say, really? Do we ever say how unbelievably angry we are? Do we ever say how frustrated and guilty and sad we feel? Do we ever, ever say what we really think? Of course not. That wouldn't be polite. And as Americans, we are nothing if not polite, particularly in matters of death and disease.

In the course of four days recently I lost three people I knew to AIDS. Three people. People I shared secrets with. People who helped me and made me laugh -- often. People who swore that they loved me and I them. How many stories of fallen heroes must we retell before everybody else out there, way out there -- parents, employers, next-door neighbors -- listens to us?

Fessing up, I have never been affiliated with no-holds-barred activism of any kind. As a Cuban-American raised in the super-charged, politically volatile community that is Miami, I have, as a matter of public record, aggressively stayed far away from the frighteningly jingoistic and frequently neo-Fascistic debates that have enraged that city since the 70s. When it came to AIDS, however, the question was recently put to me: "When, Richard, is enough enough?"

Indeed, how many more people in my life had to die before I pulled in the reins and took a clear, hard look at what I was doing on a personal level to help end this pandemic? A tough question. Was I doing everything I could do to help stop the spread of this senseless killer? No, I was not.

By putting all of my creative energies into *POZ*, I initially thought I could simultaneously satisfy my creative urges as well as do something constructive and real about AIDS. And to a large extent that goal has been met. But being editor of a national AIDS magazine did not soften the pain I felt last week when my friends died. It did not alleviate my sorrow. It did not stop my blinding anger. Luckily for my co-workers and friends, I have made a career out of disguising my feelings. No one truly knows how I feel about matters of the heart. But I know. I know.

I can only hope that the next time someone calls to tell me another beautiful person I knew and loved has died of AIDS, I have the simple courage to confront my pain. We just can't stop fighting and we can't stop feeling now, can we? We've come so far already but, of course, we have got to do more, lots more. We have to openly, intelligently, incessantly talk about AIDS with *them* --

those people we all deal with who do not know and do not care about AIDS because, they say, AIDS doesn’t affect them directly. Every single day, we must use the word AIDS in a sentence to someone new. Can you imagine the discussion that would spur?

When we begin to accept a PWA’s death as just another fact of life, we throw in the towel in the fight we’re all in. You and I, bound together by a shared desire for awareness, compassion and action on AIDS, remain the good guys in these harrowing times so rife with frustration and angst.

So, what to do? All we’ve got to do -- and do it every single day -- is tell the world how we feel about AIDS, unedited. Our dignity -- and our very lives -- may well depend on it. Haven’t you had enough?

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