La Quinceañera de Allgo

November 1, 2000 By Joe Jimenez

The Austin Latino/Latina Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Organization (ALLGO) is celebrating *la quinceñara*, 15 years of struggle, of *lucha*, and in honoring their work -- our work -- my mind keeps returning to 1985. But I do not remember the year -- I was born in 1976 -- and I find it unwise to imagine a truth through my eyes alone, whose cells survive with AZT and protease. My urgency to know comes not from seeing my friends and lovers and tricks die off, but from seeing a new generation accumulate like special collections of new infections.

Sometimes I think that if I could capture the fears of that time -- the blistering necessity of fighting to live, fighting because extinction has far exceeded the realm of threat, fighting because AIDS is genocide inasmuch as HIV is our contemporary queer inheritance -- and mix them with the ashes of silence and death and the forgotten that is my world, I might organize harder. Maybe my generation would look to the past in order to construct our future.

I know it's impossible to touch 15 years of living without stroking so many years of death. How many of those who worked with ALLGO are no longer here? It's like trying to imagine a revolution without ever having known freedom. What is that *extraño*, yearning -- like when I don't really know what it is I am missing? The cultural critic Gloría Anzaldúa writes of the border between the United States and México as *una herida abierta*, an open wound, and I think of this as I listen to our *veteranas/os*: "Our gay and lesbian Latina/o community has been devastated by HIV." So much *lucha*, so much loss. I remember those words, place them in the pocket of my mouth and let them lie beneath my tongue. It is this wound that moves me to admire and love and yearn for the arms and lips and *pechos* of my older Chicano brothers, that moves me to document our lives through the spoken and written word.

I don't know how many people we have lost since '85, their names or their faces. But I know they were there. And I know that shame and silence have buried them because families must retain good names, untarnished by the faggot red mark of AIDS. I miss their guidance. Their life knowledge, their strategies for survival and pleasure amidst an epidemic of exile and decimation, amidst white gay male consumption of limited resources, amidst dying, memory and inevitability.

I count seven of my closest friends -- all queer, Latino, under 25 -- and write each name on a *quinceñara* invitation using ink dots of genetic connection, infection and cum. In seven years, it's likely I won't be able to invite my closest friends to dinner. And I wonder if 15 years from now we will be unremembered. I'm thinking of José Esteban Muñoz's words: "We do not know ourselves,

our passions, our drives, our beauty and our power until we establish contact with each other.” I’m thinking that there’s a lot of contact we won’t have. I’m thinking there’s a lot of knowing we won’t know.

What do I make of this? I use this *extraño* to better understand the distance between my generation and those who came before. Like other HIV *gente*, I find death in life, I swallow, and my body reconstitutes itself.

And this is our task, I believe -- to journey to the past in order to survive the future, to resurrect the ancient in order to recreate the modern. We are here to breathe those beautiful moments when we meet in the world of survival and shared history. It’s about embracing the living, the dead, and the effort to regenerate ourselves. It’s desire, papa -- to live and survive pleasurably, *con ganas*, to be one of the biggest, baddest, fiercest *jotas* Aztlán has ever seen, and to never, never forget. That, I believe, is our project.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/la-quinceanera-de-allgo