



Larry Kramer, the Iconic AIDS Activist, Remembered at Memorial Service

Speakers, including Anthony Fauci, MD, recall the highs and lows of working with HIV activist and author Larry Kramer, who died in 2020.

July 6, 2023 By Laura Schmidt

A memorial held for [Larry Kramer](#) brought together friends and loved ones to remember the late AIDS activist, playwright and author, who had died in May 2020 at age 84. (Kramer was a [long-term survivor](#) of [HIV](#) who also had a liver transplant, but the cause of death was pneumonia.)

People gathered at the Lucille Lortel Theater June 26 to remember the life of Kramer, who fought against discrimination and defined his life as an activist. A cofounder of Gay Men's Health Crisis (now referred to as [GMHC](#)) and the activist group [ACT UP](#) New York, Kramer also wrote the 1978 novel *Faggots* and the influential 1985 AIDS play *The Normal Heart*, which also became a 2014 HBO movie.

Fittingly, the memorial service included its own Playbill:

The memorial kicked off with an excerpt from *Larry Kramer in Love and Anger*, an HBO documentary about his life, according to [the New York Times](#). Speakers, including activist [Peter Staley](#), who helped organize the event, took turns sharing memories and stories about Kramer. [Anthony Fauci, MD](#), who led the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease from 1984 to 2022, spoke fondly about their tumultuous relationship that turned into a lifelong friendship.

Fauci said Kramer's actions and decisions as an activist were marked by "confrontation, outrageous behavior and insults" that were accompanied with "insights, rationality, sensitivity, vulnerability, empathy and even humor." Fauci added that these actions were a result of an "unselfish goal" intended for the betterment of the gay community.

Fauci shared his thoughts with a wider audience in a guest essay published in the Times on July 4 titled "Anthony Fauci on Larry Kramer and Loving Difficult People." Fauci wrote in part:

"Larry was the initial driving force that changed forever the relationship between the advocacy community and the scientific and regulatory establishment. Larry was the battering ram who

not only opened the door for his younger acolytes to participate in the formulation and implementation of the scientific and regulatory agenda of H.I.V./AIDS; he crashed it down. Along the way, Larry and I developed, as he often described it, a ‘complex relationship’....

“As we got to know each other better over the years, it became clear to me that despite his confrontational behavior, Larry had a pure, simple and unselfish goal — there were no hidden agendas with Larry. His passion was pure and his commitment unflinching in his attempts to jar people into realization of the seriousness of the AIDS epidemic. I quickly realized that despite his sometimes provocative behavior, he was as noble as the most respected scientist and public servant. And so we became brothers in arms.”

In 1982, Kramer cofounded Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC) to address this new health crisis. But Kramer butted heads with GMHC and was ousted from the group. In 1987, he cofounded the impactful organization ACT UP.

“We lost count of how many times he resigned from ACT UP over truly petty stuff,” Staley recalled during the memorial. “Yet all of this was family feuding. We loved him.”

For a collection of POZ articles about Kramer’s life and legacy, including numerous POZ cover stories—click [#Larry Kramer](#), where you’ll also find [his obituary](#).