R.I.P. Ganga Stone, Who Fed People Living With AIDS and Cofounded GLWD

Watch Ganga Stone explain the history of God's Love We Deliver and the need to provide meals to people with AIDS. [VIDEOS]

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Ganga Stone, who cofounded God's Love We Deliver (GLWD) in 1986 to provide meals to homebound people with AIDS, died June 2, 2021, at age 79.

According to The New York Times, the cause of death has not been determined.

"Ganga's vision changed New York City," noted a remembrance the organization posted on GLWD.org. "Through the efforts of Ganga and those of her co-founder Jane Best, people who had been starving, shunned, isolated, and alone now had a delicious, nutritious meal brought to them by a caring volunteer. Ganga and God's Love We Deliver immediately relieved the suffering of so many, simply by recognizing that being sick and hungry is a crisis that demands an urgent response."

Today, GLWD continues the work Stone and Best started. It provides nearly 2.5 million meals each year to about 10,000 people with chronic illnesses, including AIDS. What's more, the meals are medically tailored to meet the needs of the individuals and their illnesses.

The video below includes tributes to Stone, along with inspiring and heartfelt tales.

"Ganga was fearless in her vision for a better New York City, with caring New Yorkers giving their time, love and energy," GLWD's president and CEO, Karen Pearl, said in a statement. "I delighted in her stories and in her unwavering belief in the triumph of human compassion and the joy of service. We are honored to continue her legacy of life-saving work for everyone who needs God's Love We Deliver."

This chapter of AIDS history started in 1985, when Stone, then a hospice volunteer, visited Richard Sale, a man living AIDS who she learned was too ill to prepare his own meals. She decided to provide one for him, one that was high in calories and protein because Sale was suffering from wasting. As the GLWD history tells it, "She researched his needs and was on her way again, with a new meal in hand, when she was stopped by a minister in the neighborhood who recognized her.

He asked what she was doing, she told him, and he replied, ‘You’re not just delivering food…you’re delivering God’s love.’

“And Ganga said, ‘That’s the name.’ And God’s Love We Deliver was born.”

Below is a 1991 video profiling the work of GLWD and Ganga Stone. Visit the organization’s website for more history and videos.

Also in the early 1980s, Stone began clipping newspaper articles about AIDS and quickly realized the severity of the developing epidemic: that young gay people were dying, and their friends who could help them were also dying, and that many of them had no religious affiliation or family they could rely on for help.

In the organization’s first year, 400 clients died, according to the Times.

At first, the organization coordinated with restaurants, helping people with AIDS order from specific menus and then delivering the orders. By 1987, the group operated a kitchen in a Presbyterian church and delivered 50 meals a day. Fast-forward to 2015, when the organization moved into its current home, the Michael Kors Building in SoHo, where it operates a 9,600-square-foot kitchen.

Over the years, numerous celebrities have joined the GLWD cause, raising funds and awareness, and well over 10,000 people have volunteered at the organization. One of the most high-profile was beloved comedian Joan Rivers.

“It’s not even the meals—it’s the contact,” noted Rivers, in a video lauding the organization. “Whenever I go to deliver a meal, I spend at least half an hour in that person’s house. It’s so much more than ‘Ding-dong, here’s your meal.’ It’s ‘Ding-dong. I come in, and we talk, and we have a visit.”

Stone’s birth name was Ingrid Hedley Stone, reports the Times. She was born in Manhattan and raised in Long Island City, Queens, and the Bronx. Stone identified as a radical feminist, and in the mid-1970s, she spent two years at the ashram retreat of Swami Muktananda, who named her Ganga, after the Ganges River. She’s survived by a daughter, son and sister.

For a collection of POZ articles about God’s Love We Deliver, click #GLWD and #God’s Love We Deliver. You’ll find stories such as “Delivering Medically Tailored Meals to New Yorkers With HIV,” about a 2020 partnership with Amida Care.

In related news, see “GMHC and DoorDash Unite to Provide Food and Jobs to New Yorkers With HIV.”

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