Dennis deLeon: In His Own Words

December 16, 2009 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

Dennis deLeon, president of the Latino Commission on AIDS, died of heart failure December 14, 2009. He was 61. I had the honor of knowing Dennis, if only professionally.

I met him a few times while I worked at *LGNY* (a now-defunct LGBT weekly newspaper in New York City reborn as *Gay City News*) and reconnected when I started working at *POZ*.

The reaction from the HIV/AIDS community to his death has been overwhelmingly supportive. In particular, *POZ* founder Sean Strub wrote a touching memorial.

In 1998 and 1999, Dennis wrote three first-person stories for *POZ* on his views on living with HIV. Sharing his stories, in his own words, is the best tribute I can make for Dennis.

May 1998 - "Life: Good Pill Hunting"

These past years when there was no hope, meds were like life rafts on the Titanic. But after being sweet-talked into believing that protease combos are a path to the future, I have come to learn that this new car may break down in the middle of a desert ...

The clear-minded Dennis knows that we're at the iron-lung stage of HIV, subjecting our bodies to heavy-handed therapies while awaiting a Jonas Salk. The good, grateful, nonwhiny Dennis knows that he wouldn't be around to taste his mother's *huevos rancheros* without

the new treatments.

July 1998 - "In the Blood"

And because my tenacity in fighting HIV is learned from [my mother], I want to help her to see the hope that comes from speaking your mind, challenging medical authorities ... I want to remind her how to kick ass.

March 1999 - "Life After Legacy"

Before AIDS, I was one of the world's many lawyer-careerists extraordinaire, always building that résumé for the future and never burning a bridge. I relished making money and playing a lawyer's behind-the-scenes role as much as I did giving advice to clients.

All of this changed when I tested positive in 1986. While I had many reactions, one main concern shifted to leaving a legacy ... As I eventually came to understand, it's not how many clippings you accumulate, but how many lives you touch.

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