Dia de los Muertos

November 1, 2016 By Shawn Decker

Today is Dia de los Muertos, the Mexican holiday where families gather to remember those they have lost. One of the biggest tragedies in the AIDS community over the last three decades has been the unnecessary shame heaped on families who have lost someone to HIV/AIDS. Many times the death of someone who lived with HIV is spoken of rarely, or in some kind of impersonal code; as if the life of that person is somehow of less value because of the medical circumstances of their passing.

Many who are living with HIV don't feel comfortable confiding in their families, for fear of rejection. In this day and age, for those with access to modern treatment, the prospect of carrying a lifelong secret can be quite the burden. And I think that those who are unable to confide in their friends and family are way more likely to skip doses and miss doctor's appointments, thus giving HIV the opening it needs to negatively affect one's health.

So what is the AIDS community to do on Dia de los Muertos? I think the answer is simple: we must celebrate the passing of the millions we never met. Those whose families were and still are too afraid to acknowledge their memory. We should let their spirits know that we care. And even though they may not have experienced the love and care needed while among the living that, in death and beyond, their memories are properly honored and any residual pain, embarrassment or shame is no longer a burden on their souls.

Positively Yours,

Shawn

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.