



Dr. Lyman Fisher: A Fallen Friend...

May 10, 2007 By [Shawn Decker](#)

It seems like it's been nothing but bad people news as of late. Not news about bad people, like Paris going to jail (the only news that has softened the blow of Sanjaya's defeat), but news that is bad in regard to people I actually care about.

A couple of weeks ago I posted about my friend, Jordan, whom I saw about a month ago at Cheeseburger in Paradise. He was the picture of health, we were laughing and having a good time, and now after a serious car accident he's lucky to be alive, and has a long road to recovery ahead of him.

But he's alive, and that's the good news.

Today, one of our best friends is about to lose her sister to cancer after many weeks, months, and years of up-and-down news. Life and death is all a very natural cycle, but it's unnatural how much death and saddening news can be squeezed into a short period of time.

Last weekend, Dr. Lyman, my childhood doctor, passed to spirit. When I got to know him, I was just a recently diagnosed-with-HIV kid with no interest in acknowledging his HIV status. I hated going to the doctor's appointments to see him every three months, and wanted to be anywhere in the world besides there, having blood drawn to see how quickly or slowly the virus was killing me.

Of course, from his point of view, he was just monitoring my health to make sure we were on top of things, any little thing we could do. "You need to eat better," he'd tell me, one of the only lines of defense at our disposal then. I'd say yes, and then go home and head to 7-11 for a slice of pizza, a cherry Slurpee and a Boston Creme-filled eclair.

Dr. Lyman is a hero. He was a hemophilia specialist who became an HIV/AIDS specialist by default when all of his patients contracted HIV in the 1980's. He bravely advocated for the rights of people with HIV to have children through a safe, medical process in a time when he was putting his job on the line to do so. He was tireless in his efforts.

Not only that, he went the extra step. I received dozens of postcards from him when he'd travel around to the big cities? which I never thought I would or wanted to see? to attend conferences in attempt to glean any hope that he could bring back to his patients.

The last time I saw him was in 1999, right around the time I was diagnosed with AIDS. He was retiring, which seemed funny since he never slowed down to even take a breath, unless it was that of his patients. I'd gotten updates on Dr. Lyman over the last few years, he was sorry to miss my wedding in 2004 on the account of his own health issues, a strange turnaround in our patient/doctor relationship.

Earlier today I spoke with his wife. Lyman had been a bit out of it over the last few months, he was more than ready for his journey to wherever we go when our work here is done. I was disappointed that I didn't make time to see him, or that he didn't get a chance to see the book.

Then Gwen (his wife's name is Gwen, how about that?) told me that the night before he passed, a local hemophilia society visited to present him with a plaque in honor of his service to the community. They'd found out about Dr. Lyman from reading *My Pet Virus*, so they looked him up and discovered all he'd done for the community over the last two decades and wanted to give something back.

My last memory of Lyman isn't of that doctor's appointment in 1999, it's the phone call I made to him in 1996, informing him that I was going public with my status. He was surprised and thrilled for me: finally he could send me some information, knowing I'd actually read it this time.

And now, as it turns out, I'm going to be out of town for his memorial service, because it's the same evening that Gwenn and I are in NYC hosting a benefit for the AIDS Walk. I told his wife on the phone, "I don't talk to Lyman for years and years as his patient, avoiding the topic of HIV and AIDS. And now, I miss his service because I'm somewhere else talking about AIDS!"

She thought he'd find that funny. And so do I.

Positively Yours,
Shawn