Five Questions for Stuart @theaidsmemorial

His Kind magazine interviewed me about the Instagram account. Here's an excerpt.

November 6, 2017 By Stuart @theaidsmemorial

People who follow my The AIDS Memorial account on Instagram often want to know more about me. Although I'm reluctant to make myself part of the story, I will direct you to this interview I recently did with His Kind magazine. Below is a slightly trimmed and edited excerpt from the interview, which might answer many of your questions. Check out the full interview for much more.

First off, why did you start The AIDS Memorial Instagram, and what has been the driving force behind it?

I wanted to document these incredible stories that I had read about for many years. Not enough people talk about the history of AIDS, the deaths, and the impact on those left behind. So many people have passed away and have been forgotten. There are varying reasons why. Some reasons I get. Others are just excuses. Who really wants to revisit the pain by raking up the past? AIDS was a taboo subject matter and sadly still is. It has always struck me how many accounts that relate to AIDS don't actually remember the fallen in some form or if they do they're celebrity driven…. History doesn't record itself, and I feel a sense of duty to make that happen in some way. The account is a reminder to remember not just those who have passed but also those left behind.

Can you tell us a bit more about yourself?

I get asked this a lot. My name is Stuart and I live in Scotland. I don't think it's particularly relevant to know who I am. The account is not about me. I think that's probably a Scottish trait. We don't like to make a show. I'm not comfortable with attention. It's also interesting to find how people interact with me without knowing who I actually am. I have been criticised for this. I have been told that not showing my face causes some to be skeptical, cautious or even reluctant to submit a post. Why? I'm not trying to sell you 100% Natural Activated Charcoal Face Masks or Teeth Whitening Kits. But anyway, Instagram tends to be an illusion of sorts. I'm more real than some of the slactivists you will find on Instagram.

A screengrab from HisKind.com

What was it like to live through the height of the epidemic, and how did this impact your choice to run this project?

I was a kid in the 1980s. I was raised a Catholic. I didn't know much about sex, let alone gay sex. I remember a relative who worked in an AIDS ward warning my cousins about unsafe sex. I found this confusing and embarrassing. Then I remember adverts on TV commissioned by the government which were designed to scare the crap out you — and they did. I remember how the gays were vilified even more. I felt doomed, and along with Catholic guilt and AIDS, this made it even more difficult for me to come out of the closet. When I did come out, I still did not want to know about AIDS. I switched off. I wanted to be detached from it. I was scared that it would happen to me. I'd change the conversation when AIDS cropped up. I turned the page when I saw an obituary. Switched TV channels. It was too depressing. I was young. No one was going to burst my bubble. This Instagram account has helped me understand the subject of AIDS more than I could ever have imagined.

What's the general level of submissions, and what's the process of submitting a story?

There isn't a day that goes by when there isn't a story to share. What is featured so far on The AIDS Memorial is just the tip of an iceberg. I don't set limits on posts, meaning that I will feature a loved one over and over again. Instagram limits each post to about 400 characters, and sometimes I have to edit, which I hate to do as I never want to take anything away from these tributes. I can be emailed at theaidsmemorial@yahoo.com, the maximum word count is 400 words, minimum of 1 photo and maximum of 10. You don't need to be a wordsmith either. Just a few lines or words will suffice… It's really that simple.

Are there any submissions that have really stayed with you?

I usually say I can’t pick one. I mean that. However I want to point out these posts. Totally broke my heart. He died recently. The posts speak for themselves:

. . “My brother #GeraldJoyce lost his life to AIDS at the age of 43, February 10, 2017, my youngest sons 18th birthday. Gerald was an Interior Designer as well as a Wedding Coordinator. He brought a smile and laughter to all who knew him. Gerald had told us he had stage 3 lung cancer, 11 days later he went missing and was

found 11 days later in a hospital in Nashville TN. That is how we found out about his horrific illness. . Gerald never told anyone, he always lived away from us in the city, New Orleans, Indianapolis etc. He chose to not tell anyone, I can only assume from shame, stigma and stereotyping. I would have bent over backwards a million times to have helped him get the treatment he needed. I would have moved to be closer to him, I would have gave anything in my life to have known. Gerald went through hell for 16 months pure and absolute hell from this disease. He had AIDS dementia as well. He had told us he had stage 3 lung cancer. We believed him. He had lost 80 lbs. And couldn't even eat. His entire story is unbelievable . Doctors tried to help him for 2 and a half months. Ultimately he was placed on Hospice close to his family in a nursing home. AIDS had affected his mind and his body. For 16 months he fought and never complained as we watched him waste away, he couldn't eat, he would throw up, it was horrific. I thank God every day for our dad who stayed by his side through it all. . Gerald became bedfast, in the end it was me, his sister who was holding his hand when he took his last breath. Our world is so much darker without him. We miss him more each day. We honor his memory and we ask that each individual person please get tested for HIV." - by Karen Helmandollar @karen_hel . {Swipe to see multiple photographs} . #whatisrememberedlives #theaidsmemorial #aidsmemorial #endaids #neverforget #endhivstigma #stigmakills #UequalsU #FactsNotFear #ScienceNotStigma #CantPassitOn #ProtectOurCare #HIVResists ????

THEAIDSMEMORIAL@YAHOO.COM

A post shared by THE A I D S M E M O R I A L (@theaidsmemorial) on Jul 6, 2017 at 10:23am PDT

“I wish we had known he was so sick. We went to visit him 10-18-15 in Nashville. We lived 6.5 hours away. He was so skinny but in his right mind with the exception of him asking where my husband went. I said ”Gerald he didn’t come!“ and he laughed because he was always joking. . He told us the following Monday he was to see a lung specialist. When I texted him he said ”yes they are going to start me on a clinical trial for stage 3 lung cancer.“ . On Oct 29th 2015 he quit responding. . On November 2nd, my father drove to Nashville and found his car gone but every light and TV in the house on. We assumed he had went out of

town to do a wedding. 3 days later my son and father returned to his home in Nashville, no car, all lights and TV blaring but this time they took the police and busted through the door. They found his cell phone dead on his nightstand. . My father filed a missing persons report. The police said ”...he is an adult he doesn’t have to tell you where he is going.“ My dad said ”...he is sick.“ They assured him no local hospitals had him. . November 9th 2015, I get a call at work from the Skyline Medical in Nashville ”Maam we saw your Facebook page. We have your brother here.“ I had started a Facebook page called ’Help us find Gerald’ with all my contact information. Thank God I did. . When we got there the nurse explained that he was getting HIV medication. We were numb. Gerald was in the fetal position in bed and barely knew us. That is when our long journey began. 11-9-15. Little did we know Gerald had full blown AIDS. . My brother #GeraldJoyce lost his life to AIDS at the age of 43 on February 10, 2017” - by Karen Helmandollar @karen_hel . #whatisrememberedlives #theaidsmemorial #aidsmemorial #endaids #neverforget #endhivstigma #stigmakills #UequalsU #FactsNotFear #ScienceNotStigma ????THEAIDSMEMORIAL@YAHOO.com

A post shared by THE A I D S M E M O R I A L (@theaidsmemorial) on Jul 8, 2017 at 7:23am PDT

Be sure to read the full interview with me on HisKind.com.

You can follow The AIDS Memorial Instagram account here.

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