



Good Night Alice

June 14, 2009 By [Richard Ferri, PhD, ANP](#)

Alice Foley is dead and I am not feeling so great myself.

Alice Foley MSN, RN died recently in Provincetown. Alice was one of the early and brave pioneers in the AIDS epidemic. She was also a pain in the ass. I am sure half of the people that showed up for her memorial service where there just to make sure there was a body to put in ground. Some were just baffled. Others truly saddened. I had always assume that I would show just to make sure it was not a ruse, but I actually was rather taken back and sad when I heard Alice Foley had died.

I was out of town for the service and amazingly regretted it. Alice and I did not get along. In fact, there were times we treated each other hatefully. A line was drawn in the sand between us and neither one of us really cared about erasing it.

So when I read that Alice died I very surprised at my feelings since there was actually some sorrow. In fact, truth be told - more than I could have anticipated.

Very few people would deny that Alice was "difficult", and at times, just plain old mean. For very strange and convoluted reasons Alice and I simply did not get along. She always thought I was somehow out to take her place. After all, we were both well known AIDS nurses who came to up to bat before there was a name for this damn virus. While I played the Washington DC game and helped convinced Congress that AIDS was real and going to need long term financial support Alice was creating one of the first AIDS support groups in the country. It was a remarkable achievement.

Alice was also a wonderfully imperfect person who was one of the first people - one of the first nurses - in the world to take on the AIDS epidemic with her sleeves literally rolled up. She got her hands dirty when most people were fearful of touching someone with AIDS. She took a ton of bullshit from people she did not have to in the beginning of epidemic. All she did she did mainly on her own, and that is where the rub came in. Alice did remarkable things, but she also had an ego that danced with demons far too long and far too public.

I think I am very much like Alice Foley. At least I hope I am. I never thought I would write those words.

However, reality sometimes transcends even death. But if you think I am going to share some "touching" stories about Alice you are wrong. Her work speaks for itself. I am here to say that Alice, like many other pioneers, was hard to work with and was often disliked. She annoyed people to the point of fraying their nerves into splinters of glass. Toward the end of her career she faced a very public and brutal dismissal from the support group she helped create. It then became "fair" sport to "Alice-bash". I was a chief culprit of this crime and I am sorry. As the saying goes it is not always what you say but how you say it that matters, and I most assuredly fucked up. You see, I too am very much like Alice Foley. I get annoyed and pissed and hurt. I feel I have been treated "badly" by the very AIDS organization I essentially resuscitated

for 10 long years at my own emotional, financial, and spiritual expense.

But guess what? Big fucking deal. I am the old guard and Alice's death has wonderfully reminded me of that. I need to find the grace and dignity to sit down, shut up, and let a new generation lead. I have no idea how I am going to do this, but I know I must. For a while I was pondering my "next move". Now I am hoping to just shut up. (Or don't get me wrong. Shutting up on printed page will never happen. However, shutting up like a wise parent has to happen.)

So whatever is next is next. I am beginning to learn that again. And after all is said and done I suppose the only thing left to say is: good night Alice, and please keep a spot open for me next to you.

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