Goodbye, Barton (November 16, 1942 - May 30, 2012)

May 31, 2012 By Shawn Decker

I was sitting in my gaming chair this evening, getting ready for "battle" when I heard Gwenn gasp. "Who died?" I asked, half-expecting to hear some other type of information or, at worst, the name of a random celebrity who had actually passed. Gwenn clicked a couple of more times on the laptop and then said, "Barton."

My heart sank.

Barton Lidice Benes was an invaluable member of the AIDS community and, well, the community at large. I met him through Sean Strub- and if you want to meet Barton I highly suggest that you get to know him a little bit through Sean's written word on his blog entry dedicated to the memory of his great friend. Barton challenged the art world by creating a series of works entitled "Lethal Weapons" because the pieces included his own HIV positive blood. I'll never forget his support of my own art- my music- and how he let me use an incredible image of a squirt gun shooting his blood as a CD cover. Years later, when Gwenn and I got married, a package arrived in the mail a couple of weeks later. It was a red squirt gun shooting his blood, immaculately framed in the same way he framed much of his work. It was instantly my favorite gift in recent memory.

And still is.

He was a loving soul. I remember, years ago, having a white russian with him in his apartment. It must have been 2 pm in the afternoon. I'd never had a drink in the afternoon before. When I played a show in New York City two years ago, and once again used his artwork for the cover image of the CD, I wanted to drop one off for him but he was struggling with his health so I didn't want to impose. I don't regret not pressing the issue, as a friend I wanted to let him rest- but I do hate that his final years were inhibited by the cruelty of a body that turns on its host. In his case, it was his kidneys. He also had problems with his lungs. When I think of Barton, though, I don't think of his failing kidneys, lungs or even his HIV status. I think of his kind heart.

His beautiful heart.

You will be missed, Barton. The next time I have a white russian, you will be toasted my friend.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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