My Last World AIDS Day

Five reasons I no longer recognize World AIDS Day.

December 8, 2017 By Aundaray Guess

This year I didn't recognize World AIDS Day. Instead of tying a red ribbon to my shirt and creating 'awareness" I decided I would no longer participate in something that seems to be a hollow acknowledgement from those not living with the disease. In fact, it's even got to the point when several friends sent me a Facebook post wishing me a "Happy World AIDS Day". Almost as if they were saying Merry Christmas. So I may be a Scrooge when I say this but I pulled myself out of observing December 1st.

Now before people think I hit my head or something I'll give five good reasons why I feel the way I do about World AIDS Day and my boycotting of the day.

1. The day is treated like Christmas. Red ribbons are displayed and small parties are held with invited speakers to either remind people of HIV or share their stories. After the free cookies are gone and the panelist/speaker has said there last, everyone goes back to their lives of being HIV negative. In fact many as they leave the event take off their red ribbon even before they get back outside. And the next day it's almost as if the event has never happened. While those who live with HIV go back to dealing with this diseases. Many do it alone. We don't have the luxury of taking our red ribbon off as we have daily reminders of what it means to have HIV.

2. My remembrance of friends and family loss to this disease doesn't just happen on this day. I've been lighting a candle literally and figuratively since the day they passed. I no longer need an audience to call out their name or reflect the impact they've had on my life. I don't need a date to circle on my calendar to have me think of the loss I've experienced. I see the empty spaces every time I close my eyes and think of their absence.

3. I don't want to sit before a panel of HIV negative people to hear their viewpoint of the disease. It seems the last few years I have stepped outside my comfort zone and attended World AIDS Day event and if there are speakers, most are negative and maybe one or two positive people thrown on the schedule. And it seems like the invited panelists are either someone from the medical profession, a pastor from a church to remind us that not all churches stigmatizes those with HIV, and a community member who you only seem to see when it's public events and not in the actual community. I want to hear more from my brothers and sisters living with this disease. And no offense to the youth but a realization that those over 50 are also bearing this bitter fruit. So where are our voices?

4. Why do I have to stop and recognize HIV on that day when the world doesn't. In many spaces those living with HIV are still stigmatize and made to feel like the others. Even in the gay community itself, I'm sure no one edited their online dating profile to say "today I don't mind hooking up with someone not clean" as that word and others still proliferate our LGBT vernacular to let those living with HIV, you're not wanted. Yet those same dating apps will have a banner recognizing World AIDS Day sprawled across the screen.

5. The value of the day is raising awareness which is great but awareness is something that should be a yearlong endeavor. And as stated before, World AIDS Day also remembers those taken from us. Yet between each, those living with HIV are ironically forgotten on that day. Why isn't there space to call out my name while I'm here and can appreciate the love instead of waiting until I past. Why not an acknowledgement of my persistent efforts to remain healthy as I deal each day with this disease. The pills don't take themselves. Why not highlight the inequality in HIV medication and warriors who have to fight pharmaceutical companies to not force them into mail order prescription plans or keeping medication affordable. Or if we're lighting a candle, how about to those dying alone in hospices or simply dying alone. I can list more but my point is clear.

World AIDS Day had a purpose when it was first initiated but over time has been treated like another holiday on the calendar. And similar to when Pride festivals used to recognize the struggles of the LGBT movement, it has been co-opted to now have a different meaning. A meaning which seems to me has lost its purpose. So that is why I am boycotting World AIDS Day.

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