LGBT Media on Death of Elizabeth Taylor

May 27, 2011 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

A recent article in Press Pass Q ("a newsletter and trade publication for the LGBT media professional") raised an interesting question:

When a straight celebrity ally of the LGBT community dies, is that "gay news"? In the case of Elizabeth Taylor, editors and publisher of LGBT publications voiced a resounding yes.

And yet, coverage of Elizabeth Taylor's March 23 death from congestive heart failure at the age of 79 varied in LGBT outlets. Some publications considered it a national front-page story. Other outlets paid tribute on the arts pages. Some contributors offered a personal take, with news editors looking for a distinctly local angle.

"I don't think there's any doubt she had an impact in the LGBT world," said Tracy Baim, publisher and

executive editor of Chicago's Windy City Times. "Even before the AIDS epidemic Taylor was iconic in the community for her life and tragedies. So in the old-school way of thinking of divas, she would be important for us to cover. But separate from that, her work on AIDS definitely put her death at the level of doing a large tribute to her."

Besides a news story, Windy City Times, for its "AIDS @ 30" series, ran an interview with Taylor, originally published in the November 1997 edition of POZ, a national magazine on HIV/AIDS issues.

The article includes comments from editors at the Bay Area Reporter, Frontiers and the Washington Blade, as well as details on how several other LGBT media outlets handled the coverage.

The article also sheds light on how Taylor and the LGBT media helped each other:

Inadvertently, Elizabeth Taylor may also have helped to raise the credibility and visibility of gay media.

Veteran journalist Lisa Keen, editor of the Blade during the 1980s, recalls Taylor's invitation then to be a guest

speaker at the National Press Club. Although Keen was a club member, “No one from the Blade had ever been offered the privilege of attending a pre-speech reception for a speaker,” she said.

The Press Club, however, invited Keen as Blade editor not only to attend the reception, but also to sit at the head table during Taylor’s appearance.

“I am sure that she had nothing to do with it,” said Keen, “but it was another example of how her just being there, speaking out on AIDS, prompted the Press Club to take a step forward, toward recognizing the gay press as one of its own.”

To read POZ Pays Tribute: Elizabeth Taylor, click here.

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