I Lost Another Friend

We can’t wait for them to save us; we must save ourselves.

October 13, 2021 By Paul Kawata

I didn’t tell the full story last week when I discussed my depression. I lost another friend. He wasn’t somebody famous and there will be few people who will mark his passing, but his story is no less important. While Rick didn’t die from AIDS, his life was another example of a gay man living with HIV who got turned upside down because he did not expect to survive. What happened to us in the early days was really fu**ed up. There are too many survivors, me included, who never fully healed from all the loss. I got to drown my sorrows in NMAC. Not everyone was so lucky.

I am part of a generation who live wounded. My wounds are not always visible to the outside. To heal I need to come to terms with what happened to me and my friends. But it seems impossible. We are still in the middle of our struggle. Until HIV is over, we won’t know how our story ends. COVID is just another round of triggers. Watching a virus become political. Too many people are sick and dying. Hospitals and healthcare systems are not able to respond. Communities of color are disproportionately impacted. The story is all too familiar.

I think that is why it is so hard to heal. There is no end. No end to the racism, HIVphobia, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, sexphobia in America. No end to the bickering. If anything, it has increased. We must try to heal while immersed in the trauma. Is that even possible?

I may have to go New York to pack his apartment. I don’t want to pack up his apartment, but there is no one else. Surviving HIV and COVID is not for sissies, take it from this big sissy. Maybe it’s too much to ask to be happy. Maybe the best I can hope for is to stop the pain. I think that is why we are in trouble.

We are a world in pain, lashing out at others who are also in pain. It creates cycles that sometimes feel never ending. While I love my job, it is not easy being the target of so much misinformation. I’ve learned it’s better to not respond; keeping quiet extends my pain. This is not at all unique to me. Systems like Facebook feed off our pain and misery. Social media created another way of judgement that perpetuates the trauma.

Now it’s time to figure out how to end HIV in the middle of COVID, racial reckoning, climate change, abortion, immigration, failed withdrawal from Afghanistan, and a government that is more divided than ever. We can’t wait for them to save us; we must save ourselves. It starts by fighting for plans to end HIV that are real and centered on community. The communities hardest hit by HIV need to be in leadership positions because our work has missed too many. Plans must include

talking about sex and bringing back sex positive HIV prevention and fighting for equality and dignity for all people living with HIV, people of color, gay men, the transgender community, Black women, drug users, and sex workers.

People wonder why I've stayed at NMAC. Its because ending HIV is my pathway to healing the trauma of my life. Early on, my mentors taught me that it was important to commit your life to something that is bigger than you. HIV has been that burden and gift. Right now, I'm hurting, but the pain reminds me that I am alive.

God is Love and Love is for Everyone,

Paul Kawata

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/lost-another-friend