PWN Remembers the Brilliant, Indomitable Loren Jones

She was a co-founder of the Positive Women's Network-USA.

June 23, 2021 By PWN-USA

PWN is deeply saddened by the passing of our brilliant, well-respected, and loved founding member Loren Jones earlier this month. Loren was a long-standing member of PWN's board of directors, a pioneer in HIV advocacy, a prison rights activist, an organizer and voice for those who are housing insecure, and a pillar of the Bay Area HIV community.

Loren was a true revolutionary who inspired us and was unapologetic about demanding accountability to Black people, low-income people, and women. She consistently foregrounded issues of race, class and gender throughout her decades of analysis and advocacy.

In addition to co-founding Positive Women's Network-USA, in the 1990s, Loren served as a peer advocate at Women Organized to Respond to Life-threatening Diseases, connecting women living with HIV to healthcare and services, and helping them navigate life post-diagnosis. Over the years, she served several terms on the Ryan White Part A Collaborative Community planning Council for Alameda and Contra Costa Counties and was a member of the Anchor Study community advisory board as well as the AMFAR Cure Research community advisory board. Loren also served on the board of directors for CAL-PEP, an organization serving Bay Area sex workers, as a founding advisory member of the East Bay Getting to Zero initiative, and as part of the Bay Area State of Emergency (BASE) addressing the HIV epidemic in the African American community. She also served on the board of directors for Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency (BOSS) and a term as the Chair of the Berkeley Independent Task Force on Homelessness. Loren was active in her church, in Justice Now, and was literally everywhere in the Bay Area. There was no key initiative related to HIV and communities most impacted by HIV that she didn't know about or have a role in. And no matter how hard it was for her to get to a meeting – two buses, three flights, a long walk – Loren was always there, prepared, and ready to advocate for her people. She was a true champion and committed fighter.

"A lot of us thought for years that women could not get HIV because the focus was on other demographics. Black women contract HIV at rates higher than white women," said Loren Jones. She dedicated much of her adult life to dispelling those misconceptions, stereotypes, fighting HIV stigma, and for the human rights of people living with HIV.

Loren, who acquired HIV during the early days of the epidemic, was passionate about ensuring the inclusion of women in HIV research. “The main push we needed was woman-specific research because we definitely can have babies after diagnosis, even though our doctors told us differently,” she said. She also spoke to the barriers that kept many women living with HIV from participating in clinical trials when they had the opportunity. “If I’ve got all kinds of other trauma, drama, and stress going on in my life, everything can kind of just go to hell,” she said at the 2018 Cure Summit in San Francisco. “And a lot of it is about the children. You know those children get up every morning no matter how you feel. You can preset the TV but they’re going to want you to sing Mr. Rogers with them. And you need to be able to do that.”

Loren was an innovator. She was uncompromising in her principles and she was feisty as hell. Loren’s laugh could be heard across a crowded room and her smile was truly something to witness.

Loren’s fierce, tenacious, unflagging advocacy–as well as her wry sense of humor and indomitable spirit–will be sorely missed in our community. We are all a little bit less for having lost Loren, but her spirit, her analysis, her vision, and her values have shaped the organization PWN is today, and her legacy will live on.

Loren touched people throughout the Bay Area and indeed, all over the world. To honor her legacy, there will be not one but two Celebrations of Life for Loren Jones. The first will be virtual on Friday, July 23, and the second will be in person on Saturday, July 31. To RSVP to join Loren’s Celebration of Life, please click here.

Please register here for either memorial.

The service will also be live-streamed on PWN’s Facebook page.

Below are some words of appreciation for Loren from just a few PWN members and staff.

> “I remember Loren being a fierce advocate for her community and the HIV community at large. Unstoppable is what she was for the homeless, persons challenged with substances, and other causes. She put her heart and passion into working for the disenfranchised. Rest In peace Loren, you’ve left a path for all of us to follow!” – LaTrischa Miles, Board co-chair
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> “It’s hard to imagine that someone as full of life as Loren Jones is gone. Loren was a founding member of Positive Women’s Network – USA and became my board member/boss. Before that, Loren was and continued to be a badass prison activist, a housing activist, and so much more. Her analysis was intersectional because she was not confused about the importance of valuing embodied experience. Loren was also the most consistent and dedicated HIV policy advocate I have ever met. She was at the meeting even if she had to take three buses to get there, and I really don’t even know how many Planning Council terms she served. Loren was a brilliant thinker, incisive learner and shaped my understanding of economic justice through her teachings. She was an outstanding and fierce advocate who has paved the way here in Oakland and nationally to

advocate for the priorities of Black women living with HIV. And she had a wicked, infectious laugh. I'm so grateful for you Loren, and honored to have worked with and learned from you. Thank you for your generosity and your ferocity. May you be at peace. – Naina Khanna, co-executive director

"I was so sad to hear about the passing of Loren Jones. I served on the PWN board of directors with Loren. At that time, Loren was sharing analysis and understanding about the intersectional nature of HIV that took me years to understand. Loren was the first person I heard talking about HIV and aging issues. At the PWN summit in 2016, Loren led a workshop on aging. Some of us who attended her session had our first open conversations about aging with HIV. One of the table topics in that session was sex and the whole conversation was about the fear of criminalization. It's 2021 and we are still talking about criminalization. PWN would not be the organization it is today without Loren Jones. She will be missed. Rest in peace and power Loren." – Venita Ray, co-executive director

"Loren is a Shero in my eyes. My funniest memory of us was when [the staff and board] were on a PWN-USA retreat in Oakland, and we kept getting locked out of the building because we were always outside laughing and smoking cigarettes while sharing our personal stories." – Teresa Sullivan, founding member

"Loren has a lot of love coming to her from one Philly girl to another. I think she is a fierce trailblazer. I have learned so much from her walking in her footsteps." – Waheedah Shabazz-El, founding member

"Dear Loren, you are iconic to me. I wish I could have told you. You are inspiring. Your vision for the world. Your fire. Your intensity. And your openness and vulnerability. It moved me and many others. Your spirit and your presence influenced me. I wish I could have told you. You pushed me to be better. You modeled such resilience and self-determination. Thank you for walking on this earth. Thank you for making it better. Thank you for allowing me to bear witness to your story. With respect, love and fierceness, Sonia." – Sonia Rastogi, Board member

"Loren and I were the coaches of the very 1st policy workgroup for PWN. I learned so much from Loren. I learned not to rush brilliance, and to listen…REALLY listen. When I did, I ALWAYS was reminded that Loren was seriously one of the most astute, politically savvy, and sharpest people I'd ever met. Loren taught us all…how to own our stories, how to carry power not despite but because of who we are, and she taught us not to take ourselves too seriously. And that laugh! Possibly one of the best laughs I will ever hear. Most definitely she will be missed a great deal in our circles and in all of those who were lucky to share space with her." – Kathleen Griffith, founding member, current Board member

"Loren had time for everyone and taught me to stay in the moment. At SPEAK UP! 2018, Venita Ray would lead us in early morning yoga, and Loren would be there smiling. Her

positivity was always encouraging and uplifting. Don't ever be fooled by that smile because Loren was a fierce warrior and knew exactly how to speak about injustices that needed to be focused on HIV/AIDS. Loren knew how to balance tough work and fun. She epitomizes the word, "shero". – Susan Mull

"Loren has always put her entire soul into every project that she took on with passion and dedication. One memory we shared happened in Atlanta at Morehouse College. We were dancing around, snapping photos, laughing, and finding freedom amid the storm as the summit's focus was a deep dive into racial injustice." – Lepena Reid

"Loren's life and light has always been a shining example of advocacy on behalf of people you love and care about." – Penny DeNoble

"We served together as both PWN steering committee and board members and I never stopped learning from her. She was unapologetically herself and always elevated the needs of women living with HIV. She had a wicked sense of humor, dressed up to show us all how it was done and I always remember her smile and laugh that just made you grin along." – Barb Cardell, Training Director, founding member

"Loren was a fierce advocate from whom I have learned so much. I always enjoyed her stories, and she always made me laugh." – Evany Turk

"I'm so sad to hear of Loren passing. She was a firecracker and true advocate but a gentle soul all in one. God has one of his angels back!" – Andrea Johnson

"My first impression of Loren was at HINAC in Iowa. She spoke with conviction and such power that one couldn't help but notice this very small in stature woman but with the voice of a giant. Her work in the HIV field as it intersects with women and aging has truly revolutionized HIV research where women living with HIV are a focal point. I love you, Loren. You fought so hard for all women, myself included. I can't find the words to express how truly influential you have been in my life." – Tiommi Luckett, Communications and Training Assistant

"Loren was one of the very first PWN members I met–I actually met her during the interview process for my position at PWN. She made an impression on me from the very beginning! I will always remember her dry humor and wit, her heartfelt laughter, her fierce determination to be heard on every matter that was important to her. She was generous with her time and energy while refusing to take crap from anyone. She is such an integral part of PWN and will be so missed." – Jennie Smith-Camejo, Communications Director

Loren authored the very first blog on PWN's PWNSpeaks Blog back in February of 2016 in honor of National Black HIV and AIDS Awareness Day:

Black Shame and HIV

By Loren Jones

Feb. 5, 2016

Why is it always us??

These are the words that echoed in my head, as I grew through adulthood, watching the news. Why are we always on the dark side, if you will, of the numbers?? We are always seen as poorer, more uneducated, more criminal, sicker, more obese, more drug and alcohol dependent, just well–more black.

I had to spend long hours searching through obscure sections of the library reading books that nobody else cares about to discover who we really are. We are really even so much more than the George Washington Carver Elementary School that I first learned in. We are inventors, we are self-taught writers, singers, and poets.

I also know now, personally, that our ability to survive both physically and mentally within a society whose institutions were set up to serve anyone but us cannot be challenged.

As I get older, even with HIV, I no longer care so much what anyone other than my daughters thinks of me. I have done my time. I have studied who I am, as part of a race, as an HIV+ woman, and as an individual. And I am no longer ashamed.

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