Randy Shilts

October 25, 2008 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

"History is not served when reporters prize trepidation and propriety over the robust journalistic duty to tell the whole story."
- Randy Shilts

Randy Shilts is being honored this year on October 25 for GLBT History Month. He is one of five HIV-positive honorees this month, including Greg Louganis, Cleve Jones, Robert Mapplethorpe and Bill T. Jones.

He was the first openly gay journalist to report on LGBT issues in the U.S. mainstream press. His three books, however, are what I believe to be the works that will preserve his journalistic legacy.

In 1982, Shilts wrote "The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk." In 1987, he wrote "And the Band Played On: Politics, People and the AIDS Epidemic." In 1993, he wrote "Conduct Unbecoming: Gays and Lesbians in the U.S. Military: Vietnam to the Persian Gulf."

Chronicling the early days of the AIDS epidemic, "And the Band Played On" was the first major book about HIV/AIDS. It was made into an all-star Emmy Award-winning HBO film in 1993. No matter what I was originally surfing for on TV, I always get hooked into watching it whenever I run across it on cable. Of the many plot lines portrayed, the search for the virus to me is the most compelling.

The French researcher Dr. Luc Montagnier was recently honored with a Nobel Prize for his work in discovering HIV. The American researcher Dr. Robert Gallo was overlooked for his work in discovering HIV. "And the Band Played On" details the controversy over who first discovered HIV.

In 1993, Shilts was given a Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association (NLGJA). He died of AIDS-related complications in 1994. He was inducted into the NLGJA Hall of Fame in 2005.

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