

Remembering Lynda

December 1, 2011 By [Richard Ferri, PhD, ANP](#)

Today is World AIDS Day 2011 and I have been struggling with what to say for weeks now. I have written and re-written this column and still felt it lacked something. Then it hit me. It lacked Lynda.

Lynda was one of my very first patients with HIV in a time and place far away that remains exhaustingly close. A time before the Internet, cell phones, and protease inhibitors. A time when dying of AIDS was not only common, but expected. There weren't any long-term survivors. Grief was ever present and v toxic to the touch.

But there was also Lynda. Lynda was a woman who did not take her situation at all seriously, but solidly accepted it. She knew she was going to die from AIDS, but made a radical decision to live life on her terms. She did not "see the light and change her ways." *She liked her ways.* She liked using drugs and couldn't see a point in stopping. I had many a foolish conversation with her on this issue. She would sit and listen to me hammering away and then stop me cold with a Santa-like twinkle in her eyes and say: "And what difference would it make?"

Indeed. What difference did it make? Lynda still died and the world went on. An international AIDS day was not even on the radar screen. I did not have to agree with positions, but she damn well knew I respected them. She wouldn't tolerate anything less.

She never shared a needle or straw and gave up sex as soon as could because she was bored by it. Actually Lynda was nearly ecstatic over being able to choose not to have sex again. She often looked at me and reminded me that sex for her was a business, and it felt good to retire young.

Lynda saw life differently. I still don't fully comprehend it, but that was just fine because I did not have to as long as she did. It would take me a couple of decades and facing my own substance use demons before these words made sense. Lynda was the first person to let me know that I had to make sense to myself before anyone else. This is something I tend forget on a daily basis.

Lynda also taught me to forget about myself for the greater good when I could. She reminded me that I went back to grad school many years after getting a doctorate to become a nurse practitioner to practice AIDS medicine. I did not have any real "fire in my belly" to get a third graduate degree, but I did it because it was the only way I could think of to help. Lynda made me remember that took balls. "And fucking big ones too Ferri!" she often said. Knowing Lynda pushed me back to school, find life, and be a man.

Lynda was generous, kind, and sad. She did not hide it. Her life was hard, but she lived it anyway and lived it loudly.

Honestly, I cannot remember the last time thought about Lynda. Life does indeed go on. Yet today as cyberspace and politicians babbled about ending AIDS Lynda was the one person that kept coming to my mind. She was a hero in time and place that literally disorientates my mind.

So today is not one of personal bravado for me. No grand insights or sermons are coming forth. Today is a day to remember Lynda.

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