Remembering Vito Russo

December 5, 2013 By Sean Strub

The following piece was originally posted on my blog on the Thursday before World AIDS Day, which was also Thanksgiving--a day on which we gave thanks for and saluted the heroes of the movement.

When he was alive, I thought of Vito Russo as a friend and an activist I admired. I didn't realize the significance of his impact on my life until after he died, of AIDS, in 1990.

Then I realized how important Vito's example of pride, empathy and service to his community was in influencing me. When Vito talked about the "old days", meaning before the epidemic, when gay and lesbian activism in New York centered around the Firehouse at 186 Spring Street, I was fascinated, learning about a history I had no idea existed.

That history was important for Vito to share and should be important for all of us to share, to connect the young people in our community to a proud and glorious past, to learn, to be inspired and to find the strength to carry on in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. Vito also looked to the future, always with a vision for our community more ambitious than most; maybe it was his devotion to the movies, where the perfect happy ending was always in sight. That's what Vito saw for us.

An effort a few years ago to save the Firehouse from destruction failed (in later years it was owned by Adam Horovitz of the Beastie Boys). Today the lot is part of a development site listed for sale for $38 million.

While the building wasn't saved, the memories have been, in archives and museums and in the stories we hold in our hearts and minds. We just need to share them.

Please also visit Body Counts at www.SeanStrub.com, on Facebook.com/BodyCounts and on Twitter @BodyCountsBook.

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