R.I.P. Bertram Schaffner

February 2, 2010 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

Bertram H. Schaffner, MD, a highly respected psychiatrist, especially in the LGBT and HIV/AIDS communities, died in his sleep on January 29. He was 97.

He earned his medical degree from Johns Hopkins in 1937. He served in the U.S. Army during World War II. Afterwards, he served at the Nuremberg trials and on the denazification process.

He was openly gay and was one of the key players in getting the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from its diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders in 1973.

He also was among the first psychiatrists to treat people with HIV/AIDS in the United States. He maintained his private psychiatric practice in his home in New York City until recently. He also was a renowned collector of Indian art.

I had the privilege of knowing Dr. Schaffner. It was 1994. I had been diagnosed with HIV in 1992 and by that time had slid into a major depression.

My HIV physician at that time personally recommended me to Dr. Schaffner, who even then had limited the number of clients he was seeing.

I had never been to a psychiatrist and he made it work. Sitting in his home with all that wonderful Indian art was part of the magic. The other parts were his calm demeanor, his active listening and his insightful questioning.

I was blessed to have Dr. Schaffner help me through the darkest days I have ever known. Thank you, Dr. Schaffner. Rest in peace.

Watch a video tribute:

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