Simon Nkoli

October 22, 2013 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

Born: 1957
Died: 1998

"I am black and I am gay. I cannot separate the two parts of me into secondary or primary struggle. They will be all one struggle.
-Simon Nkoli

Simon Nkoli is an official honoree today for LGBT History Month 2013, which this year has several HIV-positive honorees.

Simon Nkoli was an anti-apartheid student leader and is widely regarded as the founder of the gay rights movement in South Africa. He later became an influential AIDS activist, initiating several support groups for positive African men after being diagnosed with HIV in the early 1990s.

Nkoli began his career as a youth activist with the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), the African National Congress (ANC) and the United Democratic Front (UDF) to speak out against apartheid. In 1983, he joined the predominantly white, apolitical Gay Association of South Africa, where he was quickly frustrated by the group's racism. In response, he formed the Saturday Group in 1984, the first black gay activist group in Africa.

After being diagnosed with HIV in the early 1990s, Nkoli turned his focus to AIDS activism, becoming one of the first openly positive gay men in Africa, and initiating the Positive African Men support group in Johannesburg.

In 1994, after traveling widely and receiving several human rights awards in Europe and North America, Nkoli was one of the first gay activists to meet President Nelson Mandela and helped to win LGBT protection from discrimination in the new South African constitution and the repeal of anti-sodomy laws.

In 1998, after living with HIV for 12 years and several AIDS-related illnesses for the last four, Nkoli died at the age of 41.

Go to lgbthistorymonth.com for more information about Beam and the other honorees.

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