Thanking Dr. Joe

December 7, 2013 By Sean Strub

There is something kind of simplistic, if not cheesy, for someone who came so close to death to give thanks to their doctor for having "saved" them. Dr. Joseph Sonnabend didn't jump in a river to rescue me while I was drowning; he didn't race into an intersection to grab me out of the path of a vehicle hurtling towards me; he didn't talk me off a ledge when I was ready to jump.

How he saved me was by showing me how I could save myself, respecting me as an individual, acknowledging my mistakes without judgment and empowering me with information. He saved me by convincing me it was possible to be saved. For that, I am so very grateful.

When I ran POZ, there was only one occasion when I wrote our cover story and that was when we profiled Dr. Sonnabend:

Since my diagnosis, I've outlived three of the four doctors I had before Sonnabend, each of whom, while caring and compassionate, had sought to prepare me for my eventual death from AIDS. Joe was the first to prepare me for survival.

Sonnabend provided the encouragement and intellectual foundation for the people with HIV empowerment movement, spoke the truth about how sexually-transmitted infections were facilitating the spread of the epidemic, midwifed the activist team of Michael Callen and Richard Berkowitz, promoted PCP prophylaxis when the federal government refused, first proposed the concept of "safer sex," conceived of community-controlled collaborative research, launched the first AIDS-related publication and the first AIDS-related civil rights litigation was when his landlord kicked him out of his office for treating people with AIDS.

He has never sought attention for himself, had a publicist, written a book or otherwise taken steps to secure his place in history. That's a responsibility for us--those of us who have benefitted so greatly from his research, guidance and care--to take on, which I do gladly in Body Counts. I'm looking forward to December 15, when Dr. Joe will be honored by the *Treatment Action Group*, along with Olympia Dukakis and Anderson Cooper.

TAG's 2013 Research in Action Awards take place on December 15. For more information, please click here.

This piece was originally posted on my blog at www.SeanStrub.com this past Thanksgiving--a day on which we gave thanks for and saluted the heroes of the movement.

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