

The Relapse of Indifference

October 8, 2010 By [Richard Ferri, PhD, ANP](#)

In the small of my mind deep in the countryside of Tuscany I have come to realize I am a lucky man. I am in love with a man who is also my best friend. I have an exciting career, and not just a job. I am passionate about my life's work. Financially I am far off better than my parents could have ever hoped for me to be.

I have...I have....I have...I have a lot, and way too much and not nearly enough.

But just for today as I walk in this beautiful Italian village of grapes and olive trees I have the blessing of gratitude.

I am a man of very raw emotions. Compassion that wounds with muscles and ink that scare. I am also a man of the virus that invades so many bodies. But I am also a man of God. A believer, a fucking churchgoer, a sometimes good do-er, often times a jerk. I am a die hard liberal capable of drop kicking a Dominican nun just for the visceral pleasure it would give me.

I am complex as I attempt to paint through words (and many of you have told me so many times so I know I hit nerves which thrills me to near ejaculation.) I also know semantics is the language of fools, and I am a fool for words.

But I am a fool without shame. I live with AIDS and other foibles and do so proudly. Sometime my pride blinds; other times it pierces and opens up healed wounds. I know this too well. I often feel I do not write on paper with ink but blood. My blood. My tainted serum without giving a damn who knows.



My life's work is with junkies, hookers, and drunks for the most part and I am happy about that. For I am all of them and they are me. I am at home in the gutter or the White House. I sometimes prefer the former to the bullshit of Pennsylvania Avenue.

I also have a tempter that simmers and stews and blows out without much preamble or control. Often I amaze myself with my own bullshit.

I try to keep my life and words honest. I do not practice medicine under the armor of the damn lab coat. I never wear one as a superhero's cape since it is just cheap fabric without any mystical powers. I don't want to be separated from patients. I am not special. I am an infected queer and recovering drunk and addict who has done many things Sister Mary Sonofabitch would frown on.

One of my more feckless readers kicked me in the balls before I left for holiday in Italy. This guy had the guts to say I was "a relapse about to happen" and then rambled on what I should do about it. Renzob, the reader, was almost right but not about my picking up a drink or a slam, but dead on about another kind of fall from grace. This fall is one that terrifies me. I was jumping into the pool of indifference without a blink. I felt like I was about to dive into an abyss.

Silence isn't death - indifference is. The emotion of truly not caring about yourself or others is the most terrifying emotion I can imagine.

Indifference scares me so much because I have witnessed it's evil so many times. It kills. Many years ago I saw it on such dramatic level that the experience still shakes me to this day.

I was beginning my advanced clinical practice at a clinic on Cape Cod that was nothing short of a massive cluster fuck. There was a physician there, Dr. Al Sheehan, who was a full fledge prick. He hated everyone and told patients they deserved what they got, especially anyone with a sexually transmitted disease. In short he was waste in a bag of skin. He once told me that the reason he stopped delivering babies after women became more involved in their birthing process was because no "fucking woman was going to tell him what to do."

Dr. Sheehan died a sudden and totally unexpected death and no one noticed. No one cared. One day he simply did not show up for work at the clinic and the next day his death notice was posted in the nursing station.

The clinic did not close or send flowers. I simply hired another doctor to take his place. It was like he never existed. No one even showed up for his funeral. Not his wife or kids bothered. No one

gave a fuck about this man.

What I learned is that all acts of bravery, compassion, and daring can be wiped away by indulging in indifference. I think I was dancing wildly on indifference's tightrope but kept my balance somehow.

I may have started to stumble but I did not fall off and for this I am externally grateful and know that God is out there watching this fool from time to time. Thanks buddy.

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