

## Connection, Reflection, and Anger: Our Lives Were Forever Changed By AIDS

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As a LGBTQ-RAN intern, one of my responsibilities included transcribing a session from the [Rolling the Stone Away Conference](#), which took place from October 31-November 2, 2017, in St. Louis, Missouri. I chose the session titled, "[Our Lives Were Forever Changed By AIDS](#)." Over the years I've found myself returning to the subject of HIV/AIDS time and time again, each time learning something new about its devastation and the networks of care and connection that were formed and still exist today.

If one thing is for certain it's that transcribing, like much archival work, is a time-intensive labor of love. There's a slowness and care that is imbued in the process. Being able to hold and share the grief and memories of the attendees and panelists brought me to tears and allowed me to understand this time period in a different light. Much of my understanding of the activism in the 80s and 90s was devoid of religion, or even more so critical of religion in the case of ACT UP's 1989 protest at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. It was powerful for me to witness how spirituality and religion were intertwined in AIDS activism and care and dispel many of my own preconceived notions. The words of Rev. Jim Mitulski stick with me now: "I do think it has shaped my spiritual life being with so many people on a journey of living from the time I was in my 20s [...] I think twisted me in some ways, but I was not prepared in my 20s to accompany so many people, to do hundreds of funerals. Saturday was funeral day. Sunday was Church day. And the people that I was doing funerals for in the 80s were my age you know."

As a non-binary butch lesbian, continuously learning about the impact of HIV/AIDS on LGBTQ communities and other marginalized folks throughout the 80s, 90s, and the present is both deeply intimate and emotionally consuming. However, watching the documentaries [Voices from the Front](#) and [United in Anger](#), following the [AIDS Memorial Instagram account](#), handling AIDS memorial objects in my work as a Project Assistant at [Lambda Archives of San Diego](#), and completing this transcription during the COVID-19 pandemic has kindled a new level of connection, reflection, and *anger* within me.

It haunts me to understand that we have not yet realized one of ACT UP's most crucial messages that healthcare is a right. We have continued to bear witness to this failure through the combined desolation caused by America's private healthcare system, repressive police and carceral state, global imperialism and sanctions, and growing inequities dictated by our capitalist system. It haunts me to understand that our disabled LGBTQ members cannot enjoy the fruits of the fight for marriage equality without losing access to their life-saving (but already poverty-level) benefits. It haunts me to understand that trans people are being violently targeted by legal efforts domestically (and abroad in places like the U.K.) on top of not being able to access healthcare, housing, employment, and other resources.

It **angers** me that there are LGBTQ folks that are actively involved in and perpetuating this exploitation and violence against our most vulnerable and oppressed community members.

Internalizing and repurposing the logic and rhetoric of our oppressors against our own community—whether in the form of biological essentialism, racism, xenophobia, classism, or other ideologies—has detrimental consequences and MUST be rooted out. The lessons and anger of AIDS activism must continue to be channeled to demand and fight for a more just and equitable world.