

# SPECTRUM

**P**ride  
by J  
a Deeper Love...

## IN MEMORY OF THOSE WHO DIED FROM AIDS

In the early 1980's, the world reeled from the impact of a devastating virus that swept throughout the world in an epidemic that many ignored or thought would not happen to them. AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is an infection caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and directly attacks the body's T4-cells - the cells responsible for initiating an individual's immune system response. Initially, frequently diagnosed within the homosexual population (with the greatest loss of life among gay men), current statistics from the CDC (Centre for Disease Control) have placed heterosexuals as the next group with an increasing number of cases of HIV-positive or AIDS diagnosis, with an alarming increase among women. Understanding the disease's social impact, however, was a slow process.

At the onset of dealing with this disease, people were unwilling to admit that they knew someone who was diagnosed as HIV+ or had full-blown AIDS, much less that they themselves had been infected. Misperceptions of AIDS as a "gay man's disease" led to stigmatization of numerous people infected with the disease. This in turn has led to a reluctance to fund research and a general obstinate refusal to deal with people who had contracted the disease. Yet as the epidemic raged on more and more people, individually or in groups, brought home the impact of this disease to the general public. Transcending such barriers as: culture, gender, social status, sexual orientation and race, the voices that cried out demanded that the world listen and understand the social nature of AIDS. These people had lost fathers, daughters, nephews, friends and opposite-/same-sex partners; the memories that they cherished would not be forgotten.

Through various research gains and hopeful possibilities, arose several drug therapies that either suppressed or inhibited the replication of HIV within the body. However, AZT, ddI, ddC and Acyclovir were not the only means of combating the effects of AIDS on people. Families and friends took to the streets in projects such as the AIDS Walk and the Red Ribbon Campaign. They formed support and education groups like AIDS New Brunswick, in order to provide information and comfort for the public. Perhaps one of the most profound projects to ever be initiated, was the formation of the AIDS Memorial Quilts throughout the world. Begun in 1987 in the United States, the American AIDS Memorial Quilt was a testimony to the memories that friends and family had for the loved ones who had died through AIDS-related illness. Composed of individual 3 ft x 6 ft

panels, the quilts commemorated the lives of the deceased, often embedded with a token or favourite object that the person cherished. The panels are reminiscent of the size and shape of a regular grave plot, evidence of the

impact AIDS has had on the lives of the friends and family who must continue on. In 1989, the NAMES Project began in Canada, marking the creation of a Canadian AIDS Memorial Quilt. Currently numbering 1,100 panels, with additions being made in a frequent stream, the Quilt is displayed throughout Canada, and is the third largest in the world.

On September 13, 1995 the Canadian AIDS Memorial Quilt will be presented in Fredericton at the Aitken University Center. This momentous

event is a way for people to recognize and acknowledge the gravity of the situation in terms of the lives lost, and the loss and pain of the survivors. Beginning at 7:30 in the evening, the Opening Ceremony occurs in a general hush. The atmosphere is one of solemnity and warmth, as people slowly walk amongst the various mementoes that lay upon the ground.

A tribute to, and a way of honouring the dead, some come to pay their respects, while others offer a silent recognition of AIDS' impact on society.

It is a time of reflection and more often than not, a time to grieve. Yet enfolding the entire event, is a sense of shared grief and loss; and ultimately a sense of comfort and support. This is not an event that focuses on a particular group per se, but rather a way to remember. A way to forgive, a way to continue the fight against AIDS, and in the end a way to heal. For those interested in attending, the Quilt is on display from September 13 to the 16th. More information can be obtained from AIDS N. B. at 459-7518.



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