

health & wellbeing

Associates in Recovery

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Toward Intimacy Group for LGBT now forming

Individual & Couples
Psychotherapy

Fee based on
Individual Means

My neighbor Tracy took his own life last month. He took it back from AIDS, he took it back from his doctors, he took responsibility for his own soul and took himself out of pain.

I liked Tracy a lot. He had a sort of manful gentility of spirit. He was smart and well-spoken, but deeply tangled in depression. Everyone in the Vermont CARES House is grieved that he's gone, but I don't think anyone is truly shocked. One reason for this was Tracy's immense sadness. He kept it neatly bottled up most of the time, but it moved under the surface of his skin, in the depths of his eyes, in the way he carried himself. It was his generally recognized attribute, no less real than the mustache on his face.

Another reason for the low key of our reactions to his suicide is simply that we, as people living with AIDS, have all developed strong psychological mechanisms which are specifically designed to accept death as a real and aggressive possibility in our worlds. We scurry like rabbits to evade it, but when it strikes near, we are not surprised. Having HIV gives me a certain authority to speak in the death department. I have a lethal disease. I've thought a lot about it and recently I've been asking myself a lot of questions. I've been around the block enough times to know that there was nothing I could have done to prevent Tracy's death. Maybe I could have gotten to know him better, maybe I could have checked in on him every day, maybe I could have become his best friend. But I couldn't have

Resurrecting the Body Politic by John Hannah

restored his wasted constitution, I couldn't have made the drugs he was taking any more effective or their side-effects any less debilitating. I couldn't have wiped out the hard years he had spent fighting the enemies in his body and in his mind.

Would I have stopped him from taking his life if I'd been given the opportunity? Yes and no. If he had asked me to talk him out of it, I would have bent all my energies to the task of convincing him not to. But then, the act of asking for help would have shown me that some part of him wanted to hang on. All the residents of this house have made the decision to resist this disease and as long as some part of him still believed in that resolve, I would have tried like hell, like anyone here, to help him hang on to it.

But I don't buy into the Western medical notion of preserving life at any cost. Ultimately, deciding whether or not it is worth it to live is a primary right that belongs to the individual. Having HIV makes this painfully clear. I have said before that privacy and autonomy are the first casualties of HIV, and that their loss is grievous. I have also said that people living with HIV are guinea pigs. But there is a crucial difference that separates us from the lab rats. We can withdraw from the experiment. We have the right to say "this isn't worth it to me." We accept all

kinds of intrusions into our lives as a result of this disease, but that fundamental core of autonomy, that kernel of self, is precious. It must be preserved — at any cost.

So if I imagine a situation in which I perceived Tracy's intention and he explained to me that he really didn't want to live anymore, out of respect for him, out of respect for his integrity, I would not have stopped him from achieving his aim. If someone's pain is that great, forcing him to endure it against his will is cruel and inhuman. Having a right to life implies having a right to death, having a right to liberty means liberty to make the most radical decisions. And if to pursue happiness meant that Tracy had to chase it right out of this world, the chase was his. I hope with all my heart that he's found it.

I was fortunate to know Tracy for the brief time that I did. There was nothing cowardly in his suicide, nothing shameful in his decision to die. He has brought home an essential truth of experience, but one that is nevertheless hard to accept: our lives belong to us. We must each find our own balance between pain in the moment and faith in the future. It is a tender one to strike and deserving of solemn, if sad, respect. Tracy was loved here. None of us will forget him. His is and was a spirit to remember, and his memory does honor to this place.

Dealing With Death

The Mostly Unfabulous Social Life of Ethan Green

by Eric Orner

Ethan Green's CHAOS THEORY OF LOVE

JASON CHANG LOVES TIM & CARLOS. TIM & CARLOS, HOWEVER, LOVE BUCKY.

BUCKY ONLY LOVES HANS, HANS, THOUGH, LOVES LAST NIGHT'S TRICK.

LAST NIGHT'S TRICK, AS IT HAPPENS, REALLY LOVES LEEZA...

BUT LEEZA, AS IS WELL DOCUMENTED, ONLY LOVES ETIENNE...

ETIENNE MOSTLY JUST LOVES ETIENNE, BUT OCCASIONALLY CAN BE FOUND TO LOVE CARLOS'S BEST GIRLFRIEND JAMES.

LEO, SEVERAL YEARS TARDY, THINKS HE JUST MIGHT BE READY TO LOVE ETHAN.

BUT ETHAN LOVES DOUG.

FEAR NOT, HOWEVER, CUZ, SCIENTISTS, SOCIAL ENGINEERS & ELLEN AND HER NEW GIRLFRIEND ARE WORKING 'ROUND THE CLOCK TO DEVELOP A FORMULA TO GET THE PERSON YOU LOVE, TO LOVE YOU BACK, AND VISA-VERSA, ALL AT THE SAME TIME.

HEY, I LOVE YOU FIGHT NOW!
HEY, I LOVE YOU FIGHT NOW BACK!
MAMA BOOK THE CHAPEL, THERE'S GONNA BE A WEDDING!

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