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00:02

Took us places we never ever wanted to go. Never thought we were going it's definitely expanded our horizons past any point that we want it



00:11

sometimes I think when I speak to people about it now there is just this past year maybe when someone would say to me, how did your son die? I'm sorry. And now I can now say AIDS. And every time I do that, I think maybe he sees me. Maybe he hears me and maybe he's saying I'm so proud of you



01:10

you can see this woman's



01:25

No. No stop



01:38

aids, acquired immune deficiency syndrome, a modern day plague that has killed over two and a half million people and infected an estimated 14 million around the world. At its dawning, AIDS seemed only to infect gay men. Scientists baffled by mysterious symptoms and unable to find any known agents of infection linked the disease to sexual orientation and named it gay Related Immune Deficiency, or grid. As the Jews were blamed for the spread of bubonic plague in the Middle Ages, so gay men were blamed for the spread of AIDS. anti gay religious extremist called AIDS God's retribution for homosexuality, encouraging further torment rather than compassion for the sick and the dying. People with aids were fired from their jobs and evicted from their homes. In some towns, homes occupied by people with AIDS were

firebombed. Even in the gay community lovers left lovers, friends deserted friend's parents abandoned their gay sons. But the plague years have also brought accounts from families affected by AIDS have great courage and enduring love. These are some of those stories.



03:38

Before aids, many gay men chose not to share the intimate details of their lives with their families. In many cases, gay sons moved to faraway cities, so that parents inquiring minds wouldn't learn of their secret lives. For many aids meant not only dealing with devastating disease, but also facing the shame that some parents would inevitably feel upon learning of their son's homosexuality. Ruth and Sanford Levy's son Ken lived his adult life in New York City, about 90 miles from his southern New Jersey Home. Ken's success in life especially his financial success, brought his parents a great deal of pride. The Levy's believed they had a perfectly honest relationship with their son, but can never told them that he was gay. Sanford sometimes wondered about his son's sexuality, but never questioned him.



04:31

I really was not sure. I had suspicions but I wasn't really sure. Because, you know, there are a number of gay people in their manner of speech, many times, you can kind of well use you shouldn't prejudge somebody, but you get an inkling. Now, Ken did not have that. type of an affliction. He didn't have feminine ways about him. He was like one of the boys. And the only suspicion I had to be very frank with you was that he had a lot of girlfriends say an awful lot of girlfriends. And some of them were really the most beautiful girls. I mean, I just I'd look at him and I, I'd say, gosh, if he married that girl, boy, we're gonna have a beautiful daughter. Look,



05:32

Mark Frank never really left home. He had a loving relationship with both his parents, Ken and Sandy. And he lived with him all his life, except for a brief time when he lived in an apartment some 25 miles away from home. After college, he built a successful career in radio. Both Ken and Sandy asked Mark whether or not he was gay, long before he broke the news that he had AIDS. Despite a trusting and straightforward relationship, Mark couldn't bring himself to share his sexuality with his parents. Even when they asked him point blank, we had



06:06

sort of suspected, although, I mean, you know, just normally we had suspected,



06:15

I think, excuse me. I had discovered some books that I really think he left exactly where he knew I would find them because it was in his clothes drawer. And I always put away his clothes when I had laundered them. And I had once asked him if he was gay, and he said no.



06:36

As had I, I had once asked him, I guess about five years before this, or four years before this, I remember exactly where we were and what we were doing. We were going to a hardware store to look for a piece of something to fix something. And after all, he wasn't dating. He was in his mid 20s. Anyhow. And I said, Mark, and I asked him, I said, Are you gay? And he said, No. And it's funny because Mark, I won't say he never lied, but he couldn't lie.



07:10

Ruth glands son Ross came out to her as gay when he was still a teenager, Ruth was absorbed with her own marital problems at that time, she still borates herself for not being what she thinks Russ needed when he was struggling with his sexuality. But the two became best friends. Ruth had grown up in pre feminist times. As Rusk grew older, he nurtured his mother's sense of confidence and self sufficiency, and helped her through a painful divorce. Far from having misgivings about her son's homosexuality. Ruth became a part of Russell's social circle, often escorting him to gay social events.



07:46

He told wonderful jokes, and he was the life of the party sometimes. And many times he would tell the same jokes over and over, because he told them well, and many times there would be people at parties who hadn't heard them. And of course, I knew what was coming. And they were always funny to me, although I think I must have been his best audience.



08:11

Hunter Muir died of AIDS at the age of 25. And late summer of 19 9100s. Mother, a Javier like Ruth gland had no trouble accepting her son's homosexuality, but for quite another reason.



08:25

I'm a lesbian mother and, and Hunter and I used to joke about, we were going to be the first lesbian mother and gay son comedy act. Because we were both very active and he had been very active in the gay youth movement in Philadelphia and quite a number of different things. And I was very proud of him. And he was the kind of man that I think men should be in this society, sensitive and carrying as well as as exasperating person he was also



09:02

that you lost everything is still making every day such an effort now to keep



09:28



09:15

me no use, moving to say, surround yourself with family of you.



09:49

Ken levy was 33 years old when he broke the news to his parents in November of 1988 that he had AIDS. For Ruth and Sanford. This meant also dealing With the fact that their son was gay, acceptance of his sexuality was one thing. The reality of Ken's probable death due to the disease was quite another. Sanford in particular held on to his denial, even chasing a preacher from Ken's hospital room, whom he thought had come to prepare his son for death too soon, Ruth and Sanford recall bedside pep talks,



10:23

I have to tell you that this man was unbelievable



10:26

have to inject something into what she's saying. lievable he was, I wanted to reassure him that we were going to make it he was and I said, we're so positive, don't even mention the word die. Because you must remove it from the free of your vocabulary, because you have to think along the lines of getting better. And I said, your illness is just beginning and we have a long way to go by time, and maybe they won't find a cure for it, but they'll find something that will alleviate the problem, and you'll be able to survive.



11:02

Mark Frank was 27 years old in 1985 when he told his parents Sandy and Ken, both that he was gay and that he had AIDS. Sandy was afraid not only for her son, but also for the safety of her family. She had read newspaper accounts of entire families ostracized in their communities, even being firebombed in their homes because someone in the family had AIDS. Ken Frank refused to accept his son's death is inevitable. Mark Two got his share of fatherly pep talks.



11:35

The attitude right from the beginning was you don't have to die. This is something we can fight. This is something we can do. We want to keep as normal life for you and everyone else as possible. And he did.



11:50

Despite Ruth Glenn's newfound sense of independence, she had grown to depend upon her son Ross for spiritual strength. Russ also untangled some of the difficulties in which Ruth found herself sometimes sorting out her jumbled finances. Russ protected his mother's so well, that

he even helped her through his own fatal illness.



12:11

I really didn't realize until he was gone, how brave he had been and how much he was enduring and not talking about to me. In fact, he used to say to me, I was very serious. And you say Mom, lighten up, come on, lighten up mom,



12:27

as a lesbian and as a mother aware of her son hunters activism on behalf of gay issues. A Javier lived close to the plague every day, one might suppose that she wasn't as likely as some parents to harbor any false optimism in the face of AIDS. But when Hunter became too ill to live on his own, he moved in with his mother, a hobby of found herself caught up in her son's futile search for a cure.



12:52

When he got sick, he was home, dependent on the sofa and needing us and making a lot of demands. And it felt like you wanted desperately, you know, make this better that if you would just go out and buy me the right juice or the right food or the right magazine or something, it would make it all better. And so it was very difficult. Because I would panic and go back out at 11 o'clock at night to an open or you know, 24 hour day store to try to find the right juice or the right iced tea or something to make it better. And that really wasn't going to make it better. A lot of it, I believe that because it seemed that that by giving him very good care, he was staying alive that that was just going to continue.



13:48

Most parents know the experience and the exhaustion of children home with measles or chickenpox or some other childhood ailment. But an adult child returning home with a fatal illness requires energies that aging parents may no longer possess. Maybe because the reality of certain death did manage to creep in, even if subconsciously, these parents tried to make the best of the time they had left with their beloved son, Sanford levy recalled some tender moments with Ken



14:19

through this sickness. Somehow rather, he always wanted to have his back rub and I couldn't understand it. But you know, I would do it for him. And you know, I would do it, let's say five, eight or 10 minutes of it and I get done. And he'd say, Dad, would you please do it again? It feels so good. And you know, I'm not young anymore. And I said, Okay, we'll give it another shot, you know, and I grabbed this back again.



15:35

For those clinging to every meager bit of faith, the limits of denial are defined only by reality. And it's rock hard bottom. With the gradual failure of hope each of these parents surrendered their sons lives to the shore in winding arms of cool unfolding death.



15:54

I think the first time I ever heard him admit out loud, that he wasn't going to make it that he was going to die was. There was something about the fliers, and he had her heard people talking, they came to visit, and they were discussing things back and forth. And Mark finally said, it's only a game. And Mark never would have said that, because those things were not a game to mark. Those were that was life. I mean, that's what you lived for to go to see these. These good games.



16:35

He said to me before, one of the last conversations we had when he was in the hospital. He said, I guess I used up my wishes, and I said, What do you wish for hon. And he said, a cure for AIDS. And he says, and then in my body, and I said to be like it was he says, oh, no, much better. And then he, he drifted off.



16:59

I said, I gotta talk to you. I said, you know, we've pushed for two years. And I said, I guess that with everything, there's a time when you have to stop pushing, and maybe just lay back and let what's going to happen happen. And I said, Marcus, and I think that you've reached that stage, and this is what we have to do. He was so tired. And he looked at me and I said, but there's one thing I want you to promise me. I said, when my time comes, I said, I want you and only you there to beat me. I said now that's providing we go to the same place. Well, he laughed at that. But he knew what I meant. And he died about a little before 10 o'clock the next morning.



18:08

Stay strong.



18:28

Upon the deaths of their sons, some of the parents dealt with their loss and their anger by becoming AIDS activists. While none of them has participated in the Dianne, nor in any other form of street activism, some have found a way to reach out to others affected by the disease. Ruth levy first took action just by opening the New York Times, she offered to share her experience and strength with other parents facing the same kind of sorrow. Ruth neither regrets the past nor wishes to shut the door on it. It's a



19:01

difficult, difficult thing, but I feel that we've been better people for



19:06

Well, I had to do I have to tell you one thing about this lady sitting next to me, we've been married 46 years. When we lost kin, somehow, this is gonna sound a little bit corny. But you start reading obituaries and she would read in the obituaries about some young man who died of AIDS. And if there was any kind of an address there, she would write them a letter. And, and in the letter, she would say if you would like to talk to me, I just went through what you have gone through. I would be glad to give you you know my input, and maybe in some way I can help you with your sorrow. And we got about what she got about, I'd say 25% response from the amount of people bullet that she said letter



20:01

can't deal with it. They don't want to deal with it, they want to put it behind them. And that I cannot understand putting it behind can I put this behind me?



20:10

Ruth levy also sells jewelry brooches designed by a gay man specifically as memorials to those who have died of AIDS. Ruth derive satisfaction from this in two ways. The jewelry helps raise both money and consciousness



20:25

and they are gorgeous. I mean, people stopped me on the street and will say, what has happened you wearing? Is it an antique? And I'll say no, it's and then there are two people or three people and we're talking about the disease. So this is AIDS awareness. And I feel it's so important.



20:40

He would be so proud of his mother, he would be telling the whole world they had an excellent relationship. We had a very good relationship with our son. While



20:51

Sandy Frank has taken some time to heal from the grief of her son marks death from AIDS. Her husband Ken has been busy producing his own roadshow. He travels the region where they live speaking about AIDS and Mark's death. He especially likes to target young adolescents. He

thinks they require an honesty that adults sometimes prefer not to hear. He bares his soul to them, hoping that by doing so he'll save some lives.



21:17

One of the first questions that I was asked when I spoke to a group of I guess 15 16 17 year old boys and girls together at a synagogue was where you made it your son. And atop my head, the answer was I guess I still am. Because I feel cheated. We made him when he told you he was gay. And no, no, I'm mad because he's not here.



22:13

With the specter of their son's aids ravaged bodies still so present in their memories, the parents heal their lives by remembering better times.



22:22

I talk about him. I have a lot of he used to be a model. So I have a lot of photographs of him very beautiful photographs. And at times, it's hard to look at them because it's hard to believe that some when so vibrant and alive and beautiful is gone. But I dream about him. I think about him, we talk about him, we laugh together about him, we cry together about him. I have a lot of faith. I believe that he's somewhere that his energy is somewhere. And it's an it can be with us. And that helps me



23:00

we enjoyed movies together. He was a good cook, and I loved his cooking. And he didn't like the way I cook he could cook better, which was okay. And he liked to have me there when he entertained. And he he just very sweet, very caring. He was not perfect. But he brought me out of myself. He helped me to find myself. And I learned a lot from him. I miss him I miss him very, very much. It's still



23:38

so such an open wound to me. I miss him so so much. There are times when when I'll be sitting in a restaurant and I'll say to my husband, oh my God look that looks just like Mark and I once I said to him to my husband. Do you think if I went over and spoke to that young man and taught him how much he looked like my son he would just let me touch his hand and my husband said no you can't do that



24:17

will be



24:24

how many?



24:34

Many



24:44

how many how many how the world was a richer place for this beautiful young man that I miss very much. And it might not know how much it's lost but I certainly do. And I wish the world was aware I wish this government was aware of how here was this hat. This half black Jewish, Native American, handicap gay man. How how much it's lost by by his being gone.



25:31

And even now I think to myself, did I tell him enough? Did we talk enough? Did I tell him I loved him enough you know, you just I would say to any mother out there. If your child is sick this way, just tell them that you love them just keep hugging them and kissing him and we did and the one thing we said to each other every night and I still say the same thing. Give me a kiss. I love you. And that was our last thing to each other every night. And so every night before I go to bed I say the same thing he should kiss I love you



26:13

Good



26:36

Give me those moments. Parents remember their day sons who died of AIDS was produced by Bert Ryan with Mark Miller at WX pm Philadelphia.