

SPEAKER: One thing before I start-- this is-- it's cold as hell up here, but I want you to see this. It's my favorite T-shirt.

[CHEERS AND APPLAUSE]

Especially important now because I am both still gay and proud, and I'm now a PWA also, which is the way I'd like to address you tonight, is from the PWA coalition. And I definitely do believe it is people living with AIDS. This past May, as I was at home recuperating from PCP pneumonia, I experienced some of the love that helps us to celebrate life-- the love from the friends I'd made during the Names Project tour, the love for my friends in the Gay Lesbian Parade Week '88. Now, that may have partly been because I'd been threatened with my life if I wasn't well enough to participate as co-grand marshal, but it still counts. It still counts. And the love from all the people I've met during my time when I was involved with the Stone Soup.

That was all love born of crisis, those times when our emotions are highest and we feel the need to express love, now or never. But we soon seem to fall back into our safe, regulated lives of normalcy, lulled into a sense that everything is all right once again, that the world is going along as it should. That's where we are wrong. That's where you and the celebration-- that's where you end the celebration and pack it away like so many Christmas ornaments until the next crisis requires that we dig in to the back of our closets to retrieve our pride and strength as gays and lesbians.

We must celebrate our lives as gay men, faggots, homosexuals, lesbians, dykes, every day we're alive, not just when our friends deaths cover us as a smothering shroud, not just on a sunny Sunday during the gay pride parade, not just when the right political activity comes along, but every day that we pay our gay income taxes to the government, every day that we pay our gay insurance premiums to companies like Prudential, every day we spend our gay incomes to travel, buy homes and new automobiles, and every time we have the chance to elect our governmental representatives.

If you even want to be allowed to celebrate your life as gay or lesbian, you must proudly and openly do so to let those moralists, Republicans, bigots, and homophiles know that we indeed are everywhere-- working, shopping, living, and even praying side by side with them every day and that every bit of anti-gay legislature that they support, every mouthful of anti-gay hate that they spew out is not going to get rid of us.

My hope is that all of their united efforts will only unite us more to join together and fight them back as never before, empowering us to fight for our rights as loving human beings. To celebrate life, we must not do it through silence, indifference, and inactivity. To celebrate life, we cannot depend on our dead heroes-- Harvey Milk, Fred Paez, or the 40,000 dead PWAs across America-- to do it for us. To celebrate life, we must participate in that great celebration of being openly gay and saying it proudly.

I am gay. Shout it with me. I am gay! I am gay! Before I relinquish the stand, I'd like to speak to my fellow PWAs. We oftentimes fear the double stigma of being gay and having AIDS. Just as AIDS is not a social disease, just as gay is not a physical disease, it's very hard for us PWAs to face rejection, fear, and prejudice from our very own gay brothers. Part of this is our own faults.

We must empower ourselves to live with AIDS and not to assume that this is a death sentence. We must take an active part in life as much as we are physically able to. We must all loudly insist on the best in social service and medical care and fight to get access to promising new treatments now, not in four or five years. We must also take responsibility to ourselves as well as to our partners in our quest for fulfilling sexual lives.

I believe that we are living with AIDS, that we don't come home from our doctor's offices with diagnoses in hand to lay down and die. I know that there's no cure yet, but I know that there are a lot of promising treatments coming up. And unless we make noise, demand more access to them and speedier approval of them, then a large number of us here today will surely die from neglect and red tape.

[APPLAUSE]

Red tape. Our voices must be heard loud, long, and clear. And our voice must be every PWA and PWR who gives a damn about their treatment and lack thereof. I'd like to read a brief paraphrase of Harvey Milk's and have everyone affected by AIDS follow. As difficult as it is, you must tell your relatives. You must tell your friends, if indeed they are your friends. You must tell your neighbors. You must tell the people in the stores you shop in.

And once they realize that we are indeed their children and that we are indeed everywhere, every myth, every lie, every innuendo will be destroyed once and for all. And once you do, you will feel so much better.

[APPLAUSE]

Just as I loudly declared myself to be gay earlier, I just as loudly can shout I have AIDS, and I am not ashamed. Now I ask that every PWA and PWR join with me and shout the same. I have AIDS, and I am not ashamed. Thank you. I wish you love and life.

[APPLAUSE]