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aids, george, christmas, hearts, knew, love, die, person, gay, life, family, wonderful, david, feel, house, santa, recovering, memory, cried, told



01:29

faithful, Joyful and triumphant holiday voices of AIDS.



01:40

Christmas 1988 A mother writes a letter celebrating the memory of her son who died of AIDS. Dear Andy, these past few days, I've been straightening up some things in your old room that always brings up memories, some happy, some very sad. A



01:58

young man with AIDS writes in his journal. God, I can't believe it's almost Christmas and I'm still alive. I really hadn't planned on it. I'm glad though sometimes dying and getting it over with is very appealing. There's so much sadness in all this. Just when I was starting to figure life out. I could have done so much more. Oh, well. As the bumper sticker says punish happens.



02:27

This season of the year always brings you closer somehow. Although thoughts about events bubble up almost every day of the year. But Thanksgiving and Christmas were always so special. When you were little how you loved Christmas trees. Remember the year when you were about four? You rushed to plug in the lights on the newly decorated tree forgetting we still needed to add an extension cord. What a crash. But after drying your tears and fixing the tree. All was again beautiful. Your dad taught you to carve the turkey. I think so he could gracefully get out of it.



03:02

I'm trying to be pleasant, happy and enjoy. Like Michael said, This is my retirement I should try and enjoy it. What's really amazing to me is all the love that's come out of this for me all the people who have given or offered their support, as well as my strong feelings for them.



03:20

In 1983 the year you were feeling lousy but afraid to see a doctor. You called from San Francisco for my stuffing recipe because you were cooking Thanksgiving dinner for good friends. That Christmas when the whole family gathered and Alameda was terrifying to me. You looked so sick, pale, drawn. AIDS was just about to change everything in our lives forever.



03:44

But my strongest love is for David. I sometimes just can't believe I have such a wonderful lover. Old neurotic feelings like I don't deserve someone this wonderful sneak in at times. But mostly I am thankful for our relationship. I don't ever want to leave him. I don't ever want to be alone. Our



04:06

last holiday season together was so special. Because you knew it would be your last on this planet. You made the trip to northern California to spend Thanksgiving with your sisters. We hauled along all the IV equipment. You stayed in the motel a lot, but we were all together. Christmas everybody gathered at our house. It was the first time in years that all you kids mills and mine were



04:31

together I have these recurring dreams about losing David and being left alone. In one. We are Christmas shopping at this huge mall. I'm searching for this one particular item though I'm not even sure what this item is. David is with me. But I think I see this mystical thing in a shop and I am separated from David. Then they announce over the loudspeakers that the mall is closing. I never make it to the shop. Swarms of people are pushing to get to the parking lot I have lost David. The feeling of panic is incredible. No one will help me or even cares. I am all alone. Alone with AIDS and to death. We bought



05:15

a spectacular tree. I cried at the tree lot, knowing I was picking out your last one. You were too sick to come with me. It was a gorgeous frosted number. You sometimes laughed at bills in my living trees. Did you know my camera malfunctioned and none of the Christmas pictures turned out. I truly believe we were meant to remember you as you looked in the many pictures we have. Not pale and thin and struggling.



05:43

I wake up crying. David mumbles some consolation in his sleep. tells me he loves me. It's just a dream and rolls over.



05:54

Since you've left us I've tried to carry on as you and I did together, supporting persons with AIDS as best I can. This past spring and summer, your room was occupied by a wonderful young woman, Kyle who had AIDS related lymphoma like you. She and I went through her chemotherapy like you and I did. She died in September. And I miss her. My greatest hope this holiday season is that AIDS will become a memory like the holocaust that happened and was cured but always etched in memory.



06:26

Just a dream. But I can't help thinking how in depth I'll be all alone. I don't want to leave David or Linda or my family. So much sadness. I think there's got to be a reason for it all. Maybe I'll figure it out. Maybe not.



06:46

Thank you for teaching me so much about courage and loving. I love you forever. Mom.



06:54

I only know that love feels good. I am a love hog. I'm working on my Christmas list. I am not alone. In David's arms. I will fly Joe



07:24

is big and he's abrasive and he can draw like a lot. Or be me guys. God knows he's courageous. And sometimes outrageous, inspires me to do all that. But I'll never forget. The last time we met how my heart stopped at the story he told me. He said



08:00

life can be hard when it is you ecard that you never expected



08:10

Hello, I'm Dale Raoul, and I'm Michael Kearns. This program which we call faithful, Joyful and triumphant is a reading of letters which were written in response to the AIDS crisis. They were



08:21

written by persons with AIDS PW A's, sons, brothers, friends, lovers and those who love them.



08:27

They were written by mothers, daughters, sisters, friends and those who love them. This is



08:32

a pilot project for what we hope to become a larger gathering of AIDS letters that will chronicle these times of illness and healing, despair and hope, a sort of a verbal AIDS quilt that will record the incredible diversity of responses to our times most devastating health crisis.



08:49

Hope, always hope



08:53

that he said it's not the end. I rely on my friend. All the affection and the love and maybe with hugs, and without who's and drugs



09:22

and maybe he will has he's active still. He goes to the marches and all the rage. He's not giving in. He's determined to win. He's a person who's living with



09:41

living with be embracing the light, when shadow is the place to be. Is it good matches Die releasing that we hold in



10:15

the loss of a mother's sister sisters and brothers that deep history of



10:29

and one way one way



10:32



to stand by living and remain you



10:43

so if you've got a friend don't go bury him trying to shed surrender you're down by reaching out to your person living



10:56

with a living when



11:09

dealing with



11:16

it's a place to be it's a step we can stay



11:36

embracing the light



12:10

dear Clark, I'm not at all used to you being gone. Sometimes I pretend you're still in the hospital or just hiding out in your apartment, endlessly rewriting a story or doing drawings for the PWA voice cross hatching yourself into a stupor. I know it's not true. But it's easier than facing you've died. I don't like being left here alone. We shared the intimate horrors of AIDS and somehow I thought that would go on and on. I hoped that I would be there when you died. That I could learn from your experience of dying from AIDS as I learned from your experience of living with it. I was just too sick to be with you. I know that you were surrounded by your family, but I don't know much more about your passing. Was it easy to finally let go? Are you ready? Or did you panic? I wish would write back and tell me about it. Then when my turn came I'd be better prepared. It is some comfort knowing you've paved the way maybe you'll be there waiting for me when my turn comes. Losing you is the worst. being incapacitated. It's harder and harder to begin each day knowing that it includes little more than lying in bed. I think if I watch one more Oprah Winfrey Show, I'll go mad. Hey, you know what? I've adopted an elephant in your name. I thought you'd like that. The zoo sent a photo and certificate to your family. I wasn't given the opportunity to name it but I think of the little packet DERM is Valentine. You know why? Your Uncle Ben has stayed in touch with us. He is such a sweet man. I'm sure it was a great comfort to you having him around you at the end. We should all be so lucky. I miss you. I hope you're happy. Knowing you has made my life so rich Andy



15:45

From an 11 year old girl, Dear God, I am not afraid of AIDS because if I get AIDS, I know I'll die and I'm not afraid of dying either. But if I do get it, I will pray and try to stop it.



15:56

This letter was written by a fifth grader in San Francisco. Dear Santa, I'm afraid of AIDS because I don't want to die. I also don't want to be made fun of and I don't want to have no friends, even people who ain't homosexual get AIDS.



16:29

Dear Mr. And Mrs. Kelly, the last time I saw you was at the hospital, and I never was able to tell you what George meant to me. Different things trigger some special memory of him. It's been Halloween and Thanksgiving, and now it's Christmas. It was just two years ago, George threw a Thanksgiving party, a wonderful sit down dinner for 12 culminating with George dressed in a white lab coat throwing a pumpkin off the roof of the house with Beethoven's Fifth blaring on the stereo. George through great parties. One year that Georgetown he rented a whole 120 people attended. George made a grand entrance dressed in a white paper jumpsuit during the David Bowie impersonation. Susan was there in black leather whips and chains. The dance flowed out past the ice sculpture shaped like Texas, past two bars, the kegs of beer, the tubs of grain alcohol and Kool Aid on to the sidewalk and into the street. I don't recall how or if I got home that night, but I remember it as one of George's best parties. When George lay in his last coma, you pulled me aside and asked me if people in college knew that George was gay. It seemed a strange question to me. You looked so desperate, so desperate to know not everybody knew about your son. The truth was no one knew in college, not even George. For all those years he was dating and would probably marry Susan. George told me later after we met up again in LA that it wasn't until his senior year that he began to reconcile the feelings he had and began to confront and overcome 16 years of Catholic education. George told me it was only in the past year that he had told you of his sexual orientation. I know the bitterness that caused in you. George shared with me the difficulty you had in accepting him. But I didn't realize the extent of the family's crisis until we were in the hospital and I spoke with George's older brother Pat. Pat told me everyone had kept the secret of George's gayness from him because Pat had a five year old son who worship George and whom Georgia doored. tears streaming down his face. Pat told me that because he was so morally and politically conservative. George feared if he told Pat, he would no longer have contact with his son. Thus, your family hid George even from himself. When you asked if people at Georgetown knew George was gay, with that painful look in your eyes, hopeful that some segment of the world could remember your son without this word, gay attached to his name. This word you find so distasteful. I was filled with pity and disgust. Such disgust at your shame. Such pity that Christians could not find it in their hearts to love their own son. Perhaps you find my words too harsh? I might think so too. If news had not come back from the Houston funeral, that you decided to make up a disease rather than tell people AIDS was his cause of death. It was an entire memorial service to someone else. Someone who wasn't George, the person he grew into after facing his gayness was by far the best George I knew. He looked the best having gotten rid of his Neiman Marcus preppy look in exchange for A funkier more open personal

style. He wore contacts instead of those thick eyeglasses. He was becoming a whole new person. happy with himself. One of the best times he had was participating in the March on Washington last October. You don't know how much I miss him. I cannot believe that George is dead. I'm too young to have to deal with this. I think of George every week. He haunts me. Could I have been a better friend? Could I have helped him through the pain. Instead, he chose to fight the disease alone, telling no one already fighting the shame he knew you would feel for him. I guess the real point of this letter is to tell you that the person who was George is someone very much for you to love. He was a vibrant person. loving, caring, sweet, funny. To deny George's gayness would be to deny him his last bit of humanity. Christine? Dear



21:08

John, it has been so long since I've talked to you. 14 and a half years is a very long time for us. I learned so much from you, and was fortunate to finally experience true and genuine love. Our love endured. We were best friends as well as lovers. I'm so sorry, baby, that you had to be sick for three long years. It was awful watching your suffering and your pain. I felt it too. And I hated God for putting you through it. But through all that I reveled in your strength and courage, watched in all your untiring spirit and will to live. I miss you so very much, Johnny. I haven't talked to you in such a long time. So I guess it's time. I really believe you know everything anyway, sometimes I think you are directing the whole thing that's going on right now. But still, I have to talk to you. It's extremely difficult for me to put into words and I pray that you understand I guess I want your approval in some strange way. You see, John, I've met someone who is very special. His name is Frank, and he has really pulled me up from despair. Please don't think that he is a replacement for you. That would be impossible, but he is making me very happy. And I only hope that will make you happy. The two of you are frighteningly alike in a number of ways. I suppose that was a major part of the attraction. I know you would like him. And as strange as the idea seems I somehow believe you had something to do with our meeting. I hope so. Of course he knows all about you and me. He knows I have Ark he tested negatively about 10 months ago. Naturally we are being very careful. Please understand, Johnny, please don't be hurt. It doesn't affect my feelings or memories about you. Nothing could ever change that. Frank lives here in San Francisco. I've been here for two weeks now. You see I rented out our house in Glendale. You know how much I love San Francisco and I really needed a change of scene. I bet my renting out our house horrifies you more than my scene. Frank. Please don't be hurt. I don't ever want you to be heard again. I won't go on about Frank. You probably know more about him than I. I don't feel guilty. I don't believe you would want me to feel guilty. I believe you want me to be happy. I am happy. I pray that you are content to I'll always love you, John. And I'll always be grateful. It's been such a long time since I talked to you. I knew it was time. Love, Richard.



24:05

Dear Jack. When you were diagnosed last November, I was devastated. And I felt a powerful need to take care of you. I've experienced so many emotions since the beginning of our relationship. It's been awkward, uncomfortable, often clumsy, as well as warm and gracious. Our worlds and the roles we have played could not have been more polarized. Only our shared anger and commitment surrounding aids brought our paths together. I've watched you experienced you. You are earnest, diligent, dramatic, sensitive, graceful and stubborn as well as frightened and isolated. Only tentatively Did you finally resign yourself to my hovering and

caring once as you lay in a coma so fragile and vulnerable. I touched you I kissed you. Knowing if you were conscious, you would have stopped me abruptly. The doctor said, I might never speak to you again. All I could think of was that you must not die. I had things to say to you. I had no idea what it was. I had to say I just knew I was not ready to say goodbye. Well, you survived that time. And as you recovered, we slipped into our pattern of friendly estrangement. Now this latest bout with AIDS, again, I am drawn to you. But now I have a wonderful insight into my feelings for you. I told you about the workshop I attended on mythology, based on Joseph Campbell's The Hero with 1000 faces. It's about the circular downward journey in which we face many dragons and demons until we meet the guardian who propels us back up into the completion of the adventure. My confusion vanished as I realized that you have been one of my most significant guardians. My life changed filled up because of what you offered me. When you looked up at me after hearing this story, you said, Susan, you will never comprehend or understand how important you have been in my life. Because I keep you at a distance. I knew then we were complete. It felt oddly glorious. We both knew what had just happened. Bose aware that you were acknowledging your final stages of living and dying. Is this a goodbye? I'm not sure. But if it is, I know now that I am ready. Love Susan. Jack Hamilton died November 20 1988.



26:49

A person with AIDS writes from his hospital bed. Having AIDS is an invasion of privacy, your found out than defined out and robbed of individuality. I was never interested at work and sharing my sexual preferences. There is much more to me than sexual preference. But now with AIDS I have to watch out for the old pigeonhole. I'm found out and defined out by society's prejudice. At a chic holiday aids benefit cocktail party that compassionate intention makes everyone feel warm and cozy. The booze makes everyone feel warm and cozy. Then as the evening proceeds, AIDS begins to be defined out categories of sickness and wellness, financial need social status, the distance between them and the PW A's is a personal or corporate check. Politics mingles with caring hearts become cold as the ice cubes in the drinks seeing illness, not persons. Some hearts resist the plea to empower someone who is ill. Some hearts want to retain their sense of power over others. It's strange to see the pleasure of power trips included in the response to AIDS. Many define out a PW a as someone who was mentally too weak to prevent the onset of AIDS, they think we manifested it both fish, the greatest number of PW A's got infected because we enjoyed sex. Many feel responsible for bringing on their own case of AIDS, feeling guilty and at fault for their own suffering bull mesh. That's just another form of egomania. If it's my fault, it makes me a much more important character in the drama. Allowing there is no fault around this disease is a surrender to powerlessness. That surrender is a much more useful state of mind towards healing, staying well. Some of us would rather feel guilty than powerless. Some would prefer to feel powerful and important in the drama of AIDS. What a blast of arctic air to hear there are people like me, and then there are the truly innocent victims. I need to warm my heart by acknowledging I'm powerless over aids and that it's not my fault. earth brought forth HIV. That deep sickness of our planet of our species is warning us. We're only seeing the tip of some terrible iceberg. warm hearts could melt the dangerous ice. This holiday. My gift is a prayer that hearts will thaw. I am praying for America's hearts. be gentler, warmer, be fair hearts. People are people, not diseases. It seems that the universe is putting us one by one through our pay says until all our hearts are warm warm during the holidays is most important for all of us to live warmly now whether sick or healthy at Christmas time a grave gets very very cold



30:20

Oh calm



30:57

shall come to



31:08

see free from satan



31:24

man



31:54

in one heart and Mind



32:25

right



32:45

dear Doug, hi, I love you, and I miss you. One of the greatest gifts you gave me was coming to me with the week after you died. I was standing in the kitchen, and I felt your familiar touch in the ribs. I was so excited you were here. And he told me you were fine. You help guide me. And despite all the struggles of life right now you're here with me. It's wonderful to have that special period in life when a brother and sister as adults can have a special closeness. When you moved out here from New York that began to happen for you and me. Such little things but to have your daily phone call, just to say how are you to plan for the holidays together? Or to hear about a marvelous concert you'd gone to. Not having those phone calls is probably the hardest thing for me. But the music we shared lives in me just last week for All Saints Day We sang the for a requiem. Oh, I can still so easily hear you singing those baritone solos. The first couple of chords during rehearsal move me to tears. Just as my anger was moved when we sang together at the time of King's assassination. You were the soloist then I hear your voice now even when someone else is singing. I have wonderful memories anytime I want them. Your way of giving to other people me in particular is special in my memory. When I was down in the dumps you take me to a special place for lunch. And I'll never forget the beautiful flowers you sent me when you found out I had cancer. White lilacs and Sonia roses. I never saw any so beautiful. I was lucky to have had you from my brother. I miss you. But I hold you in my heart. Love your sister



34:35

to your son. This letter is long overdue. One of the blessings of aides is an awareness of the importance of no longer putting anything off until tomorrow. You were 14 years old and your sister was nine when I finally got clean and sober. I was drunk or loaded for all the formative years of your lives. You have grown into a fine young man I have great respect and admiration for the ease the naturalness with which you have accepted yourself as a gay man. It wasn't that way for me. But then I grew up in another time, another world. I am very proud of you. I remember the day when you were about 17, and I saw the match books in your room from some well known gay bars. I was stunned. The thought had never crossed my mind that you might be gay. My first reaction was, oh my God, no, my kid is gay. What did I do wrong? My next thought was, wait a minute, if there's something wrong with my kid being gay, what does that say about me? At age 45. For the first time in my life, I finally had to really look at my beliefs about myself about being a gay man, I can tell you it was not a comfortable experience for me. But when I asked you if being gay was a problem for you, you look baffled and said Why should that be a problem? It took my son being gay for me to really accept myself as gay. And for that, I thank you. During my drinking years, I often envisioned our family to be just like a Norman Rockwell painting. In reality, it was more like an episode out of soap. Today is better. Though we may not be the typical American family, we are all still together. We really do love each other. I've changed and grown a lot over the past few years. Even before I learned I was HIV positive my journey had led me to Louise Hay and other metaphysical teachers. By the time I was diagnosed with Arc, I had built a solid foundation in the belief that we all have the ability to recover from anything. After all, I had succeeded in recovering from 30 years of alcoholism and drug addiction. I have even recovered from my own self loathing, my homophobia. And now I am recovering from a virus that most of the world believes to be hopelessly fatal. I am recovering because I believe I can. Today I have a faith, the greatest gift of all, I trust in a power that is greater than all other powers. I know that each of us is a part of that power. We are all connected. We are one. Today there is no need to fear death because there is no death. We are not just our bodies. We are spirit, light. Energy. We keep on changing, transforming becoming more than we ever imagined we could be. Today I know the rightness of each of us being exactly who we are. When I got sober I thought life was going to be grim the surprises I like it. When I was diagnosed, I thought it was going to be scary and unpleasant. The surprises life has gotten better, fuller, richer. The real gift is we get to be here. We get to experience it all. I'm so thankful I've been able to get to know you. Merry Christmas, Mark. Love dad. You better be like a good little girl. Getting down get down



38:26

your Santa. Remember me? I'm that little girl on Carlisle Street. The one who lived in the red house next to all those candy store the house with the chime bells that played the Ave Maria every time the door opened. During Christmas time that door swung open a lot. Uncle Eddie coming in from shoveling the snow from our walk. grand mom carrying groceries and Marie showing off her new holiday hairdo. And my mom always rushing in and out going somewhere. The house was full of relatives and neighbors that time of year. Sometimes it felt like the wall shook with laughter other times it roared with angry words. Especially when Uncle Eddie drank too much whiskey. I remember hiding under the dining room table huddled next to my cousin's humming Christmas carols to drown out uncle Eddie's drunken words. Later, when he'd fallen asleep on the sofa. We'd poke his belly and tug his whiskers just to hear him snore louder.

Grandma would chase us than distract us by letting us help her bake the Christmas cookies. But Santa, there is one Christmas that I will never forget. You left an empty box under the tree with my name on it. What could I have done to deserve that? I was shattered and cried for weeks after grandmama said you were probably just too busy. She told me I had to forgive you. I refused. Well, years and years have gone by and I held on to that feeling of being deprived feelings that I was not worthy. But I was just is not good enough. Then three Christmases ago, I was diagnosed with a strange new virus called HIV. It is what causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It is always fatal. They say, I was terrified, angry, sad, confused, guilty, resentful. For two years I ran around trying everything in anything to get well to fight back. I went to workshops I chanted, I cried, I meditated. I ate food. My grandma wouldn't serve her worst enemy we ever had Hmong ward. I don't know why, Santa. But last Christmas, as I was dusting off the ornaments, and making ready to trim the tree, I remembered that empty box. During my meditation that night, I saw clearly the whole picture of that Christmas a long time ago. There were lots of presents under that tree with my name on them. Not just that empty box. Why didn't I remember them Santa? I started to cry, and smile and then laughter began to pour up from down deep inside where that little girl sat. Every cell shook with relief with joy. I picked up that little girl. She smiled broadly and spoke to me. She said, Joanne, you are enough. It has been a crime against your heart to forget those other gifts. You are special. You have many riches. Santa, I spent a lot of time unable to forgive. I always felt the world delivered me a life of empty boxes. I had forsaken the journey for the destination and I wound up stranded. Suddenly, sitting there with that little girl who was me. I realized the empty box wasn't really how it was. How it is. Yes, even now with Ark. Many wonderful thoughts come into my mind. The time I traveled through Europe working on films living in New York, the life of Holly Golightly dancing theater, fighting for causes I believed in civil rights, gay rights, the anti war movement, the birth of my only child, my daughter just turned 18 an outpouring of joyous wonderful times. Since that time last Christmas. My body and my heart have undergone a major healing transition. I have wonderful friends and family. God given courage and faith. So many boxes all filled to the brim. I am glowing this Christmas. I have no symptoms. My T cells are shining bright. My heart is light. Full of kindness, love peace. I'm filling that empty box Santa. And I'm giving it to the universe that supported me. That supports me still. I am not waiting to die. I'm too busy moving on living. Or I'm still praying for peace Santa's Oh calm All Ye Faithful, Joyful and triumphant. That's my Christmas wish for all my brothers and sisters. Love that little girl from Carlisle street



43:20

Welcome Oh



43:31

Dr



43:39

ha ha me.





44:01

Kidding Oh, come on. You've been listening to faithful, Joyful and triumphant holiday voices of AIDS. The production of artists confronting aids, featuring Michael Kearns and Dale row under the direction of Libby appel. The letters were compiled by James Carroll picot technical assistance by Morisseau Peggy Lyon and Bob Lyon. This program was produced for Pacifica radio by Lucia Chapelle. Seeing wires



44:42

sing



44:50

Hey, buddy, when I get well, I'm going to take you to Las Vegas for the best Christmas you've ever had.



44:56

Thank you for teaching me so much about Courage and loving I love you forever.



45:02

Mom in David's arms I will fly I cannot believe



45:07

George is dead



45:08

I don't like being left here alone is this goodbye it's been such a long time since I talked to you I



45:14

miss you but I hold you in my heart people



45:17

are people not diseases



45:20

I am not waiting to die. I'm too busy moving on living



45:24

the real gift is we get to be here. We get to experience it all Happy



45:31

Holidays



45:32

Happy Holidays



45:44

boy alone is he alone it is.



46:32

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