Watch 40 Years of Personal Stories From the AIDS Epidemic

The 2020/40 platform hosts multimedia stories of those lost to HIV—Mary Bowman, Vito Russo and Sylvester—and those still in the fight.

July 8, 2020 By Trent Straube

A new storytelling web platform titled 2020/40 collects multimedia stories from 40 years of the HIV pandemic. Launched by the National AIDS Memorial and hosted on AIDSMemorial.org, the initiative uploads a different story each week—as of July 8, the site includes 21 stories.

A screengrab from the website shows (from left to right), Row 1: Jim Wigler, Gert McMullin, Cleve Jones; Row 2: Sylvester, Vito Russo, Antwan Matthews; Row 3: Pedro Zamora, Mary Bowman and Reggie WilliamsAIDSMemorial.org

“These stories testify to the long struggle of AIDS with the aim to educate, to remember, to reflect and to support the work yet to be done,” according to a National AIDS Memorial press release about the project. “The stories offer lessons to help communities impacted by HIV/AIDS and all those impacted by on-going social injustice.”

2020/40 features a variety of people, ranging from nurses, parents and allies to activists, long-term survivors and youth. The page for each person’s story includes a variety of videos, images and written details as well as links to further information about that person.

For example, the page about pop star and singer Sylvester includes a short written bio, a clip of a live performance and the 15-minute documentary Love Me Like You Should: The Brave and Bold Sylvester, which is posted above.

“These stories help connect people in a very personal way to the AIDS pandemic, not just from 40

years ago, but today," said Josh Gamson, PhD, a dean and professor at the University of San Francisco and a National AIDS Memorial board member who cochairs its storytelling programs. "The face of AIDS has changed over time, and this effort shows how the history and lessons from the AIDS pandemic are important today, as our country faces another pandemic and is once again torn apart by social injustice, bigotry and fear."

Based in San Francisco, the National AIDS Memorial encompasses the National AIDS Memorial Grove and several scholarship programs and storytelling initiatives. It is also the steward of the AIDS Memorial Quilt.

For a POZ interview last year with John Cunningham, executive director of the National AIDS Memorial, see "Healing Through Remembrance." This spring, Cunningham penned an opinion piece about adapting the lessons of AIDS to fight COVID-19 titled "Through Darkness, We Must Always See the Light."

2020/40 and the virtual AIDS Quilt project launched this week in conjunction with the 23rd International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2020), which was slated to take place in the San Francisco Bay Area but is being held virtually because of COVID-19. For a roundup of articles on the conference, click #AIDS 2020.

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