

INTRODUCTION

The LGBTQ community has made great strides toward civil rights and in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Today does not feel like it did in the 1980s and 90s. It's important to recognize that the decades prior to our recent advancements were ones of hardship and devastating loss of life.

Two years ago, I embarked on a mission to create a written record of some of the significant challenges the local LGBTQ community has faced. In this account, I focus on the period from the first public knowledge of AIDS in 1981 through 1999 when medical advancements were beginning to make HIV a treatable, manageable disease, not dissimilar to other chronic health conditions. I believe now is the time to remember those years.

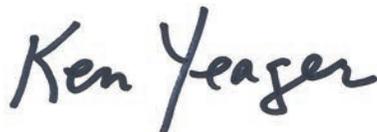
Although the LGBTQ community has endured countless hardships, perhaps nothing has cut so deeply as HIV/AIDS, and I recognize that no retelling can truly capture the pervasive fear, enormous suffering, and agonizing sorrow this merciless disease inflicted. I remember losing many friends. During those years, hope was in short supply.

Looking back, we find selfless heroes in the battle against HIV/AIDS. There was amazing tenacity, bravery, generosity, and self-sacrifice. I have called attention to a handful of the many Santa Clara County HIV/AIDS heroes. Another entire account could be devoted to the brave and dedicated others.

However, there were also villains who perpetuated bigotry and discrimination for political gain, which greatly exacerbated the suffering and slowed the progress of research and treatment.

HIV/AIDS continues to claim lives, particularly in certain communities. Far too many people are not taking advantage of early and easy testing options and preventive medications. As part of our continuing effort to fully eradicate this disease, it is helpful to reflect on the losses we've suffered, while also celebrating the hard-earned advances we've achieved.

For those who weren't old enough to experience these early years of the AIDS epidemic, I hope this account will inform you. For those, like me, who lived through the darkest days, I hope this serves as a reminder of how far we have come in many aspects of societal changes. For all, I hope it will inspire you to become involved because we can all make a difference.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Yeager". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

DECEMBER 2018