**[EZ Speech Writers No. 15762]**

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Remarks by Dr. Steven Pounders in accepting the 2016 Kuchling Award of the Black Tie Dinner fundraising organization.

MEMBERS OF THE BLACK TIE DINNER BOARD . . . HONORED GUESTS . . . ALL YOU WONDERFUL FRIENDS WHO’VE BEEN GOOD ENOUGH TO JOIN ME HERE THIS EVENING . . . LADIES AND GENTLEMEN . . . :

IT WOULD BE LESS THAN HONEST FOR ME TO SAY THAT RE-CEIVING THIS VERY PRESTIGEOUS AWARD IS NOT A TRMENDOUS HONOR FOR ME.

IT IS.

AND I APPRECIATE THE RECOGNITION VERY MUCH.

YET I MUST SAY THATI FEEL AT THE MOMENT A LITTLE LIKE THAT ICONIC FIREFIGHTER OF TV AND MOVIE LORE WHO — HAVING

JUST SAVED A CHILD FROM A COLLAPSING BUILDING — IS CALLED A “HERO” BY EVERYONE YET RESPONDS (AND BELIEVES) THAT *“I WAS ONLY DOIN’ MY JOB*.”

I WAS JUST DOING WHAT I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE DOING, WHAT GOD INTENDED ME TO BE DOING.

I WAS JUST ANSWERING THE CALL.

WELL . . . I’VE BEEN ANSWERING THE CALL FOR A GOOD MANY YEARS NOW, PERHAPS MORE THAN I CARE TO REMEMBER SOME-TIMES. ESPECIALLY THE FIRST YEARS, THE EARLY YEARS. I WAS THERE AT THE BEGINNING, BEFORE THE SCOURGE EVEN HAD A NAME, JUST AS THIS STRANGE PRESENTATION OF DISEASE SYNDROMES BEGAN CLUSTERING IN THE GAY POPULATIONS OF NEW YORK AND LOS ANGELES.

IT WASN’T PRETTY. IN THE EARLY YEARS, BEFORE AZT WAS WIDELY TESTED AND AVAILABLE, WE DIDN’T HAVE A HELLUVA LOT

TO WORK WITH. FOR AT LEAST THREE YEARS, WE REALLY DIDN’T HAVE THE SLIGHTEST IDEA ABOUT WHAT WE WERE *DEALING* WITH CLINICALLY. THE EARLIEST NAME WE HAD FOR IT WAS THE “*GAY-RELATED IMMUNODEFICIENCY SYNDROME*,” OR GRID. THIS WAS CHANGED IN A FEW YEARS, WITH NOT A HUGE IMPROVEMENT IN DIAGNOSTIC UTILITY, TO THE “*ACQUIRED IMMUNODEFICIENCY SYNDROME*,” OR AIDS.

WHATEVER YOU CALLED IT, IT WAS A DEVASTATING DISEASE. A WASTING DISEASE . . . AN SAPPING DISEASE . . . A DISEASE WITHOUT A CURE, IT’S DIAGNOSIS WRITTEN ALWAYS WITH A SKULL-AND-CROSSBONES AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE. IN THE EARLIEST DAYS, THE LOOK IN OUR PATIENTS’ EYES WAS ONE OF CONFUSION, AS IN “DOCTOR, WHAT’S WRONG WITH ME?”. BUT ONCE IT BECAME KNOWN THAT AIDS WAS INEXORABLY A FATAL DISEASE, THAT LOOK CHANGED TO FEAR — THE FEAR OF DEATH COMING DECADES TOO SOON. THE FEAR OF SUFFERING AN UNWANTED CAPTIVITY IN A FAST-COLLAPSING BODY. THE FEAR OF HAVING NO HOPE.

LIKE I SAID, IT WASN’T PRETTY. BUT I KNEW FULL-WELL WHAT I WAS GETTING INTO WHEN I DECIDED TO DEDICATE MY LIFE TO PATIENTS SUFFERING WITH AIDS. AND I MADE THIS CHOICE BE-CAUSE I THOUGHT THAT I WAS IN A UNIQUE POSITION TO MAKE A USEFUL CONTRIBUTION. THERE ARE TWO REASONS I FELT THIS WAY. FIRST, OF COURSE, I’M GAY, LIVE A GAY LIFESTYLE AND HAVE BEEN ACTIVE IN ALL KINDS OF LGBT EVENTS AND INITIATIVES FOR MORE THAN [NO.] YEARS. NUMBER TWO: I’M A DOCTOR. NOW WHILE THE CONCEPT OF A GAY DOCTOR MIGHT NOT SOUND SO VERY ODD TO YOUR MODERN EARS HERE IN 2016, I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT I WAS, IF NOT *SUI GENERIS* BACK IN 1981, AT LEAST A MEMBER OF A ***VERY*** SMALL FRATERNITY OF AIDS DOCTORS PRACTICING IN OUR COMMUNITY AT THAT TIME.

SERVING A COMMUNITY *OTHER* THAN THE LGBT COMMUNITY HAS NEVER CROSSED MY MIND . . . NOT IN MORE THAN 35 YEARS OF PRACTICING MEDICINE. YOU’LL NEVER FIND A POPULATION, EVEN TODAY, THAT’S MORE IN NEED OF COMPETENT AND COMPAS-SIONATE HEALTHCARE, OR A POPULATIONS THAT’S MORE

GRATEFUL FOR IT WHEN IT’S DELIVERED. IN THE EARLY DAYS, ALL WE COULD DELIVER WAS A BIG DOSE OF COMPASSION AND NOT A HELLUVA LOT BY WAY OF HEALTHCARE. TODAY, WE’VE GOT A GROWING PHARMACOPOIA OF AGENTS THAT HAVE PROVEN TO PROLONG LIFE AND REDUCE SUFFERING AMONG AIDS PATIENTS. WE’VE ACHIEVED REMISSIONS IN A GROWING SUBSET OF AIDS CASES. AND IF YOU CHECK THE RECENT LITERATURE, YOU’LL EVEN FIND THE “C” WORD — THAT’S “C” FOR “CURE” — CROPPING UP WITH INCREASING FREQUENCY AND GROWING OPTIMISM.

OF COURSE, THE STRUGGLE GOES ON. I’VE BEEN A PART OF IT FOR A LONG TIME, AND I DON’T TEND ON QUITTING ANY TIME SOON. BUT IN WHATEVER CAPACITY I MIGHT CONTINUE TO SERVE, RECEIVING THE KUCHLING AWARD HERE THIS EVENING WILL SURELY STAND OUT AS ONE OF MY LIFE’S MOST CHERISHED MOMENTS. PERHAPS NOT AS GREAT AS SAVING A LIFE, BUT CHERISHED NONETHELESS.

NOW, BEFORE I CONCLUDE MY REMARKS, LET ME TAKE A SECOND OR TWO TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE TREMENDOUS DEBT OF GRATI-TUDE I OWE TO [INSERT LIST OF TRIBUTES, ALONG WITH THE NATURE OF THEIR RESPECTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS EVENING OR TO YOUR LIFE.]

AND NOW, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, LET ME CONCLUDE MY REMARKS SIMPLY BY SAYING, AGAIN, HOW VERY, VERY MUCH I APPRECIATE THIS AWARD, AND HOW GRATEFUL I AM TO ALL THOSE WHO CHOSE TO HONOR MY CAREER BY BESTOWING IT ON ME.

THANK YOU FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART.

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