

AIDS Lecture April 10, 1989
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Remarks
By
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It was 34 days since I had last spoken to a public audience on the epidemic of AIDS. This was a most unusual audience, and a most unusual occasion. I had spoken several times in lectures on AIDS about the terrible injustice and indiscrimination leveled against the Ray family in Florida. Three Ray children, all with Hemophilia, and all having been recipients of blood transfusions and blood products, were HIV positive. In the minds of their neighbors, this was sufficient reason to torch their home. I had also spoken many times about Ryan White and the fact that he was excluded from school and how wrong that was in the ethics of education and the understanding of AIDS. Here was an opportunity to pay tribute to these people, and call attention to some of the things I had highlighted in previous speeches.

I shared the platform with Dr. Jerome Isaak, representing the American Academy of Pediatrics, with Dr. Joseph Holland, President of the Florida chapter of the American Academy of Family Practice, with John Burger, Coordinator of HIV Education and Training Program of the National Education Association, Mrs. Lynne Bounds, Vice-President of Region 3 of the National PTA, Mr. James R. Ogelsby, President of the National School Board Association, William Hotchkiss, MD, past president of the American Medical Association and an old friend, and Dolores Hardison, immediate and past President of the National Association of Elementary School Principles.

I started by saying that I was sure many others would have liked to have been there that day, but these folks represented a few of the national organizations with whom I consulted before writing the Surgeon General's Report on AIDS.

There were also families with school age children with HIV, prominently Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Ray, and their children Ricky, Randy, Robert, and Candy, Mrs. Jean White and her sons Ryan and Andrew, Mr. and Mrs. Andy Moore, and Christopher Case.

I congratulation those in the audience for having courage and having heart, and then presented a layman's approach to AIDS, indicating that it wasn't airborne, it wasn't food born, but it was blood born. This got me into a description of the virus, and what it could do. Because no one knew very much about AIDS, many people with the AIDS virus suffered great cruelty at the hands of their fellow citizens, and many of those were

children. I deemed cruelty not to belong in our society but cruelty against children to be especially inexcusable.

This was certainly not the norm for our country, as the majority of Americans understood what it was to be responsible for one's neighbor. These are people who respect the call to justice, the people who have the courage to think clearly, and to do what's right.

I acknowledged that we were there to celebrate, and especially honor, a number of individuals – good and decent people, whom it was our privilege to know and recognize, because in addition to their personal strengths, integrity, and decency, they also happen to resemble what is best about the people in our country.

A lot of individuals, organizations, and societies were then thanked for specific things that they had done, especially in the state of Florida. One always takes a risk in listing such people, but I think we got them all. Then I mentioned the unsung heroes and heroines who made the day happen – there were a good number of individuals, including musicians from the Pine View School for the Gifted and their director, Kenneth Bowermeister. In fact, I read off in addition to those I'd already mentioned, 2 pages double-spaced of people who deserved special accolades. I quipped that perhaps I had left out about a dozen names in all of Sarasota County. Then I presented a certificate of appreciation and a medallion to three individuals. The citation was “for your contribution to the enhancement of public and community education in support of the families with school age children with HIV infection”. I repeated this to other groups, and individuals, hoping all the while that I really hadn't left anyone out. I closed with a citation to Woodrow Myers, MD, MBA, Secretary of Health, State of Indiana and a great colleague during my Washington years, because of the passion we shared for public health.

This was probably the best I had ever felt during the epidemic of AIDS, and my part in trying to educate the public about it. All the reasons for my being there were sad, and essentially inexcusable, but I was with the people who turned situations around, and made it possible for us to hold our heads up, as Americans with integrity.

Because of the nature of this presentation, and the number of proper names, there is no index.