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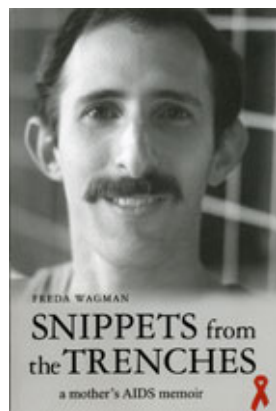
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A Mother's Story



Freda Wagman's son, Gary, was diagnosed with Kaposi's sarcoma in 1983. At that time, treatment options were limited, and thousands of gay men were falling ill and dying from AIDS. Determined to help those living with HIV and to conquer her own fears about her son's future, Wagman began volunteering at the AIDS Foundation Houston, providing assistance and comfort to people with AIDS and their families. In her 2007 memoir, Wagman writes about the patients and families she met through her volunteer work, and shares stories from her son's life and death.

The following are excerpts from *Snippets from the Trenches: a mother's AIDS memoir* (BookSurge Publishing 2007).

1984

For the next two weeks, we all took turns going to the hospital, suiting up in identical yellow paper clothes—paper shoes and all.... We were instructed by the nursing staff in the Intensive Care Unit to be sure to leave the hospital garb inside the room, lest it contaminate anyone on the outer side of the heavy glass window. It took many months before anyone gave consideration to the fact that the person in the bed, hooked up to a ventilator to stay alive, was the one who needed protection.

1985

As I left Billy's room, I could tell that we were all in it together for the long haul. I couldn't bear to leave Billy's parents by themselves, especially since they had nothing to do but wait forty minutes of every hour to see their son for ten short minutes. After what seemed like an interminable wait, it was Billy's dad's turn to see him.... When he returned, Bill Sr. announced that he had had a "talk" with Billy, combining the son's note writing and his father's speaking.

"Billy told me he had something to tell me. He said, 'Dad, I have AIDS.' Then he says, 'Dad, I have something else to tell you. I'm gay.' So I says, 'So what? You're our son. You're sick and we love you and we're here to help you.'"

1995

At 6:30 AM, Thursday morning, a call came from the nurses station.... I was told that Gary had taken a turn for the worse.... By Friday morning, it was clear that he would soon be leaving.... neither of us spoke of the inevitable end of our lives together. I couldn't tell him. I just wanted to crawl into the bed with him and hold him. Not wanting to make him uncomfortable... I merely stood by his bed and sang softly to him....

For more information, please contact Freda Wagman at freda.wagman@sbcglobal.net.

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