

# Lonely Planet Program Note

I don't want to die. I can only assume you don't want to die.

Can we fight together?

– Larry Kramer, AIDS Activist and ACT UP Founder, *1,112 and Counting* (1983)

*Lonely Planet* follows two queer men as they deal with the ongoing AIDS crisis and how it impacts their lives.

The AIDS crisis started in 1981, sensationalized by the infamous headline “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals”, published by the New York Times. This article, just one of many, demonstrates the misunderstanding of HIV and who it could affect. For years, most people thought of AIDS as “gay cancer,” simultaneously appalling, threatening, and not their problem.

The queer community struggled to turn the scandalized American public into allies. People with the ability to make change in the government and the pharmaceutical industry turned a blind eye as the virus continued to spread. Eventually, the unrelenting protests by AIDS activists pressured the federal government to take a stance. In 1985, President Ronald Reagan finally acknowledged the ongoing crisis as a “top priority,” despite not having mentioned it during the prior four years of his presidency.

*Lonely Planet* is set in 1993, over a decade after the crisis began. Despite medical advancements and reluctant government support, AIDS continued to take the lives of thousands every year. This continual exposure to mass death had extreme effects within and outside of the queer community.

Grief affects everyone in unique ways. It can bring people together or tear them apart. It can drive people to action or paralyze them. In the case of *Lonely Planet*, it disrupts the connection between two longtime friends. The play is just as much about social health, our ability to interact and form meaningful relationships, as it is about physical health.

THE NEW YORK TIMES,  
FRIDAY, JULY 3, 1981

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## RARE CANCER SEEN IN 41 HOMOSEXUALS

Outbreak Occurs Among Men  
in New York and California  
—8 Died Inside 2 Years

By LAWRENCE K. ALTMAN

Doctors in New York and California have diagnosed among homosexual men 41 cases of a rare and often rapidly fatal form of cancer. Eight of the victims died less than 24 months after the diagnosis was made.

The cause of the outbreak is unknown,



Since 1993, the development of new medications has allowed HIV+ people to live without their condition worsening into AIDS. Even though the threat of HIV has largely been mitigated, the social ramifications of the AIDS crisis are still present today, and the fight for queer rights is ongoing. Our production of *Lonely Planet* invites us to reflect on the past to care for the present.

– Aysha Zackria, dramaturg