

KALPESH OZA

In the early morning of Jun 4, Kalpesh Oza passed away in the Toronto home he shared with his chosen family. He was 34.

Exactly 11 years before, on Jun 4, 1984, Kalpesh moved to Canada from India where he had lived, loved and studied in his hometown — Ahmedabad. A student in microbiology at the University of Windsor, he discovered his sponsoring professor was using his skills for the professor's own career. In 1985, he transferred to McGill.

"When I came to Montreal in 1985, I had a fantastic change. I came out of the closet openly living as a gay man. Freedom to its fullest was experienced for the first time. This was what I thought then. I was ignorant in thinking in terms of 'freedom to its fullest,' not realizing that oppression was continuous. Heterosexist, male dominated society mediated subtle but strong oppression. Life, anyway, had certainly become colourful, beautiful, worth living." (From Sep 25, 1988.)

Kalpesh discovered he was HIV-positive in March 1988, after realizing a doctor had wrongly reported a negative result from 1986 tests. He witnessed the death by AIDS of two lovers, Guy in 1987 and Chris in 1994.

A dedicated AIDS activist, Kalpesh fully applied his scientific training, creativity, commitment to ending oppression in all forms, and passion for living, to the struggle for the treatments, care and justice that all people with HIV need to extend their lives and live with dignity and self-respect. He believed that leadership in an AIDS movement for social change needs to come from an organized, politicized force of people with HIV and AIDS.

Kalpesh loved a joke, a flip on his roller blades, a leap out of an airplane. He delighted in writing short stories, oral histories, community theatre, exploring languages, performance, singing, dancing and music.

His contributions reach far within and beyond the AIDS movement. Some of the groups he contributed to include the Scientific Review Committee of the Canadian HIV Trials Network, Act Up Montreal, the Comité des personnes atteintes du VIH (CPAVIH), AIDS Action Now's Treatment Access And Research Committee, Community AIDS Treatment Information Exchange, Canadian AIDS Society, Ontario AIDS Network, Alliance For South Asian AIDS Prevention, People Living With AIDS Foundation, Desh Pardesh, CKUT, CKLN and Montreal Serai.

At the time of his death, Kalpesh was on disability from the Immunology Department at the Hospital for Sick Children. He is deeply missed by his friends. We live and work on in the warm shadow of his enormous spirit.

A memorial will be held at 3pm on Sat, Jul 22 at The 519/Cawthra Park.

— Punam Khosla and Datejje

