My People
By Maggie Snyder

It was my silent efforts
At social justice
For “My People”
Who needed medical care
In a time
Where there
Was none.

No Social Justice,
And
No medical care.

“My People”
The Marginalized,
The Discriminated,
The Unloved,
The Outcasts
Trying to make
Their way in life,
Trying to treat their pain
The best way
They knew how.

I wanted
To help
“My Own”.
“My People”
How could I not
Give back to “My” community.

The first major fundraiser
In Salt Lake City
For people with HIV
Was in 1987.
I thought it strange then
The acronym AIDS
On the poster:
“Another Individual Dies Silently”

Why was it so?

Timothy,
His love with a man
Was forbidden
In the time.
His blue eyes
Turned black
As he lay dying,
A slow death
In a hospital bed...
Alone.

Robert,
He calmed his soul
With a needle.
His blood
Colored
The bed linens,
The walls,
The floor,
Where only
The Med III nurses
Would go...
Alone.

Janis,
She sold her love,
To make a living.
Her thrush
Was so bad
That copious
Amounts of Genitain Violet
Made no difference,
Except to purple
Her teeth,
Her skin,
Her clothes,
Her hospital room
And everything near her...
Alone.

These are “My People”
The Marginalized,
The Discriminated,
The Unloved,
The Outcasts
Making their way
The best way
They knew how.

“There
But for the Grace of God
Go I.”

It was a time before
We knew what HIV was.

A time
Before
Medications
Made a difference.

A time when
Everyone died.

A time when
Fear controlled so many.

“My People” ached
For human touch,
Love,
Companionship,
In a world
Where the mainstream medical staff
Whispered
That we,
The “untainted”,
Would soon die too.

We that were there,
Wanted to be.
We fulfilled our people’s
Last wishes:
To be loved,
To be held in someone’s arms...
If only fleeting,
On their Journey.

We fought for them
In voices that were mainly unheard.

I stopped counting
Their deaths
At 500.
I couldn’t count
Any more.

I learned to cry
Without tears.
I remember
Their names,
Their stories,
Their faces.

In 1990,
The Cure
Was Promised
By the year 2000...
A fleeting goal.

Times have changed.
HIV is preventable.
It is a chronic disease
Managed by medications, viral loads and patient adherence.
HIV is no longer
A death sentence.

Times have changed.
This is my happiness.
“My People” live
A long life...
With strict rules of health.

Social justices
Are evolving.

Looking back
At my own journey...
I learned
“Everything” in the exam room,
Walking along my patients’ side
On Their journey.
Sharing...
Their intimacies,
Their secrets
Their successes.
For this I am most thankful.

I thank “my people”
For making me
Who I am today.

No one does this alone.
I joined the leader,
Dr. Kristen Ries,
In the early years.
And
One by one
Others joined too.
We became a team,
Working for a common goal.
I thank everyone
Who helped me
Help each
Individual with HIV.

My wish is that No one
Has HIV.

Listen
To “My People”
Where HIV lives
Within.

They will tell you
It’s not easy.
Medications,
Side Effects,
Sick days,
Insurance issues,
Financial costs,
Social costs,
On and on.

It is the cost of living
With HIV.

They will also
Tell you
How it has changed their lives,
For the good...
Unimaginable.
It let them see
A life from
A different window.
One that they would
Have never looked through.

My sadness is that
Some of
“My People”
Continue
To take risks
To chase,
To want,  
To get  
HIV.

In their worlds
Where they treat
Their pain
And continue their journeys.

Our world is so much better now.
Equality is headed our way.
We won’t go back.
“My People”
No longer have to be
Marginalized,
Discriminated,
Unloved
Or outcasts.
We have a new world.

And how do I end this?
There was no beginning
As there is no end.

It is as if I jumped
Into the white water rapids
Of an unfamiliar river;
Only now
To have come to
An eddy
That has allowed me
To retire on the shore.