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The Creation of Art, Science and HIV/AIDS Pioneer Allen D. Allen

Phantom Street Artist · Wednesday, March 29th, 2017

A romantic loss is what inspired Allen D. Allen to write a hit song. The devastating loss of the HIV/AIDS epidemic drove him to create a cure. Whether it be the fine arts, literature or the sciences, the spark of inspiration and the act of creation are universal. Allen D. Allen has distinguished himself as a creative in multiple mediums and forms.



*Just Married this mornin'.
How happy they are.
"Just Married" written on
The window of a-their car.
It broke my heart
To see them drive away.
I lost the one I love today.*

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In 1958, country crooner Marty Robbins recorded the hit single “Just Married.” The song reached Number One on Billboard’s Top Country Singles charts and peaked at third as a Country and Western Best Seller. With Barry De Vorzon, Allen D. Allen wrote the song of lost love when he was hustling jingles among the advertising agencies in San Francisco. “Back then,” Allen confesses, “it was just like *Mad Men*, the martini lunches and all of the beautiful girls.” He is referring to the cable series of Madison Avenue hijinks in the Sixties. “San Francisco was a very romantic place.” Throughout the Sixties, Allen garnered awards and Fortune 500 clients.

Several decades later, Allen remained a creative with a focus on healthcare. The problem solving aspects in the creation of a timed advertising jingle is much the same as chemical manipulation. After advanced studies at UCLA and Berkeley, he became a medical researcher in the 1980’s. “I am very curious,” says Allen, “I like to pour over random case files, because, at some time, a pattern develops and there is that “Eureka” moment of a discovery.”

Before the AIDS crisis, Allen became fascinated with the immune system when his mother suffered a severe depression with the onset of menopause. Her illness was devastating emotionally and financially. Medical science is still learning about the relationship between the mind and the

immune system.

Confusing for doctors, the overreaction of the immune system is symptomatic of other diseases and conditions. In the '80s, men and women were misdiagnosed as having the Epstein-Barr virus, when in truth, they were suffering from depression. The incorrect reading of a blood test was misleading doctors across the nation.

The first documented cases of HIV/AIDS, was officially identified by the US Centers for Disease Control in 1981. Since the start of this historic epidemic, an estimated 78 million people have become infected with HIV and 35 million people have died of AIDS-related illnesses. Today, HIV continues to be a major global public health concern.

Working as a researcher at Olive View-UCLA Medical Center, a great deal of data and university findings were available to him. Allen began to see patterns in the devastation of the AIDS virus. "My colleagues and I were really interested in the fact that chimpanzees, while very much like us genetically, could be infected by the AIDS virus. It just doesn't make them sick, as their immune system repelled its illness."

Like placing a rhyming word into a three beat meter of a song, Allen was on a roll. "What happens to chimpanzees? AIDS is not a classic infectious disease like rabies. The human immune system plays a role in causing it. My colleagues and I figured out that we could rescue patients through employing monoclonal antibodies. This new type of drug was not a chemical drug, it was a drug which was in actuality made from living tissues."

Now popular in cancer treatment, monoclonal antibodies are lab-created molecules which are designed to direct the immune system to attack a cancer cell. Or possibly the AIDS virus. Allen recalls, "By the mid-1990s this was really well known in the scientific community, but HIV researchers pretty much ignored it. This was three years before protease inhibitors were even available. Most people thought that I was a nut, because no one was using antibodies in treatments."

With the help of an AIDS physician, monoclonal antibodies were tried on a patient and the results were successful. And then another. Allen said, "We ended up getting really good results. So we decided that what I needed to do was to quit academia, because in academia, you either publish or perish through its manuscript and then you are done. Nothing is ever accomplished."

In the meantime, HIV/AIDS began to steal our generation's great artists. The plague had grown to frightening proportions. The departure of the subway graffiti artist Keith Haring, rapper Eazy E, artist Kevyn Aucion and Anthony Perkins were devastating. The death toll continued with Isaac Asimov, Arthur Ashe, Perry Ellis, Rock Hudson and countless others.

"Word got out around that our miracle drug worked," recalls Allen, "It saved a lot of people and extended lives. By the start of our FDA trials, there were 300 to 400 people who were rescued."

With the help of friends, family and the families of AIDS patients, Allen created CytoDyn, a company designed to develop and test the monoclonal antibody. Like every start-up, CytoDyn has run a rocky road of funding, management upheavals and the progression through the FDA. Today, the company is on a clear path. Their product Pro 140 protects healthy cells from infection with fewer side effects to the patient. The drug is nearing its final clinical trials.

"All the experts said we were nuts to pursue our methodology, but it was the individuals we were treating who became the company's greatest supporters of our venture," said Allen, "It was simply the affluent individuals and doctors who were most affected by this terminal disease who put up the seed money to fund it. This was not about profit margin as much as this was about a desperation to save a community."

Allen settled into an uneasy retirement in 2011. He watched and waited as CytoDyn lumbers through the elephantine approval process. He celebrated his Fiftieth wedding anniversary. He wrote "A Song for San Francisco," a ditty that celebrates the city's romantic past. Sadly, on March 23, 2017, Allen D. Allen passed away from the complications of old age. Someday soon, his creative curiosities and dogged determination will result in the successful treatment of the millions of HIV/AIDS patients who suffer.

*Dressed all in white satin,
White lace in her hair.
She looked so lovely
It was more than I could bear.
Some people guessed the way that I felt
They saw the tears I could not hide.*

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