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# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Steven Reigns: Five Poems

Steven Reigns · Wednesday, December 1st, 2021

### The CDC gave six digits

The CDC gave six digits  
to each of the infected  
to track without using names.  
Kimberly 242284, David 158093  
One more digit and it could have been  
a phone number.  
But it wasn't a phone number,  
it was a code, keeping  
confidentiality while exposing  
the most intimate of details.  
David sat with Dr. Carol Ciesielski,  
CDC medical epidemiologist,  
and shared answers freely:  
the precautions he took,  
his diagnoses,  
his parents moving in,  
his sexuality,  
and let them draw vials  
of his infected blood.

Actually, David wasn't sitting  
with Ciesielski.  
He was in bed, dying.  
The virus killing Kimberly  
was killing him too.  
In a CDC report  
next to his number is a note,  
the dentist reported  
Kimberly's extractions  
were a simple procedure,  
30  
no impaction,  
just a pull of the pliers.

158093 didn't recall  
any times he had injured  
himself while practicing  
or putting anyone at risk.  
Under that number is  
another dentist's note  
about Acer's files,  
"impressed with the  
level of documentation."

\*

### **Indelible ink on skin declares**

Indelible ink on skin declares passionate love, loss, heartbreak, devotion to one's mother, military service, a penchant for self-decoration. At their worst, tattoos numbered Jews, gypsies, and gays. In the holocaust of AIDS, William F. Buckley Jr. suggested tattooing the infected. To serve as a warning, like cautionary tape, road flairs, or traffic cones. March 18, 1986. I wonder if David read the New York Times that day. Set down his morning cup of coffee, pulled up the right sleeve of his robe and looked at his bare forearm. Wondering what might one day appear on his freckled skin.

\*

### **The grandmother had**

The grandmother had  
bowel surgery in the early '80s,  
had a blood transfusion, had  
a history of hepatitis,  
lymphadenopathy, and herpes—  
autoimmune conditions.  
All complications of HIV.  
These occurred before she saw you.  
Before you put on gloves,  
asked her to open, injected Novocaine, told  
her to floss and use fluoride toothpaste.  
This grandmother sued,  
blamed you, and  
won the settlement.

\*

### **In 1990 a young HIV-positive woman in Florida claimed**

In 1990 a young HIV-positive woman in Florida claimed she was a virgin and that her infection came from her gay, dying dentist. The media believed her, seven others came forward, and a monster was born.

\*

## Kimberly testified

Kimberly testified to

Congress, “I did

nothing wrong . . .

My life has been taken away.”

Then in a videoed deposition:

Q: Has anybody ever performed oral sex on you?

A: Yes.

Q: Was there more than one episode?

A: Yes.

She didn’t do anything wrong.

She did with that man, with other men,

what lovers do, she explored the

pleasures of the body. The clit has more nerve

endings than a fingertip.

She did what David had done, what

Barbara, John, Sherry, Lisa, and Richard

had done. They were alive and bright

and loveable and sexy, and they

shared of themselves, of their bodies what

the Lord, the gym, or genetics had given them,

with someone else or many others.

Nothing they

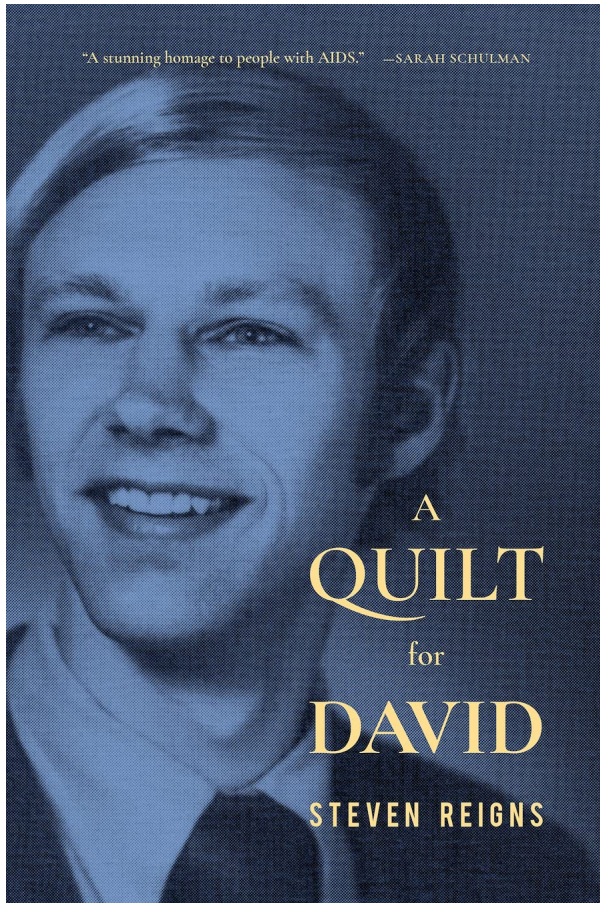
had done was wrong,

and the life

they knew

was taken

from them



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