

POV

Community
Engagement & Education

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Memories of a Penitent Heart

A Film by Cecilia Aldarondo



Memories of a Penitent Heart

straddles a lot of divides—between art and social justice, between past and present, between the personal and the global. I made this film because I see the story of what happened in my family as a cautionary tale; there are thousands of similar stories buried across the world. I want viewers to see that bigotry doesn't always look like a hate crime: often, it looks like blind love.

I became a filmmaker on the day when my mother gave me a box of 8mm films she'd discovered in her garage in 2008. Visceral memories of my uncle Miguel's funeral came back to me, and suddenly I found myself asking uncomfortable questions. When I was growing up, people told two different stories about Miguel. The official story was about a gregarious, mischievous, brilliantly talented actor who died tragically young. The unofficial story was darker. Told in whispers, out of the sides of mouths: Miguel was gay. His mother didn't approve. There was a lover, Robert, who disappeared after Miguel died. As I got older and began to care about social justice and LGBT equality, I was increasingly troubled at the casual way my family both did and didn't talk about these events. Why had this chapter in my family history been forgotten, and what could I do about it now?

Growing up in suburban central Florida in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I learned about AIDS through the very distorted lens of my parents' Newsweek magazines. I remember sordid stories about thrush, fevers and emaciated men scaring the crap out of me. But while I gathered that it was all very serious, I had a distinct impression of AIDS as a thing that was far away. Even when my mother would hint that my uncle Miguel might have died of AIDS—he had Kaposi's sarcoma, refused to be tested—I didn't sense that this bit of family rumor had anything to do with this thing called “the AIDS crisis.”

It's not that people in my family didn't talk about Miguel's death—they did. It was just that there were two distinct ways of talking about it: one nostalgic, celebratory and open, and the other oblique, told in whispers. Over the years, I found myself circling around a memorial black hole—a negative space where my uncle's life should have been.

If I had known what I would confront by making this film, I honestly don't know that I would have taken it on. Since I began chasing down the fragments of Miguel's life and death, I have been repeatedly sent into a world of unresolved grief and suffering that was hidden from me. I did not know that while my family sat at the front of the church during Miguel's funeral, Miguel's partner of 12 years sat in the back row. I did not know that Miguel's friends in New York held a separate memorial service that my family did not attend. I did not know that Robert was excluded from my uncle's death certificate, from every obituary and from every trace of my family's memory. I did not know that my uncle had an entire other family in New York—a family of choice—a family that lacked the legitimacy that his biological family enjoyed, even though many of its members spent more time in the hospital with Miguel than the people in my own family did. When I sat down to interview



Director and Producer Cecilia Aldarondo.

Photo courtesy of Flora Hanitijo

these newly discovered friends, they repeatedly told me how Miguel's death tore them apart as a group. As Miguel's close friend Ricky put it: "It was like a bomb, and we were all shrapnel." This collective unresolved mourning—a space to grieve that I felt my family had effectively stolen from my uncle's New York family—was overwhelming to witness.

This is the story of **Memories of a Penitent Heart**: a reckoning with my family's responsibility, and a confrontation with a grief that never healed.

There is a moment in the film when my grandmother's best friend asks me, "Who are you to bring this up now?" I have often asked myself that question. I wasn't there. I barely knew my uncle. So why should I care what happened to him? But I think that question—why should you care?—is central to the themes of **Memories of a Penitent Heart**. As I see it, AIDS became a crisis precisely *because* most people didn't think it had anything to do with them. Now as much as then, AIDS is seen as a problem for queers and drug addicts, not "decent" Americans. But the reality is that AIDS has always been everyone's problem. And I believe that we—LGBT people, their families of choice and their biological families—now have the chance to own this history collectively. We are in a pivotal time in the history of AIDS: a generation after the worst of the crisis, we are at risk of repeating the same omissions that made AIDS become a crisis in the first place. And I believe this is the moment for taking stock, before AIDS becomes just another badly remembered story.

There have been many times during this process when I've felt like it's my job to avenge my uncle's death. It's a powerful feeling that carries equal parts responsibility and righteousness. But it's also a very arrogant place to be. I've spent a lot of time pointing fingers—at my grandmother, my mother and even Robert—and telling people what they should have done differently. But I have had to come to terms with the fact that I have no right to make such judgments.

The sad truth is that everyone in this story played their part. Everyone hurt my uncle. But the other truth—the more important truth—is that they also all loved him. And whenever I've begun to doubt myself (Do I have the right to ask these questions? Who is telling the truth? Am I messing with people's lives? Am I playing God?), I've always come back to one guiding question: What would Miguel have wanted?

I think Miguel would have wanted people to remember all of him—his artistic passion, his humor, his poetic heart, his enthusiasm, his leadership and, yes, his mistakes. I think he would have wanted everyone he loved to put their differences aside and love each other as much as he loved them. When people ask me what I want people to do when they see this film, I always tell them I want them to cry. Not because I am a sadist or because I want the audience to feel manipulated, but because I believe that this story is more than just an interesting story. It is a story I want people—not just people dealing with the aftermath of AIDS, but anyone who's had a conflict, a falling out, a seismic loss—to see in their own lives, and I want them to ask themselves what they could do differently now. I don't just want people to ask, "What did Miguel do on his deathbed?" I want them to ask, "What would I do on my deathbed?"

I don't think this film has healed the past. Not yet. But I continue to hope that Miguel's entire family—Robert, my mother, Miguel's friends and everyone who knew and loved him—will find some measure of peace. A complicated and challenging peace, perhaps, but peace nonetheless.

Cecilia Aldarondo

Director, **Memories of a Penitent Heart**



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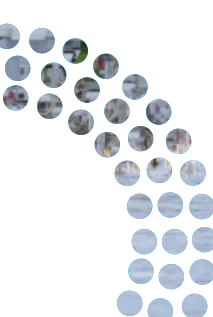
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Like all good detective stories, **Memories of a Penitent Heart** (53 min.) started with a mystery and a clue. The mystery is the untimely death of Miguel Dieppa, a 31-year-old Puerto Rican actor in New York City, in 1987; the clue is a shoebox of old 8mm home movies. The detective is Miguel's niece, the filmmaker Cecilia Aldarondo, who was six years old when her uncle died.

What Aldarondo uncovers is a Pandora's box of unresolved family drama. Miguel was remembered as a brilliant actor who left Puerto Rico for dreams of stardom in New York City, only to be tragically felled by cancer. But Aldarondo's film probes unspoken secrets about Miguel's sexuality, his real cause of death and the unresolved conflict between his family and friends. Cecilia tracks down Robert, Miguel's partner of 12 years, who is still grieving and angry about the family's refusal to acknowledge their love.

Miguel at the hospital with his partner, Aquin and his mother.

Photo courtesy of Blackscrackle Films LLC

Miguel's story lays bare a challenge shared by many victims of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 1990s, especially those from deeply religious Latin American families: how to reconcile their sexual identities with the religious convictions of their families. A cautionary tale about the unresolved conflicts wrought by AIDS, **Memories of a Penitent Heart** is a nuanced exploration of how faith is used and abused in times of crisis.

Memories of a Penitent Heart is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- **Your local PBS station**
- **Groups that have discussed previous PBS and POV films relating to homophobia and families, AIDS, coming out, or LGBTQ identity, including *Family Fundamentals*, *Tongues Untied*, *Silverlake Life*, *Wrestling with Angels*, *From This Day Forward*, *Wilhemina's War* and *ENDGAME: AIDS in Black America*.**
- **Groups focused on any of the issues listed in the "Key Issues" section**
- **Faith-based organizations and institutions**
- **Medical and social service professional organizations**
- **Cultural, art and historical organizations, institutions and museums**
- **Civic, fraternal and community groups**
- **Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities and high schools**
- **Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as local libraries.**

Memories of a Penitent Heart is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people looking to explore the following topics:

- **1980s**
- **Catholic church doctrine**
- **coming out**
- **coping with crisis**
- **ethics/morality**
- **family dynamics**
- **forgiveness**
- **LGBTQ community/identity**
- **HIV/AIDS**
- **homophobia**
- **LGBTQ issues/history**
- **New York City**
- **Puerto Rican identity**
- **religion**

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use **Memories of a Penitent Heart** to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit www.pov.org/engage



Aquin and the Dieppa Family

Miguel Dieppa was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, to Carmen (1923–1996) and Jorge Dieppa (1925–2007), in 1953. Miguel's mother, Carmen, was well known in their community for being a deeply religious Catholic. According to her granddaughter Cecilia, "The people who knew Carmen in Puerto Rico like to say, 'If ever a saint walked on Earth, her name was Carmen Dieppa.'" She was the host of a religious radio program called *Luz de Cristo* (Light of Christ) and attended mass daily. Her husband, Jorge, is described by his granddaughter as "brilliant, cultured, gruff, foul-mouthed." Miguel's older sister Nylda eventually had five children, including Cecilia, filmmaker of **Memories of a Penitent Heart**.

Miguel grew up in this conservative religious environment, but after graduating from high school he left Puerto Rico for New York City to pursue his dream of performing on Broadway. In New York, Miguel told his friends to call him "Michael," and became increasingly estranged from his family back home. During this time he met Robert, who had been a Franciscan monk until shortly before they met.

Robert and Miguel were in a relationship for 12

Miguel and his partner Robert (Aquin).

Photo courtesy of Blackscrackle Films LLC

years, until Miguel's death in 1987.

Miguel died of what his parents reported was cancer but what Robert maintains was AIDS. After Miguel's death, Robert was shunned by the Dieppa family. He was not welcomed at the funeral, and was not acknowledged in Miguel's obituary. He returned to religious life shortly thereafter, where he reinvented himself as Brother Aquin. "When Miguel died," he says, "Robert died also."

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Young Miguel.

Photo courtesy of Blackscrackle Films LLC

Homosexuality and Christianity

On his deathbed, at his mother's behest, Miguel Dieppa "repented" for his homosexuality. A devout Catholic, she was concerned about the fate of her son's soul. Homosexuality has been stigmatized in the United States, within both religious and secular communities, for centuries. During the AIDS crisis, prominent evangelical Christian leader Jerry Falwell stated, "AIDS is not just God's punishment for homosexuals. It is God's punishment for the society that tolerates homosexuals." In 1986, Joseph Ratzinger (who would become Pope Benedict XVI) wrote, "Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder." That same year, overall public opinion regarding homosexuality was at its lowest point on record. In 1986, only a reported 32 percent of Americans believed that homosexual relations between consenting adults should be legal. This was the world Miguel and his mother inhabited as he died from what she told friends and family was cancer, but was very likely AIDS.

In the years since Miguel's death, public opinion on homosexuality has slowly shifted. In 2016, a majority of Americans—68 percent—thought that homosexual relations should be legal, and, according to a 2015 survey, 70 percent of Catholics believed that "homosexuality should be accepted by society." In 2013, Pope Francis said, "If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?" This is in stark contrast to the Church's position in 1986. This shift in public opinion occurred in tandem with several concrete civil rights victories. Two landmark Supreme Court cases, *United States v. Windsor* in 2013 and *Obergefell v. Hodges* in 2015, overturned the Defense of Marriage Act and legalized gay marriage in all 50 states, respectively. In April 2017, the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit ruled that the 1964 Civil Rights Act protects employees from job discrimination based on sexual orientation.



Miguel's mother Carmen.

Photo courtesy of Blackscrackle Films LLC

Despite these social and legal advances, homophobia and discrimination against LGBTQ people remains pervasive in American society. As of 2009, approximately 20 percent of lesbian, gay and bisexual adults reported they had “experienced a crime against their person or property based on their sexual orientation,” and 13 percent had been the victim of a violent crime. In 2016—the same year that 49 people were murdered in a mass shooting at an LGBTQ nightclub in Florida—more than 100 bills were proposed by American lawmakers curbing the rights of LGBTQ citizens in the workplace, businesses and various other situations, such as adoption proceedings and healthcare services. Many of these bills were seeking exemptions to anti-discrimination laws based on religious beliefs.

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Miguel at the hospital.

Photo courtesy of Blackscrackle Films LLC

HIV/AIDS: From 1981 to Today

By the end of 1981, doctors had diagnosed 159 cases of a new disease called Gay-Related Immuno-Deficiency (GRID). The illness now known as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) was primarily associated with men who had sex with men at that time. In the 1980s, it was considered a death sentence to all those infected, and highly stigmatized, in large part due to its associations with homosexuality.

AIDS is the most advanced stage of an HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) infection. The HIV virus attacks the body's immune system, and causes similar symptoms as other diseases which compromise the immune system, such as skin rashes, pneumonia and weight loss. A test for HIV would not be developed until 1985. That same year, President Ronald Reagan, whose administration's response to the AIDS crisis has been widely criticized, mentioned the disease for the first time. Although Miguel had the option to be tested, he chose not to. He believed that testing positive would "blacklist" him. As of 1987, nearly 17,000 people had died from AIDS in the United States.

Today, AIDS is not considered a death sentence in the U.S., but the crisis is not over. It is not uncommon for people to avoid testing due to a variety of factors, including lack of access to health care and the stigma still associated with a positive HIV status. Due to new preventative medications such as PrEP, a daily medication that re-

duces risk of HIV infection from sex by more than 90 percent, as well as the post-exposure drug PEP and safe sex education programs, the rate of HIV infection has declined dramatically since the 1980s.

However, AIDS remains a serious problem in some communities. People of color are disproportionately affected by the disease. For example, between 2006 and 2016 the percentage of all men who have sex with men who were diagnosed with HIV rose by 6 percent. In comparison, over the same time period, diagnoses of black men who have sex with men rose by 22 percent, and by 24 percent in Latino men who have sex with men. In 2014, Latinos represented about 17 percent of the U.S. population, but accounted for an estimated 23 percent of HIV diagnoses. African-American women are also disproportionately affected by HIV. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 60 percent of women living with HIV at the end of 2014 were African-American.

AIDS continues to spread, and has created a public health crisis in many parts of the world outside of the United States. Globally, more than 35 million people have died of AIDS since the disease was first discovered. As of 2015, approximately 36.7 million people were living with HIV worldwide.



Miguel's sister Nylda and Miguel's former partner Aquin in Florida.

Photo courtesy of Blackscackle Films LLC

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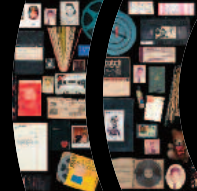
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More than **1.2 million** people in the US are living with HIV, and 1 in 8 of them don't know it.

In 2010, the rate of new HIV infections for Latino males was 2.9 times that for white males.

1 in every 36 Latino men will be diagnosed with HIV in his lifetime.

Less than half of Hispanics/Latinos with HIV are receiving medicines to treat their infection.

7 out of 10 Catholics now say that homosexuality should be accepted by society.

29% of LGBTQ+ individuals say they have been made to feel unwelcome in a place of worship.

In 2014: Hispanics/Latinos represented about 17% of the US population, but accounted for an estimated **23% (10,201)** of HIV diagnoses.

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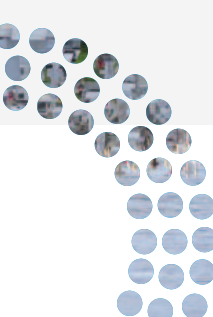
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Selected People Featured in **Memories of a Penitent Heart**

Miguel Dieppa (1953–1987) – born and raised in a middle class family on the island of Puerto Rico; after high school, he moved to New York to pursue his passion for live theater



Aquin (Robert) Darigol (b. 1945) – Miguel's live-in partner for 12 years, from 1975 until Miguel's death



Cecilia Aldarondo – the filmmaker and Miguel's niece



Nylda Dieppa – Miguel's older sister and Cecilia's mother



Carmen Dieppa (1923–1996) – Miguel's mother and Cecilia's grandmother



Jorge Dieppa (1925–2007) – Miguel's father and Cecilia's grandfather



Selected People Featured in **Memories of a Penitent Heart**



Lourdes – Miguel's friend and the person who connects Cecilia with Robert



Shane – Miguel's friend and neighbor



Gary – Jorge's friend





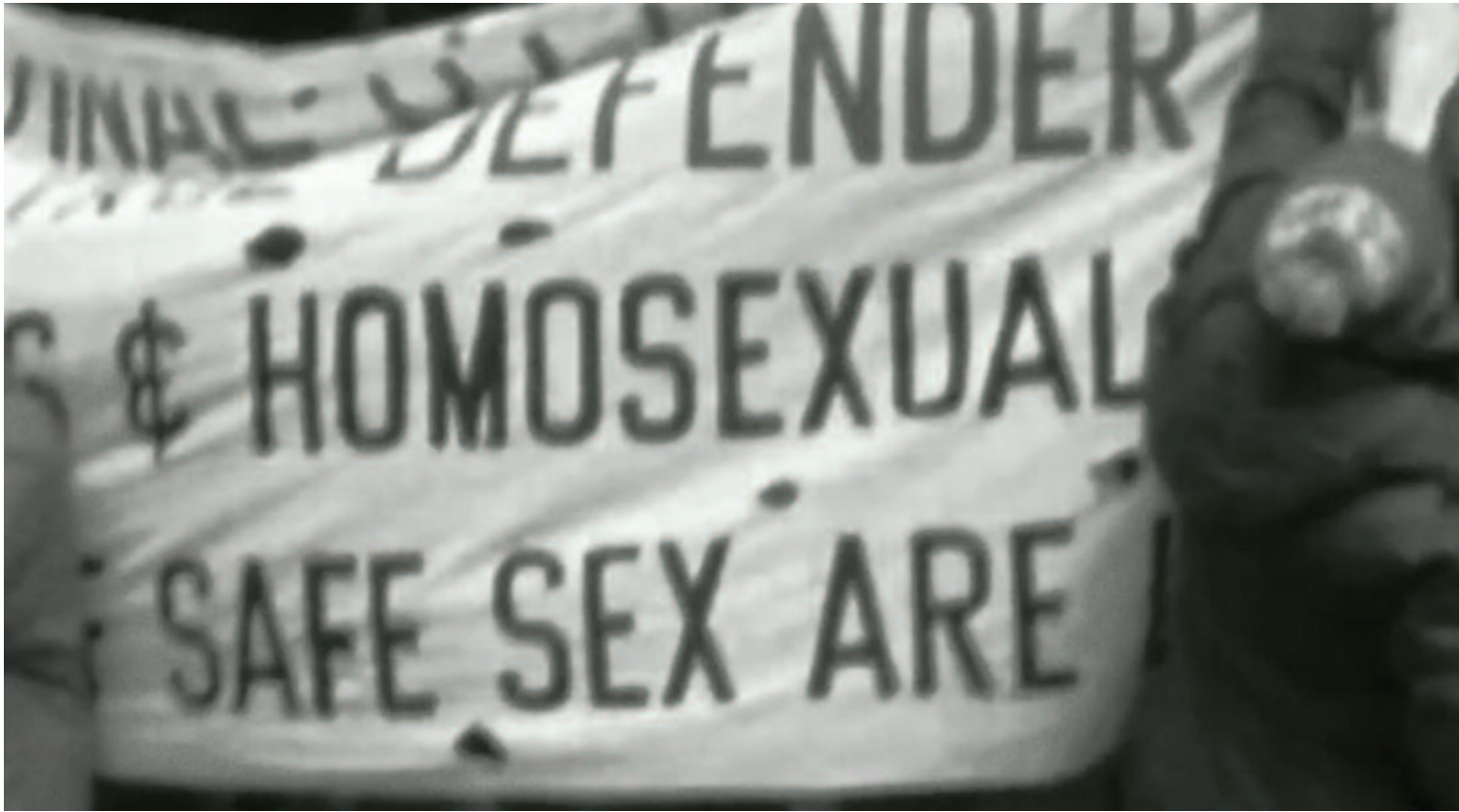
Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen or pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion:

- If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, whom would you ask and what would you ask them?
- What did you learn from this film? What insights did it provide?
- If a friend asked you what this film was about, what would you say?
- Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?
- Did anything in particular in the film “speak truth” to you? Was there anything familiar?
- How would you complete this sentence?: The story in this film is important because _____.

Aquin’s archive of memories of Miguel.
Photo courtesy of Blackscrackle Films LLC

At the end of your discussion, to help people synthesize what they’ve experienced and move the focus from dialogue to action steps, you may want to choose one of these questions:

- What did you learn from this film that you wish everyone knew? What would change if everyone knew it?
- If you could require one person (or one group) to view this film, who would it be? What do you hope their main takeaway would be?
- Complete this sentence: I am inspired by this film (or discussion) to _____.



A protest sign.

Photo courtesy of Blackscrackle Films LLC

Understanding Homophobia

What did you learn from the film about how homophobia damages family relationships? What did you learn about how to heal from that damage?

Aquin says of Carmen, “She had such a twisted, contorted view of gay people.” What did she get wrong?

The film quotes Cardinal John O’Connor saying (in the 1980s), “We strongly believe that [guaranteeing gays equal rights] would seriously undermine the moral education and values of our youth and the stability of families in our society.” In some communities, this argument continues to be repeated. What would you say to refute the claim that protecting people like Miguel or Aquin from discrimination poses a threat to families?

Aquin says that Miguel “was homophobic about himself,” living one life during the day and another at night. What leads people to internalize societal rejection, even when they know the hate or fear is misplaced? What happens in the long-term to societies that fail to confront internalized oppression such as homophobia?

Miguel refused to be tested for AIDS, even when his medical team requested it. At the time, he feared—reasonably—that a positive diagnosis would “blacklist” him. What would you say to someone who refused to be tested today? What has changed?

Aquin points to a picture of the couple at Miguel’s graduation, remembering that the family “didn’t know I was there. I was in the back. What they don’t know didn’t hurt them.” Is that true?

Aquin feels “vindicated” that Miguel’s family finally wants to hear his perspective. Why “vindicated”?

Jorge’s friend Gary says, “The sad thing is your grandfather never shared with Miguel that he was gay also, and I think he felt really badly about that. But I don’t think he knew how to deal with it.” Nylda reflects, “You could say that he was a hypocrite, but then again, look where he’s coming from. In

his culture, he would have never had the success he did in life if he had come out.” Homophobia prevented Jorge from being honest about who he was. What did that cost Miguel? What price did the rest of the family pay?

Imagine that you are Nylda and you receive this letter from Miguel:

Dear sister,

Love is not spiteful, contemptuous or defiant. You can't let it trickle now and then, withholding it as punishment for not being normal. The truth of the matter is that if you loved me wholeheartedly, you would be mocking everything you stand for. So if you say that you love me despite the fact that I'm gay and despite the fact that I won't go along with your religious beliefs, then you're saying your love is incomplete. And believe me, I don't love you despite anything. Though honestly, I still resent the fact that I was never asked to be a godparent to one of your children and we both know why.

Knowing what you know now, what would you write in response?

Miguel suffered from AIDS roughly 30 years ago. In what ways do you think that Miguel's experiences are similar to HIV+ individuals now? In what ways are their experiences different? Have you ever known anyone with HIV/AIDS? In what ways has their experience influenced you?

Do you think that there is an intergenerational difference in the way that homosexuality and LGBTQ+ individuals are perceived? Have you witnessed this difference?

This is a highly intersectional film, drawing on multiple related issues--AIDS, family, religion, and cultural identity. Why is it important to consider these issues together, rather than separately?

Religion

Aquin and Carmen share deep religious convictions, but instead of helping them find common ground, those convictions drive them apart. How would you describe the differences in their understanding of the purpose(s) of religion and the essential nature of God?

What do you think it was like for Miguel to receive letters from his mother urging him to confess and repent? What message did he hear when she expressed her concerns for him? Can you think of any way that Carmen could have remained true to her religious convictions while also accepting Miguel's sexual orientation?

Nylda says that Carmen didn't wish for bad things to happen to Aquin, she just "wanted his soul to be saved. She wanted all the souls to be saved for Jesus Christ." Cecilia asks, "Don't you think that's quite possibly a form of hate though?" Nylda's answer is no. What do you think?

In a 1980 letter to his mother, Miguel wrote, "God knows no differences. To Him we are all equals and will be judged in the same manner in which we judge others." Why might Miguel have chosen to grapple with his faith rather than abandon it, despite the wedge it created between himself and his family?

Cecilia says, "My grandmother was the spiritual center of my family. Everything I learned about how to be good, I learned from her." She also says, "When she died... everyone who knew her said, 'There goes a saint.'" How is it possible for religion to be both a source of ethics and a means of undermining human dignity? How is it possible for a person to be both saintly and imperfect?

At the time Miguel got sick, AIDS was sometimes called "wrath of God syndrome." Why do some people find comfort in the idea of a vengeful God? Why do others consider it blasphemy to say that those who fall ill somehow deserve their fate?



Memory

Cecilia asks, “If we only remember the good things about the people we love, what do we lose?” How would you answer that question?

According to Cecilia, Carmen was “the unofficial family archivist. She didn’t just keep the family history, she wrote it.” What are the consequences of ceding control of the narrative to just one family member? What have you learned about your family (and your place in it) from pictures in scrapbooks or stories shared around holiday tables? Whose version of your family history is passed on and whose is left out?

Cecilia’s great aunt Nilda scolds her, “You are going to repeat something that someone once told you they heard. Don’t do it. Stick with Miguel and forget about that part [about Jorge being gay]. If he had some sort of problem and he hid it all his life, who are you to bring it up now?” In your view, is it ethical for Cecilia to share parts of her family story that family members tried to keep secret? If you were Cecilia, how would you explain to Nilda why it’s important to share the truth about her family?

Is there a time in your life when you changed yourself to appease others? Are there parts of your identity that you try hide? Why?

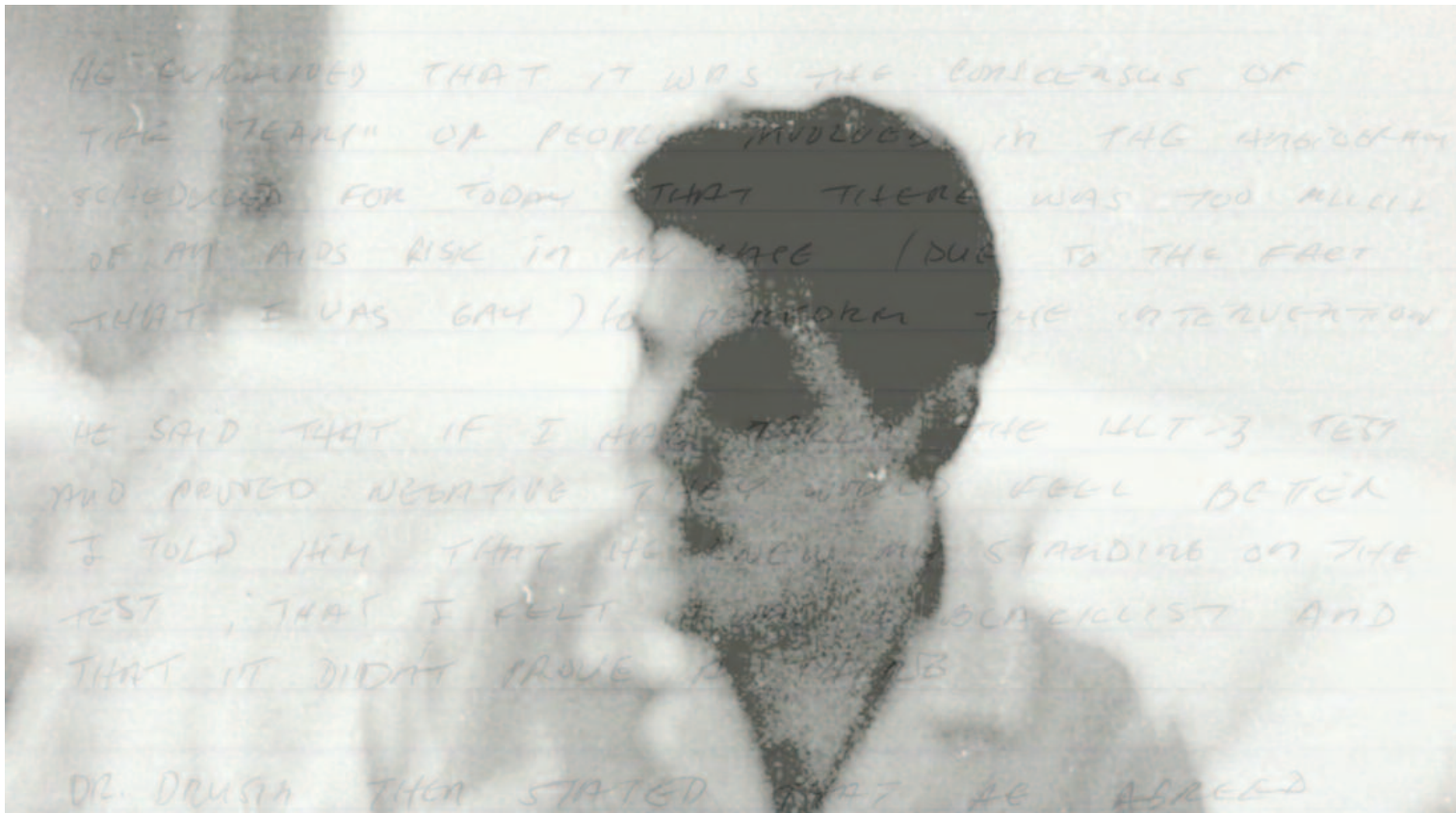
Nylda and Aquin meet for the first time since Miguel’s funeral.

Photo courtesy of Blackscrackle Films LLC

Heritage

When Cecilia looks through Miguel’s wallet, she finds what she calls “a troubling detail”: all the IDs use the name “Michael,” despite the fact that, in her words, “No one in my family called him Michael. Who was this Michael?” Aquin speculates that Miguel preferred to be called Michael “because he didn’t want to be associated with his parents... He was really angry at his parents.” How might the challenges of being gay in a homophobic culture increase the pressure to assimilate?

Cecilia observes, “Small places like Puerto Rico have a special way of making you crazy. I’ve seen it all my life. Everyone wanting to leave. Everyone wishing they’d stayed.” What sorts of things necessitate escape from such “small places”? What sorts of things make people long for those same places?



Family Dynamics

Nylda observes that there were plenty of people in the family responsible for the way Miguel and Aquin were treated. As you think about each family member, what were their sources of pain and what were their sources of comfort? How did the ways that each coped with pain affect the other family members?

Cecilia asks Nylda, "Are you angry at your mother?" Nylda responds, "I'm sad. I'm sad that she suffered so much and she made so many people suffer." What did you learn from this family about the ways in which suffering begets suffering? What stops the cycle of those who suffer inflicting pain on others?

Nylda begins to see things from her brother's perspective, recognizing that "he must have felt abandoned by me." She explains, "I was just focusing on my home life with my kids and my marriage. I couldn't deal with anything else. I wasn't there to back him up or have his back or whatever. That doesn't mean that I was condemning him." Why might

Miguel have interpreted the absence of his sister's support as condemnation?

Miguel's diary from during his hospitalization.

Photo courtesy of Blackscrackle Films LLC

One observer says that when Miguel visited a gay bar in Puerto Rico and found his father there, "It blew his world apart." What made this discovery so shocking?

Cecilia asks her mother if Aquin is family. Nylda answers, "No. He never recognized me as family. I never recognized him as family." How would you describe what Aquin is to the Dieppa family (and vice versa)? What's the difference between family by blood and families we construct by choice? Is one more valid than the other? What are the sources of our ideas about what constitutes a "proper" family?

Dealing with Death

Aquin tells Cecilia that her grandparents "tried to stop me from seeing Miguel, several times actually." Rather than honoring their wishes, a doctor provided Aquin with a letter of permission to see Miguel anytime, 24 hours a day. As next of

kin, Miguel's parents had legal rights to restrict access to him. Did that make the doctor's choice to circumvent their wishes unethical?

Nylda believes that Miguel repented, concluding, "He did whatever he needed to do to die in peace. So that he could accept death." Aquin recalls that Carmen made Miguel give back the ring that symbolized their bond because she told him that God wouldn't let him into heaven if it was on his finger. Do you think Carmen's imposition of her religious beliefs added to or lessened Miguel's burdens on his deathbed?

Aquin says that Carmen wanted Miguel dead. Nylda strongly rejects this characterization of her mother, explaining that she just "would rather see him safe in heaven rather than here on this earth being tempted." In practical terms, is there a difference between these two accounts?

Miguel's friend Shane describes Miguel's final weeks as "a family war. Who was controlling what, when, who? Who loved Michael more? Who did Michael love more? It was very competitive." All wars exact a price. What was the cost of this one?

Forgiveness

Cecilia feels like her mother was a bystander who didn't do enough for her brother and notes, "I'm realizing that I'm here telling the story about all these people and I've been struggling all along to figure out, how do I forgive everyone? How do I forgive my grandmother for the choices she made? How do I forgive Aquin for the horrible things he said about her?" How would you answer her?

In a conversation about forgiveness, Nylda says, "It was more complicated than you originally thought." What new insights or new information did each of the people in the film need in order to forgive those who had hurt them and ask forgiveness of those they had wronged?

Nylda says, "I think with all I know now, I would have done something very different. I don't know if I would say I feel guilty, but I know I was wrong. I have forgiven myself. I hope Miguel has forgiven me. And I don't lose sleep over it anymore." As a viewer, did this statement provide a sense of closure?

Consider this final exchange between Cecilia and her mother:

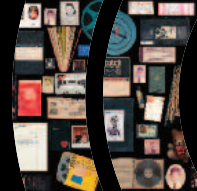
Nylda: The bottom line is that we all need to survive and we use different ways of surviving according to our gifts, our limitations, and our circumstances.

Cecilia: But what I'm saying is, can't we survive and look out for others as well?

Nylda: Sometimes we can and sometimes we can't.

Think about a conflict in your own life. What can you do to make the most of your gifts, limitations and circumstances to increase the chances that you can survive? How can you do the same and look out for others?

Additional media literacy questions are available at:
www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php



Puerto Rico.

Photo courtesy of Blackscrackle Films LLC

Taking Action

- Invite specialists in dialogue facilitation from related organizations (e.g., PFLAG) to your church or community group to teach parents and other family members ways to communicate effectively with their LGBTQ children.
- Convene a study circle to examine the work of clergy and scholars who believe that acceptance of LGBTQ people is central to their religious faith rather than a contradiction of religious doctrine.
- Host a screening of the film in your community, school or workplace and invite representatives from an organization working with those who are HIV positive to brief you on the status of the AIDS crisis in your community.
- Conduct oral history interviews with members of your community affected by HIV/AIDS and partner with your local library to create an archive.
- Is the history of HIV/AIDS being taught in your local public school? Whose story is being told? Whose is being left out?



FILM-RELATED WEB SITES

MEMORIES OF A PENITENT HEART

www.penitentheart.com

The film's official website provides information about the film and the filmmaker.

Original Online Content on POV

To further enhance the broadcast, POV has produced an interactive website to enable viewers to explore the film in greater depth. The **Memories of a Penitent Heart** website—www.pbs.org/pov/penitentheart—offers a streaming video trailer for the film; an interview with the filmmaker; a list of related websites, articles and books; a downloadable discussion guide; and special features.

DIGNITYUSA

www.dignityusa.org

The website of this advocacy organization for LGBTQ Catholics is a good source for position statements reconciling gay identity with church teachings.

CENTERLINK

www.lgbtcenters.org

This website hosts comprehensive lists of national LGBTQ organizations and local community centers.

GLAAD

<https://www.glaad.org/>

GLAAD advocates for the acceptance of LGBTQI people, primarily focusing on media representation and cultural change.

GMHC

www.gmhc.org

Founded in New York City in 1981 as Gay Men's Health Crisis, this was the first AIDS prevention organization in the world and it remains a leading provider of information and support services for people dealing with HIV/AIDS.

LATINO COMMISSION ON AIDS

<https://www.latinoaids.org/>

Formed in 1990 in response to the unmet needs voiced by the Latino community, the Latino Commission on AIDS provides health advocacy, HIV education and prevention for the Latino community.

PFLAG

www.pflag.org

PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) provides education and support resources to help families of LGBTQ children retain healthy communication and loving relationships.

HOW TO BUY THE FILM

To order **Memories of a Penitent Heart** for home use, go to <http://www.penitentheart.com/>.

To order **Memories of a Penitent Heart** for educational use, go to <http://www.gooddocs.net/memories-of-a-penitent-heart>.



Produced by American Documentary, Inc., POV is public television's premier showcase for nonfiction films. The series airs Mondays at 10 p.m. on PBS from June to September, with primetime specials during the year. Since 1988, POV has been the home for the world's boldest contemporary filmmakers, celebrating intriguing personal stories that spark conversation and inspire action. Always an innovator, POV discovers fresh new voices and creates interactive experiences that shine a light on social issues and elevate the art of storytelling. With our documentary broadcasts, original online programming and dynamic community engagement campaigns, we are committed to supporting films that capture the imagination and present diverse perspectives.

POV films have won 36 Emmy® Awards, 19 George Foster Peabody Awards, 12 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, three Academy Awards®, the first-ever George Polk Documentary Film Award and the Prix Italia. The POV series has been honored with a Special News & Documentary Emmy Award for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking, three IDA Awards for Best Curated Series and the National Association of Latino Independent Producers Award for Corporate Commitment to Diversity. More information is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

POV Digital www.pbs.org/pov

Since 1994, POV Digital has driven new storytelling initiatives and interactive production for POV. The department created PBS's first program website and its first web-based documentary (*POV's Borders*) and has won major awards, including a Webby Award (and six nominations) and an Online News Association Award. POV Digital continues to explore the future of independent nonfiction media through its digital productions and the POV Hackathon lab, where media makers and technologists collaborate to reinvent storytelling forms. @povdocs on Twitter.

Front cover: Family archive of Miguel's things.
Photo courtesy of Blackscrackle Films LLC

POV Community Engagement and Education

POV's Community Engagement and Education team works with educators, community organizations and PBS stations to present more than 650 free screenings every year. In addition, we distribute free discussion guides and standards-aligned lesson plans for each of our films. With our community partners, we inspire dialogue around the most important social issues of our time.

American Documentary, Inc. www.amdoc.org

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

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