Gone but Not Forgotten
A tour of AIDS memorials from coast to coast
By Melissa Egan, Barb Panter and Debbie Koenig

Vancouver AIDS Memorial

**Location:** Sunset Beach West, Vancouver  
**Artist:** Bruce Wilson

Nestled into the side of the hill at the base of Broughton Street in the city’s West End, the Vancouver AIDS Memorial pays homage to residents of British Columbia who have died of AIDS-related illnesses.

Championed by HIV physician Dr. Joss de Wet, the memorial was a decade-long journey that touched the lives of many individuals throughout the province. In 1994, after seeing many of his patients and friends die from AIDS, Dr. de Wet began a campaign to have the memorial built. Once Sunset Beach was selected as a location, a competition was held to determine the design. From more than 70 submissions, the steel ribbon with a view of English Bay was chosen. Construction was completed in 2004.

The undulating steel structure has a warm, rusty patina, from which the names of those who have died are cut. Every day, names on the memorial are adorned with flowers and notes are slipped between the letters—tokens of love, remembrance and evidence of how much people are missed. Artist Bruce Wilson dedicated this landmark “to the memory of those lost to HIV/AIDS, to the caregivers who eased their passing, and to those who live with the presence of their absence.”

Positive Living BC hosts an annual candlelight vigil here, where the sound of the nearby ocean serves as a soundtrack.

Parc de l’espoir (Park of Hope)
On December 1, 1990, an ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) Montreal demonstration ended with 1,400 black ribbons being tied to tree branches in an empty lot in Montreal’s Gay Village, to commemorate the lives of those who died from AIDS in Quebec. Days later, the City proceeded to remove the ribbons. That January, people tied ribbons in all the colours of the rainbow on those same trees, with the names of people who had died of AIDS written on them. Teddy bears and other objects of personal significance were placed at the foot of the trees over the course of several months. This marked the start of a campaign to claim the site as an AIDS memorial park.

Years later the battle was finally won when the municipality agreed to designate it a commemorative park: In the summer of 1996, the park was officially inaugurated *le Parc de l’espoir* (Park of Hope).

Large blocks of polished black granite (symbolizing death) are juxtaposed against the garden (which represents life). On sunny days, people congregate on the blocks to watch the crowds on St. Catherine Street flow by.

The AIDS Memorial

**Location:** Cawthra Park, Toronto  
**Designer:** Patrick Fahn  
**Landscaping:** Alex Wilson

The AIDS Memorial in Toronto was the brainchild of a group of gay men led by AIDS activist Michael Lynch. In 1988, Lynch founded a volunteer committee to make his vision a reality. At first, a temporary memorial was erected each year for Lesbian and Gay Pride Day. Two years later a design competition was held for a permanent memorial, which opened in 1993 outside the 519 Community Centre.

The memorial provides a space for everyone touched by AIDS to grieve, remember and celebrate those who have died from AIDS-related illnesses. Fourteen concrete triangular pillars, arranged in a semi-circle, hold stainless steel plates on which the names of those who have passed are engraved. Patrick Fahn designed the memorial so that there would be room for new names to be added.

Every June a vigil is held in the park and the names of those who died that year are added. Sadly, the names of both Michael Lynch, who died before the monument was completed, and Alex Wilson, who designed the landscaping around the structure, are now engraved among them.

Poems by Michael Lynch and Shoshanna Addley welcome visitors to the memorial. Addley’s poem pays tribute “To
Those Unnamed“:

Our strength, though withered and sapped, regenerates here.
Each name on each standing stone remarks thousandfold
upon those unmarked from sea to sea…

**Newfoundland and Labrador AIDS Memorial**

**Location:** ACNL, St. John’s, Newfoundland  
**Artist:** Don Short

Artist Don Short designed and created this multimedia panel with the help of staff and volunteers at the AIDS Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador (ACNL), where it is housed. Unveiled in the summer of 2010, it pays homage to the lives of people with HIV who were either ACNL clients or volunteers at some point since the AIDS service organization opened its doors in 1988. In Short’s words, the memorial “pays tribute to the courage of individuals who faced AIDS head-on, despite the barriers, stigma and isolation they often confronted when fighting the disease.”

The sculptural montage consists of a wooden base with a faux finish and a painting of a beachside AIDS memorial. Around the painting, plaques hold the names of people who have lost their lives to AIDS-related illnesses. A row of pictures and descriptions along the bottom highlight memorials that have taken place in Newfoundland since the epidemic began. Running across the top, these words sum up the spirit of the work:

- We light a candle for those we have lost.
- They have shown courage in the fight against HIV and AIDS.
- Their light cannot be extinguished.

**The Canadian AIDS Memorial Quilt**

**Location:** National project; stewardship transferred from the NAMES Project in Halifax to the Canadian AIDS Society in Ottawa

The AIDS Memorial Quilt was conceived of in San Francisco in 1985. The first time it was displayed—in October 1987 in Washington, DC’s national park, the National Mall—its 1,920 panels covered an area larger than a football field. This inspired an outpouring of interest and support and led 35 countries to create their own quilts. Today, the combined quilts form the largest community art project in the world.
The Canadian AIDS Memorial Quilt was born in 1989. It now consists of more than 600 3 × 6-foot panels, each one stitched in memory of someone who has died of an AIDS-related illness. Groups of eight panels are sewn together to form 12 × 12-foot sections. When displayed in its entirety, the Canadian quilt takes up more than 18,000 square feet, honouring the lives of those who died while also drawing attention to the scale of the epidemic. The colourful designs and loving personal messages pay tribute to people young and old, from every walk of life and all parts of the country. The quilt evokes powerful emotional responses from those who see it.

The Canadian panels can all be viewed online at www.quilt.ca. The site also describes how you can create and contribute a panel of your own.

We would like to acknowledge the countless ways that people in cities, towns and rural areas across the country have memorialized their loved ones who have died as a result of HIV/AIDS. If you have a photo or story of a memorial that you would like us to post online, email us at contribute@positiveside.ca.

In recent years, people have also created online memorials to pay tribute to their lovers, friends and family members. www.aidsmemorial.info is a catalogue of permanent memorials, digital memorials and ceremonies from around the world.
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Production of this content has been made possible through a financial contribution from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

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