

2024: AIDS Cured, ex-PWAs Ignored

POZ turns to science fiction to imagine life with a cure

January 1, 2004 By Kevin O'Leary

New York, Jan. 5, 2024 — The invitation-only audience for this evening's "Remembering January 5, 2019: A Night of Healing" within midtown's Ashcroft Hall cheered, as faded pop curiosity Britney Spears, 42, joined Lourdes ("Let's Vogue Again"), 27, to revive 2003's "Me Against the Music." Outside, two people stood in the cold. "They don't want us in there," said Daniel R. Wilson, a 48-year-old former AIDS patient clutching a sign reading LUNAR AIDS MUSEUM NOW. "They blame us HIV survivors for the events of 1/5."

He and Mavis Shelton, 59, could not help humming along to the Oldies tune, even though they do not share their country's nostalgia for an era before their illness could be cured. They denounced "America's AIDS amnesia" as the concert mourned the anniversary of January 2019's mass suicides—when the discovery of HIV's cure crashed the stock market. "We were so happy to be free and healthy, and suddenly, we were made to feel responsible for all them doing themselves in," Ms. Shelton said. Now the pair want yet another moon museum, this one to keep their relics—a panel from the lost AIDS quilt, tattered memoirs, vintage wheat-paste posters—safe from nuclear terrorism.

A veritable HIV archive, Mr. Wilson recounted the events preceding the bygone catastrophe. He was 34 in 2009, when InstaShots, the painless injection med-delivery system, replaced pills and capsules. Weekly "combo-shots" became the cocktail of choice—but proved debilitating for many. "I was on 13 serums," Ms. Shelton said. "My ChemCard said I was salvage—it was that or death back then."

Mr. Wilson recalled 2010's privacy debate over the wallet-size discs that store consumers' genetic and medical data. When AirTrav gatekeepers, employers and sex partners first began examining ChemCards at will, objections were raised. "You can run my card and detect a cold before I have any symptoms," Mr. Wilson said. "When I had HIV, I lived in constant fear of discrimination."

By 2013, consumers could slip their ChemCards through gene splicing iMed machines, pay to download a treatment recipe and watch the iMed genetically customize an injectable serum for home use. Drug companies flourished in this direct-to-consumer heaven, merging with media conglomerates for better marketing. In her second term, former President Condoleezza Rice eliminated antitrust laws and gave her blessing to DillerGlaxoAOL, the first megaco.

“And then,” Ms. Shelton said, “Scripster came along.”

Launched in 2016 by the adopted son of two members of ACT UP, the late 20th century “activist group,” this simple file-sharing system yielded free med recipes. Tech-support groups sprang up from Kansas City to Kinshasa, and even those without iMed got InstaShots. On Jan. 5, 2019, when a team of Brazilian doctors stumbled onto a Chinese-cucumber serum that eradicated their subject’s viral load within eight hours, they immediately posted it on Scripster. Meltdown.

“We’d been pouring a ton of money into these companies,” Ms. Shelton said. “And now their dirty secret was out—we could’ve had a cure back in the 1990s.” President Schwarzenegger warned the public against the untested remedy. But as stock in DillerGlaxoAOL fell to pennies, the U.S. economy went with it. The megaco’s thousands of cultish employees preferred a fatal speedball of the painkiller Oxycontin-10 over bankruptcy and life alone.

The suicide victims’ families have taken the Brazilian doctors and Scripster to court—and may sue the downloaders themselves. “They think the 1/5 deaths of all those bright young things are more real than me being alive right in front of them,” Ms. Shelton said. “But we’re not going to be hidden from history.” Inside, meanwhile, the band played on.

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