25 Years of Advocates

Twenty-five advocates share what POZ means to them.

September 1, 2019 By Casey Halter and Tim Murphy

When POZ arrived on the scene in 1994, effective HIV treatment didn't exist. That wouldn't come to pass until two years later. The successful launch 25 years ago of a magazine for people living with HIV/AIDS was, to say the least, not assured. And yet, despite all the naysayers and challenges, POZ has endured.

Recounting the magazine's mission in his 2014 memoir, Body Counts, POZ founder Sean Strub writes, "We tried to tell the story of the epidemic in all its complexities, through the experience of those with HIV. And we would do so in an attractive, engaging, and hopeful format. On glossy paper."

From the beginning, POZ has strived to live up to that mission every day, in print and online—from fighting for effective treatment to fighting for the expansion of access to that treatment, from diminishing the fear of people living with HIV to promoting the fact that being undetectable means not being able to transmit the virus sexually.

Over the years, readers have shared with us how much they value POZ in their lives. We are humbled by the praise and take seriously the responsibility of serving the HIV community. For a few readers, however, being spotlighted on the cover of the magazine has had an even deeper effect.

For some, being on the cover supercharged their advocacy. For others, the cover confirmed that their advocacy had made a difference. For all of them, appearing in POZ marked a milestone in their lives.

Here, we honor 25 of these advocates. We thank them—and all of you—for continuing to support POZ.

August/September 1996

Michelle and Raven Lopez

“I remember going to a park in the Bronx and the photographer telling my mother to put me in the swing and put her face next to mine.”

That’s how Raven, 28, remembers her 1996 POZ cover shoot. She was 5 years old, and her well-known HIV activist mom, Michelle, posed with her to show the world that both an HIV-positive mom and child could lead happy and healthy lives with the virus—even in what was then only year one of the era of highly effective antiretroviral treatment for the virus.

“That cover led me to come out publicly with my HIV status later in life,” says Raven, who still lives with her mom in Brooklyn. “I even met and became friends with [fellow HIV-positive POZ cover kid] Hydeia Broadbent. We have the same birthday.”

Raven is studying to become a phlebotomist and is the proud mother of an HIV-negative 2-year old son, Royal Makai. Of course, that also means Michelle, 52, is a proud grandma—and, as ever, a fiercely outspoken HIV activist, currently consulting for GMHC/ACRIA on issues of HIV in women over 50. “My program’s going to be called Pussy Talk 50, all about our sexual health,” she declares.

Lest you think such talk embarrasses Raven, she has this to say about her mom: “She’s taught me how to become a strong, independent woman. That’s why I’m comfortable talking about my status with anyone—even on a date.” And, she says, when uninformed men tell her she looks too sexy to have HIV, she just shows them her POZ cover!

Michelle Lopez (left) with her daughter, Raven (right), and grandson Royal MakaiCourtesy of Michelle Lopez

June 1998

Rebekka Armstrong

Playboy magazine's Miss September 1986, Armstrong had gone public with her 1989 HIV diagnosis four years before she appeared on POZ's cover, but the bisexual bombshell, now 52, still remembers that "life-changing" moment.

"For Playboy, I was showing you my body and some of my brains, but with POZ, I was actually showing the world who I was with a really intense purpose, which was empowering," she says. "People would come up to me and say, 'Oh my God, I had no idea you had AIDS' or 'This is what AIDS could look like.' It gave me a whole new platform to educate people."

She was also getting seriously sick at the time, but today, she says, she's in great health. "I've been sober 13 years now," says the former speed user. Plus, she's in business with Buck Angel, the former porn actor she calls her "chosen dad," selling her own line of healing balms and tinctures containing CBD oil. The line is BuddhaTrees.com and is produced by and with Angel's business PrideWellness.net. A portion of all sales are donated to AIDS service organizations.

A former professional bodybuilder, Armstrong is now a personal trainer and sports therapy aide who, despite having had shoulder surgery, still lifts weights—though they're lighter these days. She spends much of the rest of her time walking her four rescue dogs in the hills of Los Angeles with concert rigger Anthony DiSpirito, her partner of 11 years. "He's the love of my life," she says.

Oh, and she's still looking sexy on those massive AIDS Healthcare Foundation billboards in LA. "Thriving," they read. And is she ever.

Rebekka ArmstrongCourtesy of AIDS Healthcare Foundation

January 1999

Bishop Kwabena Rainier “Rainey” Cheeks

“I was surprised by how people responded to it,” says Cheeks. That’s how the Washington, DC–based founder of the pioneering Black gay AIDS agency Us Helping Us and the LGBT-affirming Inner Light Unity Fellowship Church remembers his POZ cover appearance 20 years ago.

“I thought I was very public with my status, but many people who knew me thought it was quite bold of me.” He says it also helped with fundraising and landing more speaking engagements. “Having that kind of national exposure was a powerful thing.”

In 1999, Cheeks, now 66, had already been living with HIV for several years. He remains the pastor of Inner Light, which celebrated its 25th anniversary last year, and is looking forward to hosting more workshops and seminars to empower gay Black men, who still have the highest HIV rates in the United States. “I do a workshop called ‘The Arc of Loving Yourself.’ How can we gay men respect, and not objectify, each other?”

In recent years, he has worked extensively to try to get mainline churches to become LGBT-affirming. “I started my meetings with all of them by asking, ‘Tell me who’s not welcome to the table of God?’” The result? A bunch of ministers held a service during which they stood in the pulpit and apologized to their LGBT churchgoers for not having explicitly embraced them in the past.

When Cheeks, the author of Reclaiming Your Divine Birthright, isn’t working, he hikes in Rock Creek Park, participates in an African drumming circle and enjoys time with his beloved collection of elephant figurines. “Elephants are family,” he explains. “They take care of one another.”

Bishop Kwabena Rainier “Rainey” CheeksCourtesy of Bishop Kwabena Rainier Rainey Cheeks

October 2001

Susan Rodriguez

Rodriguez, 59, originally appeared on the cover of POZ in 1997 for a story about folks with HIV quitting their jobs and going on benefits to take care of themselves.

That first cover “played a major role in shaping my life and activism,” she says—so much so that she went on to found SMART (Sisterhood Mobilized for AIDS/HIV Research & Treatment) University in New York City to provide support, education and advocacy for women living with HIV.

In the fall of 2001, she appeared on the cover again, flanked by four of her fellow SMART ladies, for a story about new data confirming that it was nearly impossible for women to transmit HIV sexually to men. But her most vivid memory of that issue of POZ is that it came out on 9/11, after which SMART had to temporarily vacate its downtown Manhattan offices as a result of the wreckage and pollution from the terrorist attack. “A sense of hopelessness set in [during] the days and weeks afterward,” she recalls. “Continuing SMART became my focal point to get out of despair.”

And Rodriguez has done so to this day. She recently started SMART HEART, which fuses activism and creativity for women with HIV via sign-making parties for protests and a meditation/healing component. “Our participants are primarily low-income women of color, and we felt that it was important to build a foundation of civic engagement leading to the midterm elections and now beyond,” she says. A breast cancer, stroke and depression survivor, she adds, “It’s important that I keep my life balanced and take care of myself mentally and physically.”

Susan RodriguezCourtesy of Susan Rodriguez

May 2004

Florent Morellet

POZ May 2004

POZ’s 10th anniversary cover garnered global attention after famed artist Spencer Tunick created an image of 80 naked men and women living with HIV—some of them now deceased—one frigid early morning in New York’s Meatpacking District.

The setting? Florent, the longtime beloved bohemian diner and onetime POZ magazine unofficial canteen, which closed in 2008. Its namesake proprietor is the iconic HIV-positive French activist, artist and provocateur Florent Morellet, who was known to track his T cells on the diner’s letterboards alongside the menu. He also was at the photo shoot.

Morellet, 65, now lives in Bushwick, an arty Brooklyn neighborhood whose vibe echoes that of his diner’s 1980s and ’90s heyday. “It was fantastic,” he remembers of the shoot. “I think it was one of the restaurant’s greatest moments. People called me about it from all over the world. It was political and sensational—but with humor. It was a wonderful reminder that so many of us had survived together, as a family, up to that point.”

He lives a much quieter life these days. “It’s difficult to be retired and not be at the center of the world anymore.” Not completely separated from his past, he’s still good friends with his ex, the novelist Peter Cameron.

Last year, Morellet moved longtime Florent employee Harry Eriksen into his apartment and coordinated Eriksen’s hospice care. Eriksen died of cancer in November. “He was my right hand at the restaurant and my soul mate,” says Morellet. “People tell me they’re sorry, but, actually, he

died in my arms, and it was one of the most beautiful things in my life.”

Florent MorelletCourtesy of Florent Morellet

February/March 2006

Bryan Fleury and Millie Malave

POZ February/March 2006

Fleury appeared on the cover of POZ with the love of his life and fellow advocate Malave. Both say

their romance is stronger today than ever. “Being in the magazine was the first time either of us went public [about living with HIV] and was the greatest decision we ever made,” says Fleury, an HIV prevention educator who lives in Massachusetts.

The article told the stories of five couples—both positive and negative—who found love in the face of HIV. “It gave so many people hope that true love exists, plus we were one of the very first heterosexual couples put on the cover,” Fleury says proudly.

To this day, he says his love story is a staple of his sex-ed curriculum in schools. His advice for keeping the flame alive all these years? “Keep yourself undetectable, adhere to your meds, enjoy a happy sex life,” he jokes.

“Even though I live in New York,” says Malave, “Bryan and I take turns traveling back and forth to Massachusetts to be with each other.” As was the case for Fleury, Malave’s decision to appear on the cover was an easy one. “I wanted other HIV-positive people to know that they also can find love after HIV.”

Malave, a former nurse, has traveled the world with Fleury, setting sail on five cruises tailored to people living with HIV. Unlike her boyfriend, Malave isn’t as vocal about living with HIV in her everyday life but still considers herself an advocate. “My role has been mostly trying to stay healthy for my three daughters,” says Malave.

The couple recently took a big new step in their relationship when they adopted two rescue dogs. “They give me such unconditional love,” says Millie, “but, most importantly, I just enjoy being alive and being with my family.”

Bryan Fleury and Millie MalaveCourtesy of Bryan Fleury and Millie Malave

April 2006

Regan Hofmann

POZ April 2006

Hofmann had been writing an anonymous column for POZ (“In the Closet”) about living secretly

with HIV for a few years before she became the magazine's editor-in-chief. She came out with a splash, not just on our cover but also in the pages of Vogue, New York magazine and The New York Times. (All that was followed by her 2009 memoir, I Have Something to Tell You.)

As POZ's first HIV-positive editor-in-chief, the stylish, horse-riding Hofmann brought new attention to the magazine during her six-year tenure, often appearing in gowns on red carpets for HIV galas for groups such as amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research, whose board she joined.

"Being on the cover of POZ, while initially terrifying, was the most liberating, empowering thing I have done," she says. "I lived in emotional isolation for nearly 10 years, keeping my HIV status a secret from most people. Telling my truth publicly felt like being born again—into a huge family of people just like me."

Currently, Hofmann is the policy officer of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Liaison Office in Washington, DC, where she works with the U.S. government "to encourage continued strong bipartisan American leadership on AIDS." She also supports UNAIDS executive leadership and country teams in their work around the world.

The former New Jersey girl now lives on a small farm outside DC with her beloved horse and her Muscovy ducks. "Which," she points out, "I raise for eggs, not meat!"

Regan HofmannCourtesy of Regan Hofmann

June 2008

Kehn Coleman

POZ June 2008

“Things are a lot different since I did that interview,” says Coleman, when asked about the time he

appeared on the cover of POZ. The article addressed the incredible difference in HIV care between San Francisco and Oakland, two California cities separated by just eight miles—and decades of racial and socioeconomic disparities.

“At that time, I was not working yet. I had just finished my associate’s degree and was just looking for something positive to give back,” he says. A survivor of not just HIV but also of homelessness, Coleman was one of many people struggling to find care who were profiled for the article.

Today, Coleman has a job assisting special-needs children in San Francisco, a post he has held proudly since 2009. “It’s my way of giving back,” says the quiet advocate, uncle and educator, who has been living with HIV since 1993. “I feel as though I’ve been given so many options as a long-term survivor. I figure sometimes that I’ve been given a chance to survive to help others.”

Kehn ColemanCourtesy of Kehn Coleman

July/August 2008

Jeremiah Johnson

POZ July/August 2008

Shortly after Johnson, 36, appeared on the cover of POZ to protest being sent home from Ukraine

by the Peace Corps because he tested HIV positive, another foreign aid organization saw the magazine and reached out to him, offering him a similar position in Lima, Peru. But in addition to that concrete outcome, “being on the cover was transformative for me,” he says.

“It elevated my activism and contributed to my resilience, because I was in a state of shock at my dismissal.” It was this resilience that led him, with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and POZ, to successfully pressure the Peace Corps to end its policy of sending members home for testing positive for the by-then easily treatable virus. (Unfortunately, that policy has recently reemerged; see Romany Tin below.)

At the time of the cover shoot, Johnson was depressed and waiting tables back in his native Denver. But since then, he’s thrived as a person and an activist. Since 2011, he has lived in New York, where he was recently promoted to HIV project director at the venerable think tank Treatment Action Group. He also played a large role after the 2016 election in founding the ACT UP–like direct-action collective Rise and Resist, whose members have been arrested several times while protesting Trump and the policies of the right-wing 115th Congress.

He’s in a long-term relationship with dancer and massage therapist Tym Byers, who joins him for work conferences. And Johnson says much of his current activism can be traced back to that POZ cover. “With my face suddenly out there,” he says, “it helped me get around any inhibitions I had about being public and hence talk about discrimination and stigma openly.”

Jeremiah JohnsonSean Black

November 2008

Waheedah Shabazz-El

POZ November 2008

“To this day, 10 years later, people still remember me from the cover of POZ magazine,” says

Waheedah Shabazz-El, HIV survivor, mother of three, grandmother of four and outspoken advocate in America's Muslim, LGBT and Black communities. "I've had the opportunity to speak a lot since then, and I'll still wear the same garment," she says. "When I do that, I'm like: 'You're getting it all today, you know!'"

Back then, Shabazz-El was just starting to share her HIV diagnosis, which she received while in jail in 2003. She has since catapulted into a renowned advocacy career working with the likes of ACT UP Philadelphia, Positive Women's Network–USA, Women of Color United Against Violence and HIV, CHAMP and the Philadelphia Network of Care for Prisoner Reentry in her hometown of Philly, among many others.

Today, her fight is about more than just a serostatus. "All my advocacy was around HIV," Shabazz-El recalls. "Now, my advocacy is around human rights. Over the years, I've had the opportunity to see things that have increased my awareness and broadened my perspective. There are intersecting oppressions."

Waheedah Shabazz-ElCourtesy of Waheedah Shabazz-El

November 2009

Michael Emanuel Rajner

As the legislative director of the Florida Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Democratic Caucus, Rajner was constantly emailing POZ to feed editors tips for potential stories and to ask

whether anyone on staff wanted to press presidential candidates on AIDS. That was in 2009.

“But around and leading up to 2016, I stepped away more and more from engaging with HIV/AIDS issues,” Rajner explains. “I’m now going on 25 years living with HIV, and I think that a shift has been happening. Minority communities are finally having greater opportunities to have their voices heard, and people like me have had to step back so others can step up and have that opportunity.”

But that doesn’t mean the former policy powerhouse has gone completely silent. Last year, Rajner connected with students from Parkland, Florida, to share old-school HIV activism advice after they stepped into advocacy following one of the deadliest school shootings in U.S. history.

“Activism doesn’t mean you have to be attending a conference or be the person on the front line,” says Rajner. “Sometimes it’s more important to be available to people as a resource or to help guide new people who are stepping forward. And that’s what I’m trying to do.”

Michael Emanuel RajnerCourtesy of Michael Emanuel Rajner

June 2010

Tim Horn

POZ June 2010

Horn’s history with POZ goes way back. “I authored its first feature on the development and

launch of protease inhibitors," he recalls. He then went on to edit Physicians' Research Network Notebook, a quarterly magazine for HIV care providers, and AIDSmeds.com before helping to lead the Treatment Action Group for several years as a writer and activist.

Needless to say, a lot has changed both for him and in HIV research since those early days. "It's weird to think of HIV as a 'career,' but it has been at the center of my work for my entire adult life thus far," says Horn, who currently works on HIV prevention and treatment access at the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD).

His cover story was about the countless ways our four-legged companions keep us happy and healthy. He remains an animal lover but has expanded his interests. "I'm an amateur photographer and am attempting to tackle the dark arts of bread baking," says Horn. "I'm still here continuing the challenge of living my best life."

Tim HornCourtesy of Tim Horn

June 2011

Timothy Ray Brown

POZ June 2011

By the time Brown, 53, was featured on the cover of POZ, he had already been famous for about

three years as the first person in the world known to have been cured of HIV.

Diagnosed with the virus in 1995, he was undergoing a stem-cell transplant for cancer in Germany in the 2000s when he agreed to let the doctor infuse him with cells harvested from a donor with a genetic mutation that blocked HIV. He has been HIV negative ever since.

“They’ve tried to do it to people with HIV who were in my situation, but none have survived,” he laments. Researchers are still a long way from transforming what Brown’s extraordinary case taught us about HIV eradication into a workable large-scale cure.

Dubbed “the Berlin Patient” by global media because he was living in that city at the time, the Seattle native is back in the United States living happily and healthily—despite some neuropathy and joint stiffness—in Palm Springs, California, with his boyfriend, Tim Hoeffgen, and their cat, Penny.

He does yoga weekly, volunteers via Desert AIDS Project to provide resources for locals struggling with meth addiction, including a potential needle-exchange site, and is involved in the area’s HIV & Aging Research Project (harp-ps.org).

He still regularly attends conferences about an HIV cure, including one in Seattle in early 2018. “I gave a short speech and said to the researchers, ‘Hurry up!’ I’m basically the cheerleader for an HIV cure.”

Editor’s Note: The news of a second person in long-term viral remission, and perhaps a third person, broke after we went to press.

Timothy Ray BrownJennifer Morton

September 2012

Cecilia Chung

POZ September 2012

“Things have changed since then, but they haven’t changed that much,” says Chung when asked

about her 2012 POZ cover story. The article came out the same year the trans community noted a significant increase in violent attacks on trans women across the country, and advocates like Chung were looking to fight back.

“I had been visible for quite a while by that time,” Chung recalls, adding that appearing on the cover seemed like a natural progression of her career as a positive trans activist. At the time, she was serving as a health commissioner in San Francisco, a post she still holds, and was a senior strategist at the Transgender Law Center, which remains the nation’s largest trans-led advocacy organization.

In the past six years, “I’ve spent a lot of time nurturing the next generation of leaders,” says Chung, who’s ready to pass the torch after nearly 30 years of speaking out. “I really believe that in order for us to break down stigma, we have to be able to see others who look like us and who can share our stories.”

Cecilia ChungJeff Singer

June 2013

Mark S. King

POZ June 2013

An LGBT advocate, King is the creator of the HIV blog My Fabulous Disease. But it wasn’t until this

cover story, which he penned, that he saw himself as a writer. “That article changed the way people viewed me, and it changed the opportunities that I got in terms of being able to speak out as a person living with HIV,” he says.

Since then, the blogger/activist has written about almost everything: crystal meth addiction as a gay man; positive relationships; the often dicey HIV politics of America; iconic AIDS history; and more. His byline has appeared in such outlets as The Advocate, Newsweek, Queerty and TheBody.com.

“As a writer, activist and long-term survivor, I view every opportunity to share my voice on the pages of POZ as a privilege and something I consider to be an important piece of my legacy,” he says. Find him online, on social media and in future issues of POZ magazine.

Mark S. KingHolly Clark

September 2014

Julie Lewis

Diagnosed with HIV in 1990 after contracting the virus via a 1984 blood transfusion, Lewis—the mother of Macklemore's musical partner DJ-producer Ryan Lewis—had taken a years-long break from HIV activism and education when she graced our cover. "It was me coming back to HIV activism after 10 years of not being too involved," Lewis, 60, recalls.

To show gratitude for surviving 30 years with HIV, in 2014 Lewis started the 30/30 Project, aiming to build 30 health care centers around the world to last for at least 30 years. The first to open was in Malawi.

Five years later, Lewis is proud to say that, working alongside respected global aid groups like Partners in Health, she's expecting to fully fund all 30 of her facilities. "It's been very fulfilling, but it's also been a ton of work," she says.

With four grandkids and another on the way, "I'm ready to put some time into my personal life." She laughs at how she imagines the HIV community reacted to her cover appearance.

"It wasn't like, 'Oh, who's this new person?' It was like, 'Oh, she's back.' I'm so excited to not have to be a public person anymore."

For more information and to donate, go to 3030project.org.

Julie Lewis (left) with her son RyanCourtesy of Julie Lewis

Octavia Lewis

“That article opened many doors for me,” says Lewis about her 2015 cover story, which details her HIV journey. A lot has changed for her over the past years—she separated from her husband, Shawn Lopez (who also appeared in the article), adopted her foster son, Ethan (“He’s now 5!”), and has become one of the nation’s leading transgender activists.

“That article proved so many things that a lot of trans people are told are not possible: a) you can live with HIV; b) you can be a wife; c) you can be a mother; and d) you can be gainfully employed.” But having it all was just the beginning.

Lewis is now on the board of Positive Women’s Network–USA, is a founding member at Positively Trans and has traveled the world sharing her story. “I’m also still doing stuff locally,” she says, donating a lot of her time mentoring trans youth, “just telling them that you can be whoever you choose to be.”

Octavia Lewis

January/February 2016

Ashton P. Woods

POZ January/February 2016

“It wasn’t my idea to appear in POZ,” says Woods, one of Houston’s foremost Black Lives Matter

[BLM] activists, when asked about his cover story. “I actually heard through [a friend] that you guys were interested in navigating the BLM movement while HIV positive and Black.”

In fact, Woods had a long history with organizing before gracing the cover of POZ, having started out as an activist in the late ’90s after founding one of the first gay-straight alliances in Texas. His aim throughout the years? To ensure that Black people, particularly LGBT Black people, are engaged in politics and viewing their work intersectionally.

Appearing in POZ was perfect. “My reaction when the article came out was the same as everyone else’s: How did this happen? Congratulations!” Over the past two years, Woods has continued to organize with BLM and beyond.

He has even filed to run for Houston City Council this year. “Election Day is on my birthday,” Woods jokes when asked about his future plans for intersectional advocacy.

For the latest updates about his campaign, find him on Facebook.

Ashton P. WoodsCourtesy of Ashton P. Woods

October/November 2016

Javier Muñoz

Muñoz was already famous by the time he appeared on POZ's cover, having succeeded his good friend and fellow Puerto Rican New Yorker Lin-Manuel Miranda in the title role of the Broadway blockbuster musical Hamilton. In fact, Miranda had bestowed him his own hashtag, #Javilton.

And Muñoz had already made a splash—and been honored by GMHC—for coming out as both a cancer survivor and a person living with HIV in The New York Times right before he stepped into the lead role, saying he wanted newly diagnosed young folks to have the kind of role model he lacked when he was diagnosed in 2002.

Since leaving Hamilton in early 2018 after a year-plus run as the lead and finishing up a stint on the TV show Shadowhunters, "I've spent time nurturing my relationship with my partner while reconnecting with family and friends," he says. "A show like Hamilton takes over your entire life, so this year has been about finding balance with my personal life as well as my professional life."

Muñoz says being on POZ's cover "was an honor and [led to] the greatest show of support I could ever wish for. That energy fed me, and I hope to keep returning that support to others living with HIV or AIDS for as long as I live."

Javier MuñozCoutesy of Javier Muñoz

January/February 2017

Marvell Terry

POZ January/February 2017

Terry was one of the folks spotlighted in the cover story, which addressed the structural, social

and health barriers that challenge Black gay and bisexual men at the center of the epidemic in the South.

“I was excited and nervous,” he says about his decision to speak out in the article.

But the value of the work Terry continues to do on behalf of men who have sex with men in the South is undeniable.

The 33-year-old advocate is the creator of the Red Door Foundation, an HIV advocacy group in his native Memphis, and founder of the annual Saving Ourselves Symposium, a conference by and for Black LGBTQ living in the South that’s focused on health, wellness and social justice.

“My advocacy and activism have certainly expanded since I was last featured in POZ,” he adds. “I now look at HIV at the intersection of so many other issues that impact Black and brown communities, such as homelessness, food deserts and poverty. You see I am Black before you know I am living with HIV or gay—and that reality has fueled me in broadening by coalition building and joining other movements.”

Marvell TerryCourtesy of Marvell Terry

January/February 2018

Achim Howard

POZ January/February 2018

“I’m just standing up for the trans men who can’t stand up for themselves,” says Howard when

asked about his cover story about fighting erasure and HIV in the transgender community. A few months before the article's publication, he and other trans activists made waves when they stormed the stage at the United States Conference on AIDS to demand better representation at the conference.

"I remember sitting at a table with all of my sisters at Positively Trans and seeing over and over again that the data for transgender people was just not there. I couldn't take it anymore." More than a year later, Howard is still hard at work in the community, continuing to advocate both as the founder of DC's Trans Men Rising and a Positively Trans board member.

"We are still not being counted. We still need health care that is adequate to us. The studies, the data, need to be for us." Because at the end of the day, says Howard, a cover story might be great, but for much of the HIV-positive community, the work has just begun.

Achim HowardCourtesy of Achim Howard

July/August 2018

Romany Tin

POZ July/August 2018

“I felt proud and empowered knowing that I was fighting for the rights of HIV-positive individuals,”

says Tin, 24, of his POZ cover. “But at the same time, it frightened me that everyone would know about me and my status. The stigma around it has changed my life, and that is something I would really like to change.”

At the time, Tin was in limbo back in the United States after the Peace Corps sent him home from Cambodia, his father’s homeland, for testing HIV positive while serving. That move on the part of the agency belied its promise a decade before (see Jeremiah Johnson) that it would not dismiss members who test HIV positive home if their treatment and care could be reasonably accommodated.

Like Johnson, Tin fought the rejection, reaching out not only to Johnson via Treatment Action Group but also to the ACLU and Lambda Legal—all of whom pressed the Peace Corps on why it had to send Tin home from a country with solid access to HIV meds and care. The pushback paid off: The Peace Corps once again said it would no longer send members with HIV home unnecessarily. Tin is back in Cambodia, teaching English.

“I get my treatment and labs here at the hospital in Phnom Penh,” he says. “Overall, I’m doing well. Living with HIV hasn’t changed much of my habits.” Once back in the United States, Tin wants to find decent-paying work, go to grad school for public health and continue working in HIV activism.

His appearance in POZ, he says, “was the first time I felt part of this community. It gave me the confidence to continue my advocacy to fight for people with HIV.”

Romany TinCourtesy of Romany Tin

October/November 2018

By the time Sanchez made the cover of POZ, he'd been running the blog circuit promoting his now-hit web series, Merce—a self-described "sparkly, show tune-y, jazz-handy, middle-aged" extravaganza about what it's like to live with HIV today.

"One of the major impetuses of [starting Merce] was that every time I saw a character with HIV on television or in a movie, it was always sad," Sanchez recalls.

Fast-forward to today, and the show—which includes everything from musical interludes about HIV-related diarrhea to heart-wrenching stories about love and acceptance—is in postproduction for its second season, set to debut later this spring.

Sanchez can also be found on TheBody.com, where he is currently a contributing editor, as well as at various HIV-related events like AIDSWatch and the United States Conference on AIDS.

"That cover story really validated our project," says Sanchez. "It introduced us to the HIV community in a lovely way so that when I started doing more writing and other kinds of advocacy work, people knew who I was and listened to what I had to say."

Charles SanchezBill Wadman

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