Back to Life, Back to Reality: Linda Grinberg

April 1, 1999 By Angelo Ragaza

The New York Times *calls it a "unique affliction," a trauma matched only by death-camp survival. But for us, Lazarus Syndrome, named after the biblical figure Christ restored to the living, is just the price we have to pay for life in the protease era.* POZ *spoke with five PWAs about the long march back from death's door.*

Age 47
Home Los Angeles
Occupation Founder, the Foundation for AIDS and Immune Research, former film-library owner
Tested Positive 1992

The Dying Game
In February '95, my CD4 cells were down to 30 and I was diagnosed with CMV. I was desperate. Because I was a late-stage patient, I was rejected from 12 clinical trials. But I went to FDA meetings and begged for my life and the lives of other late-stage patients. I think I finally saw the light: that we're not just here to take up space and indulge our own happiness, but to try to leave this world a better place.

Money Matters
I had sold my business in '94, and although the money was nice, the doctors had told me I had a year to live—and I was already past the deadline. What good is this money if I'm dead? So I set up a foundation to fund cutting-edge AIDS research. On the one hand, I was sick and frightened of deteriorating; on the other, fighting for myself and others gave me a purpose.

Turning Point
In mid-'95, when I finally got Crixivan, my CD4 cells shot up. It was pretty instantaneous, but my viral load has never been undetectable. I've got my energy back and I'm able to run around and go to all the meetings. But I don't think my life has changed all that much in terms of my focus since getting better—I still have the same mission, something that isn't influenced by my CD4 count. If anything, my rising numbers just prove I was on the right track all along.

Love Connection
After my divorce, I was gun shy, and being diagnosed as HIV positive brought my love life to a

complete halt. That was the hardest thing to deal with.

Straight men are frightened to death. I didn't want to feel like a leper. I made the decision to just focus on my activism. When your time is limited, your values change, how you want to spend your time, who with, doing what. But in the last six months I've start dating again—slowly.

The Way She Lives Now

My social circles have drastically changed. Now most of my friends are gay men. You just get to a point with your heterosexual friends when you realize you're boring them. They don't want to hear all this technical stuff about the virus. They have other interests. I hate to sound so judgmental, but in some ways, I think that many of my hetero friends are unhappy for trivial reasons.

One of my girlfriends told me recently that I'm one of the most contented people she knows. Her friends are healthy and beautiful, and I'm the one with this life-threatening disease, and yet I have more inner peace. It's very ironic.

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