Catching Up With...Justin LiGreci

May 1, 2001 By Clifford Chase

AGE: 18

TESTED POSITIVE: 1994

MAMA BEAR: Justin's adoptive mom sued New York Foundling Hospital in 1996 for failing to disclose the need to test Justin for HIV (his birth mother was an IVDU). The case was just settled for an undisclosed amount and a deal to work with the nascent Justin LiGreci HIV/AIDS Foundation (www.jhaf.org).

WELCOME BACK, LIGRECI: After going public in 1997, Justin entered nine circles of harassment at his Catholic high school on New York City's Staten Island. "They were calling me gay, queer, faggot, homo, all that stuff," he says. "That was the last straw." After two years of the school's malign neglect, Justin made a half-hearted attempt to kill himself. "But it wasn't meant to be. It wasn't my time."

LADY DOTH PROTEST: A transfer landed him in a more diverse, friendlier public school, but a music teacher denied him a guitar -- Justin might cut himself on a frayed string and infect someone, she argued. With no chance to practice or to perform, he got a failing grade. "I was confused, because I loved the people I met at this new school. Then to have to put up with all of this..."

PHYS ED: Justin's doc prescribed a home-school regimen last November after the stress made him drop 10 pounds. On an AZT/3TC/Viracept combo since '97, he was hospitalized with pancreatitis in January, but hopes to be back in class to graduate in June. Marinol helps him regain some of the lost weight, but the dizziness and danger of hallucinations led him to halve the dose. And he's been hitting the gym: "Trying to build up my chest -- you know, to impress the ladies, something like that."

ABSENCE OF MALICE: Justin's waiting for that thick acceptance envelope from colleges, though back-to-school time is usually met with gastroenteritis, so he'll find higher ed close to home. Future career? Journalism. "Have you seen the movie *Almost Famous*? I liked what one character said: To be a journalist, you have to be honest and unmerciful."

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