Class Pictures

July 1, 2003 By Philip Huang

The faces are proud, frail, serene and unflinching, and the texts that accompany them often explode AIDS tropes. “I could use a vacation,” says a young man. “Not that I want to run away from my problems.... It’s too cold here in New York.” Such intimate truths fill *Focus on Living*, which offers the first-person histories of 40 HIVers of myriad races, classes and generations, along with the startling portraits of photographer and editor Roslyn Banish.

While *Focus on Living* captures life with HIV in the individual present, Richard Berkowitz’s *Stayin’ Alive: The Invention of Safe Sex* retraces an entire movement—HIV prevention—from its beginnings. For the generation who cannot remember a time before condoms were used to prevent HIV, Berkowitz paints the vivid, surprising history of an “adolescent” gay community trapped between the tidal fury of sexual revolution and encroaching disease. Berkowitz, a former S&M hustler, and his activist allies, self-proclaimed “gay sluts,” fought the idea that AIDS was caused by a virus, insisting it accreted from STDs like gonorrhea and herpes, which were repeatedly infecting urban gay men in bathhouses. Urging gay men to renounce promiscuity and use condoms, the Berkowitz brigade was savaged by gay leaders as sex-phobic. Berkowitz posed the question still haunting prevention today: Who should decide what’s “best” for a community?

Unfortunately, there is nary a mention of barebacking or the ennui and oblivion that fuel risk-taking behavior now. Still, this book is required reading for anyone trying to understand the ideological divide between risk reduction and abstinence. It reminds a new generation of AIDS activists that their work will be judged by history.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/Class-Pictures-2892-2477