Editor’s Letter

Help On The Way

December 1, 2006 By Regan Hofmann

I was never very good at math—and I was even worse with statistics—until I became a number myself. Since the first time I saw the image of a man covered with Kaposi’s sarcoma, I prayed that the numbers of those suffering from HIV would drop. I did everything I could to avoid becoming a statistic. But in 1996, I became another notch in the virus’ belt.

You don’t have to be Einstein to see that HIV/AIDS numbers are trending in the wrong direction. Twenty-five years, 25 million dead. More than 40 million living with the virus and new-infection rates climbing faster than ever. Where did our calculations go wrong? The projections for future stats are even uglier, and, until recently, it seemed that those fighting the epidemic were being outnumbered by those fighting to survive it.

There were various reasons for that. Many of those who fought so valiantly early in the epidemic have, sadly, died; others are just worn out. After two and a half decades of struggle, it’s understandable that there would be a level of “AIDS fatigue.” The protease revolution and the resulting notion that AIDS was manageable and survivable also reduced the number of activists and advocates joining the ranks. The idea that we weren’t going to die tomorrow, at least in America, created a climate of complacency.

It’s become obvious that the opposite is true. If the years have taught us anything, it’s that there has never before been a more dire need to bolster our forces against AIDS. Fortunately, when we went looking for heroes, we found ourselves in a happy quandary: how to pay homage (on just 13 pages) to the thousands of amazing folks tirelessly trying to stem the blood flow. The result, our “35 Ones to Watch,” highlights the men, women and organizations we feel are particularly poised to make a profound difference in the years ahead. Some of the faces will be familiar to you; some will be a surprise. We didn’t focus just on American soil—we looked overseas too, as effective solutions to the universal problems created by AIDS can be found all over the world.

Initially, I was daunted by the idea of singling out anyone to celebrate. In my mind, each and every person who contributes to the fight against AIDS is worthy of great praise. Everyone living with the virus or supporting someone with the virus is a brave-hearted hero to me. Still, it’s comforting to know that among those of us battling AIDS, there are those who provide added inspiration and assurance through their extraordinary commitment and the power of their brains, brawn or bank

accounts.

I’m scared every day that AIDS will continue to add to the number of lives it claims. But I am also reassured by the fact that as AIDS multiplies around the globe, it creates a growing sense of urgency that everything must be done to end this humanitarian crisis. Our desperate need to stop AIDS has issued a clarion call. And our cry for help is being answered by an increasing number of truly amazing people.

As we pause to reflect on this World AIDS Day, counting both our blessings and our staggering losses, we tip our hats to the millions of you who continue to fight, recognizing your courage and resilience and strength.

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