Editor’s Letter-May 2007

Motherland

May 1, 2007 By Regan Hofmann

I was struck by how mothers play A pivotal role in many of the stories in this month’s issue. On our back page, we hear the tale of how Nita Pippins, now 80, faced the death of her only son, Nick, the late partner of *POZ*’s own Dennis Daniel, by embracing Dennis and others close to Nick as her own children. She worked through her grief and honored the legacy of her son by mothering a new, extended family.

Anthony Richardson, one of this month’s Mentors, lay blind and motionless in his hospital bed—until his mother told him that God had a plan for him, inspiring him to find the strength and courage to become an activist for those physically challenged by AIDS. Embracing her words, Richardson coined the phrase “differently abled.” He dedicates his life to inspiring others to move beyond apparent limitations.

Our cover subject, Larry Bryant, also took heart from his mother—to whom he disclosed his HIV status 20 years after becoming infected. Spurred by her love and support, Bryant found the courage to become an openly HIV positive AIDS activist. Today he travels the United States inspiring others to share stories that he takes back to Capitol Hill, advocating on their behalf.

Mothers (and motherlands) also inform our feature story, which introduces Victor Cruz and Edith Mahongo (not their real names), undocumented immigrants from Mexico and Zambia, who discovered they were HIV positive while visiting America. Mahongo chooses not to return to her native Zambia, which lacks adequate HIV treatment. The price she pays for getting medical care in America is not seeing her three children. But she says she stays here for their sake: She doesn’t want them to watch her die from a disease almost no one survives in her country. Cruz, who recuperated for several years in New York, is getting ready to go home to Mexico, to take his chances with the less-than-ideal HIV health care there so that he may again be in his mother’s arms.

And then there’s China’s Dr. Gao Yaojie, the retired gynecologist and AIDS activist we profile on our Snapshot page, who has figuratively mothered thousands of people living with HIV as well as hundreds of AIDS orphans.

Hearing the stories of these mothers, I thought of the role my own mother has played in my

survival. Suffice it to say, I wouldn't be here without her unconditional love and superwoman support. Of all the selfless things she's done for me, the biggest was certainly standing by me as I went public with my HIV status. It would be an honor for me to try to care for a child the way my mother has cared for me.

Until recently, I never considered that option. But, as we discuss on our Talking page, being an HIV positive mother is a real possibility these days. Even *General Hospital* heroine Dr. Robin Scorpio (played by Kimberly Mitchell) is rumored soon to become a mother, thus showing that an HIV positive woman can give birth to a negative child (with a little help from the right treatment). Though fictitious, her story is based squarely in reality.

This Mothers Day, I suggest we celebrate all the wonderful moms—positive and negative—who make our journey with HIV possible and show us that despite the challenges of living with the virus, life can be joyous.

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