# Editor’s Note: Hope Has History

The demands of the epidemic have shaped my evolution

April 1, 1996 By David Drake

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How I came to *POZ* is a complicated story. The simplest part is that Sean Strub asked me and I said yes. Well, that’s not entirely true. At first, I said no. But that was over two years ago, when *POZ* was still something brewing in Sean’s imagination. I loved the idea of the magazine and knew it could be an invaluable vehicle for addressing the epidemic. At the time, however, I had my own vehicle for stimulating a public dialogue about life with AIDS: Performing in my Off Broadway play *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me*. After I left the New York production I still had work to do, so my vehicle sprouted wings. San Francisco. Los Angeles. Edinburgh. London. Melbourne. Sydney. I was on a mission to save the world.

What fueled this mission?

Dreams of stardom? A quest for fame? Like sliding into the creamy leather seat of a Jaguar, that stuff is the fun part of the journey. But the *fuel* was loss. Gigantic loss. Enough loss to obliterate the suburban sissy boy I used to be and turn him into an ACT UP warrior. Paul Monette said, “Grief is a sword, or it is nothing.” I took those words to the peaks of many mountains, slaying denial, demons and the threat of more death with every ounce of my might.

Though some found my theatrical antics shocking (one *New York Times* critic called them more appropriate for the street than for the stage), given my background, it’s hardly surprising. I played Oliver. I played Tom Thumb. I played Miss Deep South. I grew up on stage, and came into my angry young manhood by marching into a spotlight. But angry young men grow older -- if they’re lucky.

Like many, I jumped into this war with the goal of winning. The cure for AIDS would be found, and all the social ills, isms, and phobias that HIV entangles would be abolished. Actually, that’s how *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me* ends: Ten minutes to midnight on Millennium’s eve, after the war has been won, looking out across a landscape of memories and memorials, filled with faith in a new beginning.

But AIDS isn’t a stage show with a nice tidy ending. It’s a constant process of assessment and action, reassessment and reaction. Just as people living with HIV must constantly evaluate the ways they face the virus medically, socially and spiritually, the rest of us must make sure we’re fighting with the most effective weapons. As with the offshoots of ACT UP -- Queer Nation, Housing

Works, Treatment Action Group -- the demands of the epidemic have shaped my evolution from actor to playwright to editor.

The stage will be there if my need ever arises, as theater has been around forever. Cave dwellers danced around the fire. Aristotle taught the Greek Island boys how to sing through a mask. And Andrew Lloyd Webber keeps cranking them out. Theater will be with us for a long time to come. And, then again, so will AIDS.

But so will hope.

I mean *real* hope. The kind that lets you see through clear eyes after the swollen grip of a thousand tears has washed your vision clean. For hope is earned. Hope is owned. Hope has history. It must be our future. Each individual is responsible for mining his or her own source of hope. Mine will be here. And if I do my job right, you'll find yours in the pages of *POZ*.

Read on.

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