Founder’s Letter

May 1, 2004 By Sean Strub

A decade ago, when POZ launched, the media, popular culture and even many in our own communities had all but taken away the possibility of survival from those of us with HIV. They assumed we were destined for awful, painful deaths. HIV was typically described as a “ticking time bomb” inside us; AIDS was “inevitably fatal,” “dread” and “incurable.” Who could survive in the face of such imposed hopelessness?

Remarkably, we could. We have survived by refusing to hide in silence. By fighting those who would divide us into risk groups and manipulate us as political categories. And by together creating first the belief in survival, then a movement to support it and finally the science and services to treat the virus. We have created an extraordinary community—one that transcends many differences and boundaries—and that, at its best, cares not only about AIDS but about one another. In the process of our survival, we have learned a lot. We have learned especially that our lives are most meaningful when we use them to care, teach and love.

We have witnessed what it means not to have access to treatment that could save our lives. We understand dying young and alone. We have wondered why we were chosen to survive. No matter how much health the new therapies bring, we have learned that we will not truly be well until we take on the agonizing burdens of addiction, homelessness, mental illness, poverty, racism, sexism and homophobia.

The power of POZ is in our commitment to tell the truth about the epidemic, no matter how painful or costly, whether about treatment philosophy or sexual responsibility, activists or the drug industry. The truth has often been ugly, accusing a culture and political leadership, in particular our current president, of having values more dangerous than AIDS itself. But POZ isn’t the magazine it was 10 years ago. Nor should it be, as AIDS isn’t the epidemic it was 10 years ago. As you read this special 10th anniversary issue, I hope you’ll agree that year after year, issue after issue, we’ve gone where our integrity, determination to tell the truth and unique ability to inspire one another has been most needed.

Survival is cause for celebration—for a magazine as for an individual. But every celebration in the AIDS epidemic is also a memorial. For we cannot celebrate without recalling the sacred memories of those we have lost. We celebrate because it gives meaning to the sacrifice, activism, prayer and dedication they expended on our behalf. So in celebrating, our spirits are nourished, as are those we remember. Our celebration is infused with the pride of a community that has shown itself to be an inspiring example of love and caring, even in the face of intense hatred, ignorance and

indifference. The men and women who came together to mark POZ's 10th anniversary—and to help create the cover for this issue—express in their nakedness the pride and defiance, gratitude and grieving that make up our celebration. Their descriptions of what the experience meant to them (see "Bare Witness") also bear eloquent witness to this.

To editor in chief Walter Armstrong and the entire staff, to our readers and friends, I want to say thank you for what together we are able to achieve with POZ. Disease is not destiny. Seeing ourselves not just as people with HIV, but with hearts, minds, bodies and lives, is healing. Our ability to act every day from that common humanity can heal not only ourselves but our diseased and endangered world.

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