Hot Type!

Just in time for summer vacation, POZ presents the winners of our Hot Type! literary contest. But brace yourselves: These brutally honest and short stories are a potent reminder that HIV is not day at the beach.

July 1, 2005

Meet the Judges:

Samiya Bashir: A former communications director for the African-American AIDS Organization The Balm in Gilead, Bashir is an award-winning author who recently published a new collection of poems entitled *Where the Apple Falls.* (Redbone Press)

Tom Spanbauer: HIV positive novelist Spanbauer received raves for his books *The Man Who Fell in Love With The Moon* (1991) and the AIDS themed I*n The City of Shy Hunters (*2001). His latest novel, *Now is the Hour* (Houghton Mifflin), a coming of age story about a farm boy in Idaho, will be out next spring.

Ernesto Quinonez: Quinonez is an old friend of *POZ*, which published his fiction. In 1999, the *Village Voice* named him a Writer on the Verge. His 2000 novel, *Bodega Dreams*, was a Barnes and Nobles Discover Great New Writers title. His latest novel, *Chango's Fire*, was published by Rayo/Harper last winter.

Rape Potion No.9
by David Hancock
(First Place, Hot Type Literary Contest, Fiction, Prize: $500)

This is the night you get AIDS, you think. This is it.

It doesn't seem to matter too much. It will be a relief, won't it? All the panic of your twenties, thirties, forties—sweating out the tests,fretting over every bruise and swollen gland—you can't seem to spark it up. You are physically exhausted from the war. The passion-sapping negotiations, "I'll do this, but I won't do that." Inventing yourself as a condom top when you want it, too, a big hard cock shooting warm cum up your ass. You fought the good fight, but now you can lay it all down in surrender.

Haven’t you been chasing it, really, in your usual muddled way? Lowering your standards through the years as the quarry gets harder to bag. Less discerning as you realize that the magic you’ve been waiting for isn’t going to happen. Cranking your tired libido with depravity. What does it matter? It’s just going to be you: old, older, oldest. It all goes flushing down the pipes tonight.That thing swirling in the bowl? That’s you, newly 50 and loathsome, no fool like an old fool, finally attaining the fatal fuckup.

You’re a writer; describe the scene from the start. Capture every detail, you’ll want to punish yourself with this memory. Your eyes open. You’re lying on a bed. Did you pass out? You look at an etched-glass fixture on the ceiling. You feel nauseous and strangely inert. A moldy air conditioner rattles in the corner, muffling the traffic noise from Eighth Avenue. It’s your hotel room. The nylon comforter under you feels scratchy. There’s the little TV sitting on the shabby brown dresser. The little round table and two chairs, with the open quart of Jack Daniels and the hotel glasses and Coke cans.

Downstage left is the costar of this seedy passion play: the Puerto Rican hustler sifting through your duffel bag. He’s a fine piece of rough trade; that was what you wanted, wasn’t it? Buzzed hair and brown skin, tattoos and muscles; his shirt is off and his pants are open; his half-hard cock dangles out.

Seeing the cock perks you up. You have sucked that cock. Ah, the delicious moment when your lips open for a big hard cock.It’s a moment of joy, yes it is. Look at your little boy now, Daddy. But even in this guilty rapture, you can’t let go. There are rules,there are always rules.

Safer-sex tips for oral: If you taste precum, back off. Squeeze the base of the cock and milk the precum out. Wipe it off the cock slit with your hand. Then suck some more. Don’t let him cum in your mouth; shield your eyes when the young ones shoot.

The hustler rummages through your pants, finds the wallet. There goes the cash, and your credit card. You try to protest but only moan. He comes over to the bed and looks down on you. He has crude tattoos on his upper chest and shoulders, like a child’s doodles. This one is all Bronx: homely, when you get past the beefcake. He’d had a nice smile in the bar, that notorious Times Square bar. He let you feel his cock under the table while you chatted; nice fat cock.

The hustler leans over and dribbles down a line of spit. It splashes in your left eye and runs down the side of your face. He takes his cock in hand and bats your face, making fun of himself hard. He puts one knee on the bed and mounts your mouth, face fucks you contemptuously. You try to cooperate but receive the thrusts passively. He goes too deep, and you gag. Stomach acid burns your throat. He pulls out and stalks over to the table.

Something has made the hustler angry. He fixes himself a Jack and Coke. He fishes a small pipe from his jacket and loads it. Is it crack, crystal meth? Watching the hustler smoke makes you think of your own modest debauchery. This is your birthday present to yourself, a sleazy weekend in Manhattan. Get drunk, smoke some joints. See the Streetcar revival with that TV actress you like.

Fondle some go-go boys. Jerk off in a video booth. “Play” in the big city; be a “naughty boy.” The juvenile vocabulary of the aimless gay male.

The hustler puts the pipe down and stares. He’s high.

Safer sex and drugs: Don’t do drugs if they make you lose control. Don’t drink too much if you can’t handle it. Don’t lose control. Keep the big picture in view. Your health is worth more than one peak experience.

Your thoughts clear a bit. You remember bringing the hustler to your room,past the disapproving guard in the lobby. He fixed drinks at the little table. He insisted on that, like a straight guy who needs alcohol before he’ll let a faggot touch him. Hot!

You remember now. You set your empty glass on the table and slide over to kneel before the hustler. Nuzzling his crotch, unbuttoning him, taking it out. Time for the poppers, in one nostril, the other. Your blood vessels expand; your skin feels warm and tingly. A nice big cock, getting hard and fat in your mouth. Happy birthday to me, happy birthday to me. You feel rebellious pride in yourself, acting so scandalous and horny at your age. You’re alive, not like all those sleepwalking married guys. The balls, you want to suck the balls. You pull the jeans past his ass and down to his knees.

Then you see them. The lymph nodes, twin paths of stepping stones running along the hustler’s inner thighs.

Common cocksucker practice: Suck any dick you want as long as the owner looks healthy. The minute you confirm he’s positive, shun him like a leper.

That’s what made the hustler mad. Being rejected by a disgusting old queen. Perfectly understandable. But how did you end up in this bed, so limp?How did you end up here? That’s a good one.

You moan and the hustler rouses. He comes to the foot of the bed and lifts your legs, jerking your body toward him. Your sad little penis hangs upside down as he positions himself for the fuck.

Safer-sex tips for anal: Be the top in one-night stands and anonymous scenes. Wear a condom. Don’t get fucked by strangers. When you do get fucked, make him wear a condom. Condoms break. Even with the condom, make him agree to pull out before he comes. If he won’t agree, don’t let him fuck you. If he agrees but you don’t believe him, don’t let him fuck you. Don’t get fucked by strangers.

The hustler’s dick is soft; he can’t get it in. With an angry snort he drops your legs and goes over to his coat. When he comes back, he has a knife in his hand. Random thoughts on safer sex. Remember, even with all your precautions, it’s still a numbers game. Don’t stay too long, don’t sink too low. Don’t get trapped in the hunt….

With the point of his knife, the hustler begins scratching designs on your chest and stomach. His face has a look of concentration like a child taking a spelling test.

With a druggy smile, the hustler draws the knife along his own abdomen, catching drops of red on the edge of the blade. Then the knife drops out of sight. The blood! Not the blood.

Not every gay is your brother. Being gay warps some people, makes themself-centered and dangerous. Understand them; protect yourself….

The hustler is hard. You feel his cock slide in as if from far away and in someone else's ass. He smiles at you, such white teeth, as he pumps his hips lasciviously. Look at me, Papi. He hoists one of your ankles on his shoulder as he pushes in deeper. With the knife in his right hand,he continues his drawing game. My blood, your blood.

Don't let sex become the main thing. Believe in love, be worthy of it. Don't become solitary, nurture friendships. Keep looking for your purpose. Don't let the animal rule the human in you. Maintain balance. In all things moderation. Be accountable for your actions….

The hustler drops the knife and takes your other ankle upon his shoulder. He pumps faster. Your stomach fat jiggles. He spits on you again. Blood or sweat is trickling down your side onto the comforter. They might charge you if it's stained.

Your panic ebbs as the hustler nears climax. Your thoughts come to you dull and distant: This is the night, you think. This is it.

It doesn't seem to matter too much.

Love yourself. Respect yourself. Don't give in to despair. Don't give up hope.

David Hancock, 46, is a longtime journalist who now works for CBS news in New York City.

Shopping With Alice
By Richard Ferri
(Second Place, Hot Type Literary Contest, Fiction, Prize: $250)

Dan was standing at the end of the canned-vegetable aisle at the supermarket in Provincetown. It was a hot summer morning, and everyone was at the beach or still sleeping off last night's transgressions. Dan picked up a can of lima beans and began to read the label. He closely examined the picture of the lima beans on the label. He started to cry.

Standing in the nearly empty store, Dan could not help but feel foolish, but he could not stop crying. He had just turned 25, was a mass of solid muscle, had a great job, and yet lima beans

were making him bawl like a baby.

“Excuse me,” a small firm voice said, “but did those lima beans do something to you?”

Embarrassed, Dan turned to see a small slender white-haired woman in her seventies staring at him over her grocery cart.

“’Cause if they did I can talk to the store manager for you. Can’t have lima beans bringing a grown man like you to tears, can we?”

Dan almost attempted a smile. “No, that would send the universe off-kilter.”
“That is what I think, too.” The woman stuck out her hand. Dan took it. “I’m Alice.”

“Dan,” he replied as he gently shook her hand.

“Good, now that is over. Put those damn lima beans in my cart and help me finish shopping.”

Dan placed the can in Alice’s cart and followed her. “Now, I am going to get some peanut butter. Does peanut butter make you cry, too?”

Dan managed a smile this time and wiped his face. “I’ll be brave.”

“Good man,” Alice clipped back as she steered her cart up another aisle. “Let’s soldier on.”

Dan followed Alice since he could think of no reason not to. She was about five-foot-six and very thin. Her shock of white hair was cropped neatly around her face. Dan could tell she was an old-time Cape Codder who had weathered many a storm. Seeing a man crying in the canned-vegetable aisle did not throw her off balance at all.

Dan felt the need to explain. “I suppose you’re wondering what that was all about.”

Alice shrugged her shoulders as she picked up a jar of superchunk. “Not really. I’m a total stranger. You don’t owe me any explanation.”

Dan leaned closer to Alice. “Aren’t you at least curious?”

“Curious?Sure. I’m as curious as a room full of gay Republicans in awhorehouse.” Going past the peanut butter, Alice stopped in front ofthe pickle section. “Here’s a little life lesson for you, Dan. Neverbuy generic pickles. Those fuckers are limp and tasteless.”

“Point noted. No generic pickles.” Dan’s voice trembled, “You see, Alice, I’m gay.”

Alice just looked up into Dan’s eyes with her no-nonsense face and said,“Well, so am I. Guess we won’t have to worry about any Harold and Maude thing happening.”

Dan tried not to look surprised and Alice caught him.

“Even gay people age. You will age. Those muscles and perfect tan will both fade.”

Alice tossed some milk, cheese and chicken into her cart.

Dan’s mouth went very dry, but he decided he needed to tell someone. Anyone. “You see, Alice….” Dan paused as Alice examined some fillets. “I got my test results about an hour ago. I’m positive.”

Alice slowly shifted her head and looked at him. “So you go to a grocery store and cry over a can of lima beans?”

Dan just shrugged. “I didn’t know what else to do,” he said softly.
“OK, so now I have to ask: Why lima beans?”

“Honestly,I was just walking around in a daze, and when I saw them, they reminded me of damaged blood cells. You know how they’re kind of poufy and have a funny shape.”

“You think lima beans look like damaged blood cells?”

Dan just looked at her. “Is that all you’re going to talk about—lima beans? I just told you I tested positive!”

A tired-looking mother passed by, failing at keeping her child from grabbing packages of straws from the shelves and flinging one into Alice’s cart.

“Guess I needed straws,” Alice mumbled.

Dan’s face was becoming red. “Lima beans and straws!” He was nearly yelling now. “What about me?”

Alice looked up at Dan’s twisted face. “You will be fine. A man who tests positive then cries over a can of lima beans will get it together. When I tested positive, I got drunk. Drank a whole bottle of brandy.”

Alice continued to shop. Dan stood still.

“But Alice, how in the world can you be positive? You’re…” his voiced trailed off.
Alice finished the sentence for him. “I am old and a lesbian.”

“Look, Alice, I am sorry. My mind is just so damn fucked up right now.”

“Let me give it to you in a nutshell. I had a girlfriend for 30 years. After Mary died, I went into

hibernation for five years. One day I told myself I had to snap out of it. So I started to go to the social events at the senior center. I met this man and he seemed nice enough. Very pleasant. He asked me out to dinner. Well, I had never dated a man before, but I figured what the hell. A new adventure, right? One thing led to another and we ended up in bed. I got infected. He left town. End of story." Alice paused. "You know what really still pisses me about it? The sex was terrible."

Dan let out a small laugh. "Yeah, the guy who I think infected me wasn't that great in the sack, either."

Alice did not miss a beat. "Yeah, but I bet you went to bed with strangers for a lousy gin and tonic."

"Never!" Dan protested. "I only drink scotch."

"Who knew I was speaking to such a class act?"

"Well, another life lesson. Go with quality and not quantity."

"I never imagined that I would learn so much grocery shopping with a stranger."

Dan grabbed the other end of the cart. "But how do you cope, Alice? I keep thinking of the things I have to do. People I have to tell. Decisions I have to make. I have this jumble of thoughts ricocheting in my head."

"It will calm down. I know exactly what you're talking about. It is overwhelming. But trust me on this: In a few weeks, you will bethinking a lot more clearly. The only thing you have to do now is nothing. Don't tell anyone. Don't make any treatment decisions. Don't become a rodeo clown. Just let it all calm down."
"That simple?"

"Look, Dan. In any of life's rough situations there are basically three choices. First, is to deal with it. The second is to avoid it, and the third is to slash your wrists. I just don't see you as a guy who believes in denial or someone fond of leaving this planet before your scheduled departure. So the only thing left is for you to cope."

Dan looked at Alice and could feel a little relief creep into his head.This made sense. He found out he tested HIV positive less than two hours ago. Then he cried over a can of vegetables and met Alice. Things were already looking better.

"So what do I do now?"

Alice smiled. "Help me home with my groceries."

They paid for the groceries and headed out to Alice's car. Alice drove to the end of Miller Hill Road. Her house was the last one on the short street and it abutted the woods. It was small but solid. Just like Alice.

She pulled her car around to the back of the house and they got out. Dan carried the groceries and placed them down in Alice's sunporch as Alice began looking for something in a closet. She pulled out a gun.

"Can you shoot a BB gun? Alice asked.

"Of course. I was a Boy Scout."

"Good."Alice fished in one of the grocery bags and found what she was looking for. She marched out to her backyard fence and placed the can of lima beans on a post.

"OK," Alice shouted. "Shoot the damn beans!"

Dan took aim and with remarkable precision hit the can dead center four times. He put down the gun and smiled as Alice came walking up to him.

"So how do you feel?"

"Great."

"Well, it's the same thing with HIV. Got to take aim and fight."

Alice and Dan went inside, opened a bottle of wine and started to make lunch.

HIV positive writer Richard Ferri is 49. His novel Confessions of a Male Nurse (Haworth) is out in September.

Intake Form
by Jack Lynch
(First Place, Poetry, Prize $350)

Current medications: (start date, pill amount, times per day and dosage count)

I begin to list every drug since the early days.
azt, ddi, ddc

Let them guess which ones I'm on now.
cytovene for cmv, sulfasalazine
I reall'y can't recall

kaletra, oxandrin, fuzeon
Whether winter took my root to bones
Before this current upward viral spring
videx, vioxx, prednisone
Or after a summer's failed attempts
To stem a spiraling T-cell fall.
wellbutrin, viread, adderal

Give me a blanket and a milk shake made of lead
norvir
and let me wait,
tipranivir
and wait,
procrit
in a cold room, in a paper dress,
on a cold steel bed.
crixivan, androgel
Glide me, motionless through a noisy cage.
levaquin, neupogen, agenerase
Stillness still comes effortlessly,
but times, dates, numbers...
t-20, d4t, 3tc
please.

Jack Lynch is a 42-year old HIV positive New Yorker. He is pursuing a Bachelor's of Fine Arts at the New School University

Picking up AIDS Results From a Clinic in Spanish Harlem
By Nikki Moustaki
(Second Place, Hot Type Literary Contest, Poetry, Prize: $150)

At Hong Fat two days ago I split a fortune cookie whose fortune read: Think Positive.
Today: a smashed tomato on the sidewalk outside my building. My throat aches.
Three blocks from the subway to the stone-gray clinic, I'm wrapped in scarves,
though narcissi already hang bright faces over the city's sidewalks,
tulips breaking their own heads on the sun.

A sparrow has another sparrow down on the pavement and swallowed
at the neck, sharp beak pinching the life out of the other—
A territorial dispute? Procreation isn't this unfriendly.
Three young men cluster by the display window of a bodega.
In the window: Lazarus on crutches, St. Francis pursued by a little white terrier,

Jesus cut, crossed, bleeding. Thirsty. I step inside to buy water and the guys' heads
don't even swivel.

A woman tries to lift her child: He's only two, look how fat he is. He eats and eats.
The neighbor lady gives him pork rinds and pudding. He don't fit in the stroller no more.
She hands him an uncooked hot dog. Her teeth are brown-golden and pointed,
skin taut to her cheeks. They leave with me, we walk the block up Lexington
together to the clinic where the boy, she tells me, will get his injections.
I don't follow her inside.

An old man across the street leans on a street lamp, singing to himself.
Or maybe he's singing to the city. Or to me. The spring light on the clinic cuts
the building's stone into silver flakes and dust. I'll have black beans and rice after this,
I'll walk the hundred blocks home. I'll be good to everyone, even myself.
Love more, touch less.

The toddler pilots the tall stairs, damp-faced, sucking a new hot dog.
The guy across the street isn't singing, he's praying. I will listen and be stone.
I tighten my scarves. The child smiles up at me and stabs out his chubby fist.
I can make my own prayer, for him, for me. Emily Dickinson says split the lark
to find the music. I say split the sparrow and find the question.
Split the child, find the man. The boy has eight fingers, like me. Two thumbs.
We both have blood, we both have answers; I'll leave this spring stoop, regardless.

Nikki Moustaki, 34, is a published poet and freelance writer living in New York City.

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