In Their Own Good Times

Paper of record fills vacant AIDS beat

February 1, 1995 By Mark Schoofs

Follow-up: At long, long last, *The New York Times* has fulfilled its promise to replace Jeffrey Schmalz, the openly gay and HIV positive reporter who won wide acclaim for his first-person accounts of the epidemic which took his life in November of 1993. “In a real sense we can’t replace Jeffrey,” said Metropolitan Editor Michael Oreskes. “But what we have done is given two good correspondents much of the territory Jeffrey covered.”

David W. Dunlap -- who like his good friend Schmalz wears bow ties and personifies the paper’s traditional image -- will handle a newly created beat called “gay life.” Before taking his new assignment, Dunlap had been writing on real estate, but had also occasionally filled gaps in the paper’s gay coverage. Over the summer, he wrote a memorable news article on the New York Public Library’s lively exhibition on gay history, which had extremely heavy attendance but which the arts and culture pages of the *Times* pointedly (and some say homophobically) ignored. Since he started at his new post, Dunlap has covered the elections from a gay angle. He also wrote an excellent obituary of novelist, *POZ* Sex columnist and ACT UP member David B. Feinberg.

Felicia R. Lee will cover the AIDS half of Schmalz’s beat. An African American, Lee’s personal perspective is different from Schmalz, a white gay man who rarely wrote about poor people with HIV and often about celebrities. But more importantly, Lee is a sharp journalist, plain and simple. So far she has written aggressive, moving stories on a controversial decision to defund community-based research programs that served minority communities; the success of New York’s needle exchange programs; and the wrenching experiences of grandparents who, after nursing their adult children with AIDS through death, are left to care for their grandchildren, many of whom are HIV positive. *The Times* played all three stories on the front page.

Asked if she had been touched by AIDS in her own life, the taciturn Lee told *POZ*, “I really don’t want to talk about that, but yes.”

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