In the Den

Henry Nicols plans his transition from Scout leader to leader of the free world

January 1, 1997 By Interview by Manjula Martin

A self-proclaimed "Eagle Scout since birth," 23-year-old POZ *No. 11 cover boy Henry Nicols decided to go public with his HIV positive status when he was 17. A person with hemophilia, Nicols learned he was HIV positive when he was 11. Since going public, he and his sister Jennifer have spread the educational word to students of all ages around the country and the world. Temporarily "retired" from speaking, Nicols now spends time with his family and leads Boy Scout Troop #1254 in Cooperstown, New York.* POZ *caught up with him and his laid-back, perennially upbeat outlook on going public, treatment and the future.*

How have you been since POZ last spoke with you a year ago?

Well, I was hospitalized about a month ago with a urinary-tract infection, but that was only for a few days. It was basically just a couple of days on antibiotics and exciting things like that.

How are you recovering?

I've gotten a lot better, but it's slow. I've lost some weight-not a lot-but i'm trying to get that back. It's harder than it may seem.

What have you been doing to regain that weight?

I'm trying to eat and exercise a lot. It's not really any sort of regimen, but I'm not a complete couch potato. I used to do karate, but I haven't for years-it's incredibly tiring. Mostly right now I walk. It's easy, it's not strenuous, and it doesn't hurt any body parts.

What kinds of foods are you eating?

Basically just a balanced meal: A lot of meats, vegetables, fruits, good stuff. The stuff your mom always tells you to eat.

Are you on any meds right now?

There are so many I don't know if I can remember them all. I take Septra to prevent *Pneumocystis*

pneumonia-that's something I've been taking for years. I also take Biaxin. I'm taking a protease inhibitor. And Diflucan, which is for thrush; acyclovir; and some more, but I can't think of what they are. The problem right now is that I'm taking so many pills there isn't a whole lot of room left for food,a nd it's kind of a real pain. But I'm doing OK-I'm still here, so I've got to be doing something right.

Did you have to quit public speaking in order to maintain your health?

Well, I didn't *have* to stop, but I decided to stop because it's extremely tiring, and my immune system is basically gone. I mean, it's there, but they just can't find it. It's defunct. So I can get sick very easily, and traveling is excruciatingly tiring.

How has speaking out about AIDS helped you and your family cope?

Speaking has helped us all deal with it. In so many ways we hadn't been able to do anything. We'd been terrified our community would find out. We didn't tell our relatives or even my doctor. Being able to get out and talk to people was very good for all of us. We've gotten a lot of practice and gotten sort of in control. I do miss it, but I'm not restless. I still try to keep myself busy. Your attitude and your mind-set have an incredible amount to do with how well you cope. If you find out you have AIDS and say, "Oh my God, I've got AIDS, I'm gonna die!" then you're dead. Or you can say, "You know, this really bites. But I can still live my life."

Who or what allows you to keep this positive attitude?

My family. Without their friendship and their support, it would be impossible. It would be something I could not do. When I was doing public speaking, people would ask me what I wanted to do before I died, and they thought I'd say, "Go to Disneyland." But I've always wanted to be President of the United States. And people always laugh at me, but I sat down and actually figured it out: You have to be 35 to run for President, I'm 23 now. I'll be turning 35 just in time for the election in 2008. And by that time, a lot of the kids I speak to will be old enough to vote. So in 2008, it's gonna be "Henry for President." We're already planning TV commercials.

Well, I'll definitely consider voting for you.

That's good, because if you don't, I'm coming back. And this time I'm not gonna be happy.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/In-the-Den-12480-4645