Mailbox

September 1, 2000

A Sure Brett

Imagine my surprise when I picked up the June 2000 POZ after not having seen Brett Beasley in about 10 years. I read “Friend of Tinky” with great interest because I know Beasley from college, and I admire what he’s doing by speaking out. I also have a special interest in the issue because I lost an older brother to AIDS.

Beasley’s cousin Rev. Jerry Falwell should be ashamed to call himself a Christian. He should be doing all he can to help people understand that AIDS is a disease like any other that takes the lives of people (and, yes, Christians) whom we love. Instead, he preaches hatred and animosity for PWAs. My question is simple: Jerry, why not show some Christian love to your own family member?

Bill Akers
Lynchburg Virginia

Hail Mary

I was very impressed by Brett Beasley’s courage to speak out against his cousin Jerry Falwell. I was at the Millennium March on Washington and was so angered by the small but hateful display from the religious group that was counterprotesting there. It especially bothered me to see kids with t-shirts that read “GAY (Got AIDS Yet?).” I’m glad that Beasley has stood up to these groups that teach hate. I hope his efforts help to further educate the mothers, fathers and religious leaders who continue to hurt young people with messages of hate. I’m gay, HIV positive and very proud of Beasley’s efforts.

Gerard H. Brien II
Pawtucket, Rhode Island

The June 2000 issue with Brett Beasley on the cover was awesome! And the article by Michael Musto was very well-written. I don’t have HIV, but I have friends who do. Beasley was very courageous to tell his story. What person could not have compassion for someone in Beasley’s position—especially a member of his own family! How can Jerry Falwell call himself a Christian and not have understanding, concern and caring—the very essence of Christianity—in his heart? I applaud Beasley and *POZ* for the message of tolerance and compassion. Hopefully the world will be a bit of a better place because of it.

Tad Smitts
Hillsborough, North Carolina

If Looks Could Kill

I can identify with "The New AIDS Look" (June 2000) as I have facial wasting due to my meds. There are deep holes in my face where my cheeks once were, not to mention pronounced brow bones. I'm starting to look like a skeleton. Talk about chiseled faces!

The article was wonderful, informative and inspiring. It made me a little more hopeful about something that's becoming worse than living with the disease itself—the change in my physical appearance. I feel as though I'm branded with AIDS on my face. Also, this AIDS "look" makes me look ill, which doesn't help me mentally when I'm trying to live a normal life. It has become a constant reminder that indeed I am ill. I felt so alone in this until I read your article.

Now, if I could only find a doctor. All the plastic surgeons I've approached have little experience with HIV patients. It seems they're either hesitant or anxious about performing a procedure to correct this particular problem.

Sunken in the heart as well as the face
Via the Internet

Shiva For A Diva

My Goddess! I had no idea that Ofra Haza died of AIDS in February ("Death of a Diva," June 2000). I loved her music! Her voice soared powerfully yet at the same time worked magically and integratively with different kinds of music. Another woman with a voice (an incredible one) died of AIDS in isolation. So, tonight before I put on one of my 5-year-old daughter's favorite videos, I'll listen to my favorite Ofra Haza dance song, "Im Nin'Alu," and we will dance one for Ofra and all women who have died of AIDS. Please thank Barry Walters for his beautiful article on Haza.

I won't even begin to touch on Greg Hutchings' death (Tribute, June 2000). I met him once a couple of years ago. What a lovely man.

Krishna Stone
Gay Men's Health Crisis
New York City

Compound Sentence

Thanks to *POZ*, I've learned so much about HIV and the importance of safer sex. I was diagnosed in 1985, and I've been in and out of jail since then due to my denial of the disease. My drug addiction led me to prostitution, and now I'm serving a five-year sentence for felony prostitution. After reading the Planet story "Big Prison Break" (June 2000) and the "Low Blows" column in March 2000, I can't imagine not telling anyone my status, and I regret having been so careless. How dare I submit anyone to my illness just for pleasure or money.

POZ helped me decide to research a drug cocktail that fits my needs. I wouldn't have known about the new therapies without your magazine. The problem was talking the medical department at the Nevada prison into giving them to me. Now that I'm finishing up my sentence and grateful to get out of here alive, I have hope for a decent future. *POZ* inspires me to do the right thing.

Judith Fadden
Las Vegas

You Gotta Have Faith

I just wiped the last tears from my eyes after finishing the Publisher's Letter in the June 2000 *POZ*. I have a great deal of empathy for the feelings Brad Peebles expressed. Growing up in rural Alabama, I had a similar experience of "conversion." However, like most gay men, I forced distance between myself and God because of the fear and shame that accumulated day after day, year after year.

It was only on a cold November morning in Atlanta that my AIDS diagnosis brought His presence full circle and placed Him at the center of my existence. For the first time in my life, I realized I couldn't be in control of what had taken place—nor did I want to be. It was truly a blessing to know that He accepted me as I am—a gay man with AIDS.

I haven't turned into a "Bible-thumping" radical, but in my own way I've started to become a much more spiritual person. I, too, believe that spirituality isn't based on what we believe but that we believe. Thanks for the words of compassion and introspection. I feel that many more people with HIV need to know that God's love doesn't exclude but embraces us.

Marc O'Gwynn
Washington, DC

As a Christian and a PWA for 10 years, I know exactly what Brad Peebles is going through. For years I was so angry at God that I completely turned my back on Him. But I've discovered that even though many of His children believe my lifestyle is wrong, He still loves me. The closer I've gotten to Him, the easier life has become. I've been lucky to find a nondenominational church where people know I'm living with AIDS. I wish I could express the love and support they offer me.

Tony Diez
Via the Internet

I saw myself in Brad Peebles' Publisher's Letter. I was saved when I was 15 in a little Baptist church and baptized in the Dan River in a rural North Carolina town. I'll never forget the proud feeling and the expression on my mother's face. My family and I sincerely hoped there would be a change in me or, as they say in the South, "deliverance." During the next eight years, I was hoping for that change in my ways of thinking about my sexuality. However, after receiving a full serving of hate sermons two to three times a week, along with not feeling wanted, I left the church and didn't set foot in another one for 19 years.

Today, I attend the Metropolitan Community Church with a new acceptance of myself, and I've gained a spirituality that I had never felt before. My faith in God has brought me a long way, including going into nursing and working with people who are HIV positive. I enjoy your magazine very much (I loved the Brett Beasley story) and look forward to each issue.

John Phillips

Via the Internet

I just started reading *POZ* (I seroconverted a couple of months ago), and tonight was the first time I've been able to read it cover to cover without sensory overload. My emotions have run the gamut over the past several weeks and have finally calmed down.

Growing up Roman Catholic, my background was probably not so similar to Brad Peebles', but the last couple paragraphs of his Publisher's Letter echoed exactly how I feel at this time. Sixteen years of Christian schooling (yikes!) combined with a take-it-or-leave-it, show-up-on-major-holidays upbringing have left me quite uncertain about my faith and feelings about God. Yet through all the uncertainty, my belief system has been providing me with a safety net, even though it was maybe not apparent to me until I read Peebles' letter.

I've attended a few masses recently. I've also started wearing the St. Christopher medal my mother always wore after her trip to Italy. And odd moments of prayer seem to be creeping into my life, especially during bubble baths.
Thanks for reiterating my thoughts that deep down I believe God will never put more on me than I can handle. Tonight, for the first time in a few weeks, I don't feel so alone.

Jim Price
Seattle

Russian Roulette
In "The New Opiate for the Masses" (May 2000), *POZ* published photos by John Ranard, along with a subhead that stated: "Many youths are…turning to drugs. They know all about the risks of HIV, but share needles anyway. Photographer John Ranard visited the scene of the crime." Writer Masha Gessen then wrote that "Russian drug users, and young people in general, are well informed about the risks and routes of HIV. The tragedy is: This knowledge has done little to lead them to protect themselves or one another."

We printed Ranard's photos in the Spring 1999 Harm Reduction Communication, as well as in our Spring 2000 issue with an account by Drew Kramer, executive director of the Lower East Side Harm Reduction Center, about his agency's HIV prevention work in Moscow. Both pieces reported on the misconceptions and lack of awareness in Russia about the spread of HIV.

Your piece implied that young Russian drug users should know better and are playing with their lives and the lives of others, committing a crime, in essence. Yet, read our newsletter, and you wonder whether these kids have any understanding at all about HIV. The real crime here is that once again drug users are being victimized by this disease and then being blamed for getting and spreading it. Worse yet, this comes from *POZ*, and you do know better.

Paul Cherashore
Harm Reduction Coalition
New York City

POZ responds: Masha Gessen is a distinguished Russian AIDS journalist, and POZ stands behind her reporting of the facts. Any notion that we're "blaming" Russian drug users is entirely in this reader's mind.

Run For The Money

Your May 2000 Fitness Issue was great! When I tested positive in 1997, being motivated to work out on any kind of regular basis was very difficult. After about a year of low T cell counts, I decided I had to do something in addition to my meds. So I signed up for the National AIDS Marathon Training Program in LA. Over the next six months, I ran more than 500 miles and raised money for AIDS Project Los Angeles. Then, along with the other 1,500 AIDS marathon participants, I ran the Marine Corps Marathon in DC in October 1999. I feel better than ever, and I'm in the best shape of my life. My whole outlook has changed, and I feel great about being able to help others with HIV.

Douglas Parker
West Hollywood, California

Pardon Our French

As a health educator, I receive *POZ* and have learned much about AIDS from it. But two of my coworkers and I were offended by the poster on page 28 in the May 2000 Planet ("Ask First, Fuck Later"). Yes, the word needs to get out about safe sex, but it could have been done in a less obvious way. I hear the F-word every day and have no choice about that, but I do have a choice to cancel our *POZ*.

Debra Bennington
Tipton County Health Dept. Tipton, Indiana

People Who Need Peebles

I was moved and challenged by what Brad Peebles wrote in his Publisher's Letter (June 2000). I certainly share his sentiments, as I, too, was saved at age 12 and had a strong sense of God and His Church well before then and still do decades later. Nevertheless, it's been an arduous struggle coming to terms with my gayness in light of my faith, though the trials have produced in me a more kind, generous, compassionate, caring individual. For that, I am grateful.

Zac Pulley
Statesboro, Georgia

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