Mailbox

August 1, 2000

Fit for a Queen

As a health educator, personal trainer and group exercise leader, I was pleased to see an issue of POZ about the benefits of exercise combined with diet and pharmacology in managing HIV ("Fitness 2000," May). Here in Ft. Lauderdale, I see so many of my brothers and sisters in the gay community getting caught up in anonymous sex and recreational drugs and letting their health and well-being take a back seat. It is good to see an issue with "positive" role models. And please give my regards to Ernest Perez. I remember him from his days in AerobicSport Competitions. I not only competed alongside him—I was also a judge at several of his competitions after I retired. Go, Ernie!

Eston Dunn
Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

Personal Best

Thank you for the articles on body-image issues (May 2000). Neurological problems and five years of HIV meds have left me with what I think is a strangely shaped body. Like S.B. ("Big Trouble"), I, too, once had a body to die for, having been a dancer and weight-lifter. Now I relate to Joe Westmoreland ("Size Matters"), with my skinny limbs and little paunch that my partner lovingly calls my "puka."

My partner is very affectionate and tells me that I'm sexy and attractive. Part of me has trouble believing that, because I don't look the way I used to, nor do I fit into the "hot" body image that society throws at us. I must say, though, I love and respect my body. After growing up with physical violence, surviving date rape and experiencing a delightful array of HIV-related problems, I am amazed by my body's resilience.

I was especially moved by River Huston's "Running River." This week I was offered a job to emcee a used-car sale at a supermall. I'm self-conscious because I walk a bit slowly, but after reading Huston's article, I thought, "If that girl can run freakin' 26.2 miles, this old, crippled, plague-ridden faggot can play some damn CDs, make some announcements and get some laughs!" Thanks for continuing to put out such a wonderful, conscious magazine.

Mark Allen
Seattle

I'm an HIV positive prisoner in Tennessee, and I'm very grateful for your love and dedication to all

of us struggling with the virus behind the fences of incarceration. The May 2000 POZ was so damn fabulous. In my opinion, it's your best ever. As someone who runs five miles four times a week, lifts weights, recently gave up smoking and does his best to eat healthy, I appreciated the fitness package. The article on Russia ("The New Opiate for the Masses") was also fabulous. My favorite parts of POZ are Nurse Know-It-All, Herb of the Month and Big Science. Thank you for all of it.

Ronald Wilson
Tennessee Dept. of Corrections
Mountain City, Tennessee

Sparkle, Neeley

Help! I'm 41, have been HIV positive for five years and am asymptomatic. My last T cell count was 1,141, and my viral load was less than 50 copies. However, my current drug regimen is definitely burning excess fat off my body. As I am decently built, this is not too much of a problem. In fact, I'm more "cut" than ever before.

Here's the problem: I am beginning to show signs of facial wasting, especially in my cheeks and on my temples. I'm starting to look like Susan Hayward in The Valley of the Dolls, specifically the scene where Patty Duke as Neeley O'Hara flushes Susan's wig down the toilet. In short, my face is starting to look old, hard and tired.

My doctor recently prescribed me Anadrol-50, an anabolic steroid. I was told I could expect results within 10 to 14 days—that is, if I get results. If not Anadrol-50, then what can I do?

Wondering in Washington
Via the Internet

POZ responds: No solutions for facial wasting are sure bets, since researchers still don't understand the causes. Some have tried facial injections (see "The New AIDS Look," June 2000). French researchers have reported a slow, partial restoration of fat in the faces of HIVers who discontinued d4T, now considered by many to be the most common problem child with facial fat loss.

Lost at Sea

Wow! First barebacking and now unprotected oral sex (Editor's Letter, May 2000). Apparently, *POZ* learned nothing from the November 1999 Stephen Gendin/Hush McDowell debacle.

I had two friends in San Francisco who seroconverted from oral sex, one from pre-cum. They didn't lie about it. One died very slowly and painfully—and unnecessarily. For, like anal sex, oral sex is a learned behavior. It can be unlearned. Walter Armstrong called unprotected oral sex "transcendent." I call it dangerous and stupid.

We live in a sea of homophobia. No matter how liberated we believe ourselves to be, we've all internalized self-hate and are liable to self-destructive behavior. The key to survival is to question the dominant culture, whether it proclaims that only heterosex is normal sex or that the best gay sex is anal sex or that unprotected oral sex is peachy keen.

The bigots want us to die. It's up to us to live. If you don't have HIV, don't get it; if you do have it, don't spread it around. It's that simple.

Bill Weintraub
San Francisco

Beat the Bush

I found it distressing that columnist Doug Ireland is planning to vote for Green Party candidate Ralph Nader ("President Nader," May 2000) when he admitted that Nader likely has little real interest in issues such as same-sex marriage. In California, there is actually concern that Nader could draw enough votes from Democrats to throw the state to George W. Bush. Was Ireland referring to Bush's election when he wrote: "It's better to vote for what you want and not get it than to vote for what you don't want and get it"?

Unlike Ireland, I worry that the son of a man who appointed Clarence Thomas could be appointing the next three U.S. Supreme Court justices. The "lesser of two evils" or not, I'm voting Gore.

Wayne Friday
San Francisco

PWAC R.I.P.

I was pleased to see the brief bit in Milestones about New York City's Body Positive having "absorbed" the cash-strapped People With AIDS Coalition (May 2000). Finally, someone got it right. While the poorly managed PWAC was dying, both PWAC and Body Positive tried to call it a "merge." Body Positive even devoted an entire issue of its magazine to explain the merge. Quite a campaign.

As a volunteer for seven years on PWAC's hotline, I moved on to volunteer at Body Positive for several weeks until the day it was stated to me very clearly by the coordinator that the hotline would no longer continue as it had, PWAC was dead, and furthermore, it was never about a "merge" but rather "a transfer of funds," after which Body Positive would decide how to proceed. So much for the publicity campaign. If that small piece in POZ is the only truthful version that ever gets printed, I am grateful that it was clearly stated at least once.

John Lesnick
New York City

He's Got the Beat

I was elated at the attitudes taken in response to the demise of The New York Times' AIDS beat ("The Times, They Are a Changin'," February 2000). In my experience with this disease, I have suffered through discrimination to universal acceptance in order to feel "normal" among the rest. So why not let the "AIDS beat" rest in peace, and resurrect a new "universal beat" to cover all diseases. After all, hasn't the hoopla from AIDS activists all these years been about universal acceptance? School me if I'm wrong.

Joseph R. Littlejohn
Orlando, Florida

Not a Pretty Picture

For the five years that I've been reading POZ, I've felt uncomfortable with the magazine. Now it's just plain disgusting. The glorification of steroid-swilling, thick-necked, White Party–wannabes is so far beyond the pale that I had to articulate the resentment I feel toward my brothers who ride the disability gravy train while working out to become monsters of vain definition.

No public health crisis in history has been responded to with the generosity and compassion that AIDS has been, and the response from most of those served by this materially and spiritually bountiful act of unconditional love is depressing. The legions of beneficiaries seem to spend their waking hours in gyms, tanning salons and sex clubs, giving little or nothing back. They don't work, volunteer or commit to anything without expecting something in return.

I'm ashamed of the blatant greed and arrogance of so many men who search for life only in the superficial. As Sean Strub's noble experiment *POZ* becomes thinner and more beauty conscious, its readers become thinner in the mark they leave on the society that reached out with so much love and support when they faced short and terrifying lives because of this deadly disease.

Stuart Smith
San Francisco

I'm a 31-year-old man in prison for being an idiot, and I like how *POZ* is informative, especially for someone who doesn't know a lot. However, I'm appalled by the "Pretty Boy Floyd" photos. I could have sworn that *POZ* was about HIV awareness.

I've seen with my own eyes how a person can be ravaged by AIDS complications. One prisoner I know developed full-blown AIDS, and he had sores—red, angry-looking, silver-dollar-sized, oozing sickly yellow pus—over 80 percent of his body. He could barely walk. He was released from prison early so he could spend his last days with his family, and died two weeks later. He was 20. Not a pretty picture.

AIDS is almost 100 percent avoidable. Please stop glamorizing it. Countless prisoners receive *POZ*, and numerous times I've heard lines like this: "Hell, look at all them guys! They don't look so sick to me!" This has been an excuse to engage in sexually dangerous conduct.

If you truly are an AIDS champion, continue to showcase your "Pretty Boy Floyd" types, with my blessing, but if you're an advocate for defeating AIDS, please showcase the losers in this "contest" for life as well, by showing reality- based pictures.

Kirk Brandon Müller
Texas Dept. of Corrections
Iowa Park, Texas

Living In The AIDS Room

I've been a *POZ* reader for three-plus years, and I've truly enjoyed your magazine. I look forward to each issue because *POZ* keeps me informed about new medical treatments and their side

effects. It lets me know that I am not alone. Then there are the political leanings, both supportive and detrimental. Unfortunately, as *POZ* reminds me, this disease has to be fought on two fronts: the physical and the legal.
I've always found readers' reactions to your controversial articles more interesting than the articles themselves. The letters give me a chance to vicariously look at the bigger picture from the safety of my living room. Here are some insights I've gleaned:

There were letters from gay men complaining about the Playboy model on the cover of your June 1998 issue. They were upset that POZ was moving away from being a gay-oriented magazine—as if AIDS were gay. Then there have been letters decrying the fact that you've had attractive young men on the cover, which made it seem that PWAs are healthy, happy campers. I've read letters from people who get so angry that they cancel their subscriptions because they aren't happy when you print something they don't agree with. What they fail to comprehend, and what I have come to appreciate, is that you never learn anything when all you ever want to hear is people who agree with your point of view.

When you're dealing with a disease that is a political hot potato, you cannot rest safely in the comfort of your living room, believing in the goodness of humankind. History has taught us otherwise. Knowledge is power, knowledge is empowering, knowledge is the sword that carries me through life. It is because of the knowledge I've acquired from *POZ* that I've managed to survive and thrive. I fear the day when publications like *POZ* cease to exist, unless, of course, AIDS no longer exists.

Andrew Thompson
Los Angeles

That's Dr. Carter to you
Emily Carter's first-person account of the horrific but treatable illness depression is one of the best I have ever read ("Woman on the Verge," March 2000). The clarity, honesty, accuracy and usefulness of the information are all impressive, and the info is presented succinctly yet comprehensively.

I'm a psychiatrist who has had firsthand experience with depression. I also worked and studied at Harvard Medical School with some of the brightest physicians. In my opinion, Carter's article qualifies her for an honorary medical degree. Her work undoubtedly has and will help many people struggling with depression.

Kathryn A. Krueger, MD
New York City

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