Mailbox

June 1, 2000

Shall We Dance?

I enjoyed the article on Chris Ramos ("Let's Dance," March 2000). As I read it, I knew exactly how he felt about disclosing his HIV status. It's been 12 years since I was diagnosed, and I still have not told my family. I've dealt with my HIV basically alone because of the stigma and discrimination that even 20 years later we are still experiencing. It's been very difficult for me since my husband died in 1988.

Unless you have HIV, you can never know what it's like living two different lives. It's almost like being a schizophrenic. I wish I could be like Ramos and dance through this whole HIV disclosure.

A heterosexual woman
Tampa, Florida

Blues Sisters

Emily Carter's words about depression were so very true to me ("Woman on the Verge," March 2000). I know the feeling of not wanting to take drugs that remind you of your illness and the guilt of not taking them and wondering where you'll end up. I've been HIV positive for 12 years and have ridden the roller coaster of monotherapy, clinical trials and drug holidays.

I am addicted to *POZ* and enjoy reading it from cover to cover. A long-term survivor, I was lucky enough to hear about your publication early on and have every copy from the first edition.

K. M. Ponthier
Via the Internet

Tell It To The Judge

As someone with HIV, I feel qualified to reply to "Low Blows" (March 2000). I definitely believe there should be criminal prosecution of HIV positive people who engage in sex with others without first disclosing their illness. In this day and age, anyone who has sexual contact with another person and doesn't at least ask their partner's status is taking a risk. Sometimes I get angry because I feel I need to tell my date my status, but I also know that there are many people who don't want to be in a relationship with someone who is HIV positive.

In short, it is a crime to knowingly infect another person. People need to get help, and sometimes the only way to do that is to hit bottom, as they say in AA. If sex addicts aren't held responsible, then where will their bottom be? Hopefully nowhere near me.

Rick Young
Belfair, Washington

Paul Mall

Your interview with Paul Lekakis ("HIV: Behind the Music," February 2000) prompted me to write this letter. I work with men and women who are both HIV positive and dealing with addiction and recovery. I, myself, have known my HIV status since 1985. Lekakis' candidness and his willingness to discuss the myriad issues he's faced in his life are refreshing and gutsy. Putting oneself out there gives others who are dealing with HIV and addiction a powerful, positive and life-affirming role model. My hat is off to Lekakis. I applaud him for his honesty and perseverance.

Dave LaLonde
San Diego

I had never picked up your magazine before, but when I saw the cover story about Paul Lekakis, I had to get it. I came out in 1989, when Lekakis was hot on the music scene. I fell in love with his image. He represented all those beautiful swimmers I swam with in college but never admitted I wanted. I was saddened to hear about what happened to him, but I'm glad that he's put himself on a better path. Lekakis is a shining example of the heroes around us who triumph daily over their inner demons and societal expectations to show the world a better way.

Ed McCanless
Campbell, California

Thank you so much for the profile on Paul Lekakis. We met more than 10 years ago through mutual friends when I lived in New York City. I found him engaging, charming and sincere—someone I wished I'd had the opportunity to know better. From reading your cover story, I not only learned that our paths have crossed many times over the years like those proverbial two ships in the night, but that our lives have suffered some eerie parallels. It saddens me that he has gone through such a tough time.

On another note, to those readers who have trouble with articles about living a positive life with HIV: Quit your bitchin'! You'll live longer. Of all my friends who've had HIV, and there are many, those who obsessed and dwelled on the bad stuff are all dead. Those who have been able to see the experience as one that could change their lives for the better are alive, are thriving members of their communities and joys to be around. For those unable to accept things for what they are, if you want to drill holes in your own boat, fine. Just stay the hell out of mine.

Ross C.
Cleveland

Big Man On Campus

Thanks for being there for me over the past couple of years. I found out I had HIV on July 30, 1997, and I've been saying "yes" ever since. I have a tattoo on my right shoulder that reads "HIV+" in two-inch lettering. I have nothing to hide, and when I hide nothing, I have nothing to fear. I wanted to drop a note to give my support to those who wonder if telling others is the right thing to do. My

answer: It's the only thing to do! Do not be afraid to say "yes"—it can greatly improve the way you live.

Thanks to the courageous 18 for saying "yes" in the November 1999 issue, and a special thanks to Yes No. 19, Thomas Stocks (Mailbox, February 2000). They are all an inspiration to me.

I would love to know what Hydeia Broadbent is doing these days. She was the first to inspire me. From the *POZ* cover story on her in October 1997, I found the strength to get my tat and to start a support group for other HIV positive students at Arizona State University.

Doug Eggleston
Via the Internet

POZ responds: Hope you caught up with award-winning fashion maven Hydeia Broadbent in May's POZ Planet.

He says, She says
What's with you people? For the most part, you produce an excellent and informative magazine. Then, like a moth attracted by the flame, you make some appalling editorial gaffs, namely "Both Sides Now" (November 1999).

In earlier centuries in Europe, sanitoriums for the insane were open to the public on Sunday afternoons so that the inmates could be viewed like circus animals. Today it seems we put them on shows like Jerry Springer or publish them in *POZ*.

Stephen Gendin is plainly a disturbed man. His dick and ass dominate his life.

Concepts such as conscience, integrity and responsibility seem to mean little to him. I can find no possible excuse for this behavior—other than psychological illness—in someone who has plainly had a lot of advantages in life. Equally, I can find no excuse for *POZ's* behavior in publishing this man. It's high time you put together an editorial board of people involved in AIDS so that these lapses of editorial judgment are, at the very least, minimized.

POZ does enormous good, but boy, oh, boy, when you screw up, you do it big time!

Jerry Backus
Atlanta

Congratulations on printing "Both Sides Now," an article that opened up a complex and charged conversation. Such dialogues are so important, and it is crucial that all voices be present—particularly the ones others may most fear and despise—so that we can wrestle with all the different truths inside us. As an HIV negative woman therapist, I find my life and work very enriched by the letters that ran in the wake of the article.

River Malcolm
Via the Internet

Meet Mr. Right

I read your magazine for the first time and am encouraged by it. I see a lot of disagreement between the conservative right and *POZ*. As a college student at a Christian university, I hear it a lot as well. My mother was afflicted by the AIDS virus so it hit me in a different way. Because I call myself a Christian, I have to write this.

In true Christianity, we are supposed to love the sinner and hate the sin. But I see so-called Christians persecuting people because they are gay or afflicted by this disease. They think that people with AIDS deserve what is placed on them. First off, that is dead wrong and that is not Christianity! Christianity is supposed to be about love and understanding—that we are not all perfect but Jesus loves us all. Frankly, I do not see that today. I just wanted to write to say what a great magazine and keep it up.

Julio Alarcon
Via the Internet

A Positive Bore

Your magazine is no longer the interesting periodical it once was. Lately I've been disappointed in the articles. Please bring back some of the smaller pieces that did not bore me to the point where I just skim through the magazine. Plus, not all of us live in New York City and not all of us are gay. I realize we're not all interested in the same things, but please try not to get too far off the beaten path.

Kevin Speas
Gastonia, North Carolina

Off In A Huff

The "Hemo Demo" letter in the March 2000 Mailbox is a total misrepresentation of the Committee of Ten Thousand (COTT), the Ricky Ray Hemophilia Relief Fund Act and hemophiliacs with HIV. COTT is not a "slick piece of political machinery" but an advocacy group for hemophiliacs, which wouldn't even be needed if people, including PWAs, were informed about how HIV has been spread to hemophiliacs. Most Americans don't know this story, nor do they care to, because, in their minds, hemophiliacs with HIV—1 percent of the AIDS pie—are too small a piece of the pie to be mentioned. But 10,000 people are not immaterial.

The Ricky Ray Act is compensation to the thousands of hemophiliacs who trusted the government to do the right thing. It won't take funds away from any AIDS organizations.

Hemophiliacs are even misrepresented when it comes to lists of the "already-marginalized populations at greatest risk." It seems that everyone's marginalized but us. How did we as a group become left off the list? We seem to be marginalized among the marginalized.

The letter's writer, John Hannah, created a false dichotomy between "innocent AIDS victims (hemophiliacs) and those who brought it on themselves (everyone else)." Using this tone, he falsely claimed, as does Dr. Laura, that the AIDS epidemic can be talked about in black and white:

the guilty and the innocent. But the world is not two-tone.

Are we to believe that compensating hemophiliacs for blood-acquired HIV means that everyone with HIV must be compensated? This silly thinking wouldn't even be held by someone with dementia. So AIDS is a "human crisis." No one would deny that. But does that mean we're supposed to forget how our government and the drug industry put greed over human life? Does characterizing AIDS as "a human crisis" mean no one is responsible for their behavior?

Barry Huff
Spokane, Washington

Natural Selection

It's too bad that there is never any write-up in POZ about natural ways to survive AIDS. I am disappointed to only find big ads about medications, which only show photos of good-looking guys and no horrible side effects such as humpback, paunch stomach and wasting. I have been HIV positive for more than 18 years and was told to take meds a few years ago by a doctor. I never took any, and I am still OK. I use a balanced, organic whole-foods diet instead of drugs. My HIV is not progressing at all. Some of the vegetables and grains that work best for me are daikon, kale, lotus root, Shitake mushroom, seaweeds and burdock.

Dan Z.
Via the Internet

POZ responds: Did you get a chance to check out our April "Alternatives 2000" issue?

Gossip? Not Us!

I read POZ from cover to cover. As director of Boriken Health Center's HIV program, it is imperative for me to keep abreast of updated info and the latest news, as well as gossip. Thanks for a wonderful magazine. Siempre palante.

E. Gonzalez
New York City

For You, We'll Yenta

I have an unusual request. In your February 2000 Mailbox, there was a letter from Gary W. Swift of Hendersonville, Tennessee, about the loneliness of having AIDS. Since I live in a small town, I certainly concur! I know *POZ* is not in the matchmaking business, but I was wondering whether you could possibly help me contact the writer of the above-mentioned letter. When you have no partner, loneliness is by far the most difficult and painful issue of living with AIDS. If I could correspond with someone who shares my situation, I would be eternally grateful.

Raymond E.Lamb
Via the Internet

POZ responds" Just this once, Lamb, we will forward your address. Our fingers are crossed! Keep

us posted.

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