Mailbox

May 1, 2000

Model Behavior

I want to thank singer Paul Lekakis for his honest and wonderful interview “HIV Behind the Music” (February 2000). I’m glad to hear his life is back on track, and I look forward to seeing and hearing from him in the years to come. There are a lot of us who have traveled roads similar to Lekakis’, and I hope his story reaches those who need to hear it. He is more than a former Armani model; he is a role model for everyone who thinks they can’t get their lives back.

Glenn Palmer
New York City

Boom Boom Box

Thanks for the recent interview with Paul Lekakis. I saw him perform in a club years ago and admired his bravery in coming out then. His coming out again regarding his HIV, 12-step and other issues is a great inspiration. Thank you for your great coverage.

Bob Ortstein
Kansas City, Missouri

I must commend you and Paul Lekakis for your in-depth look at the issues facing many poz people in the “industry.” As a 29-year-old openly poz model, I agree with Lekakis’ viewpoints. It is difficult to survive without being a part of the wild drug-and-sex-crazed circuit parties. I view Lekakis as a positive role model, someone who has made it through and is a better person because of it. Many people can learn from the choices, both good and bad, that he has made.

I wish him the best of luck. The same to *POZ* and your wonderful, insightful magazine.

Michael Gagne
Orlando, Florida

I tremendously enjoyed Kevin Koffler’s article on Paul Lekakis. Strangely enough, I met Lekakis at Numbers in LA in 1994. We spoke briefly, but I could see he was hurting. I am encouraged that he is making his way back, because he’s only had 15 seconds in the spotlight and deserves another 14 minutes and 45 seconds!

Edward Ditterline
Key West, Florida

I've thought a lot about Kevin Koffler's article "HIV Behind theMusic," and its subject, Paul Lekakis. I met Paul in 1991, at theheight of his "To My House" record success. With his stunning greeneyes and full lips, he stared at me and smiled. I remember him assmart, funny and very generous. He is to this day the most gorgeous manI've ever seen. I must commend Paul for his enormous act of bravery incoming out. To tell such heart-wrenching truths about yourself—to asingle person much less to the entire public—is hard.

Anonymous
New York City

Glam Slam

I received your February 2000 issue and, at first glance, thought it was Details or GQ. But no, it's my trusted ally, *POZ*. I'm beginning to be appalled by the slick, pretty pictures of gay white boys in your magazine—and I am a gay white boy! I might be able to forgive the pharmaceutical companies for this, but to have *POZ* try to remake itself in their image is unforgivable. Please show the diversity of class, gender and ethnicity that the epidemic is truly made up of. Who would know that better than you?

Floyd Meeks
Tucson, Arizona

I truly adore your publication, and find it interesting and informative. But while I understand that for marketing purposes glamour sells, there is absolutely nothing glamorous about AIDS. On the cover of the February 2000 issue, you have a gorgeous man with his pants hanging down at least five inches beneath his navel. You also have advertisements with men willing to sell their life insurance, hikers on Crixivan, sailors on Viramune, etc. These men all look like models for International Male. I have been in AIDS wards, and trust me, the vast majority of people there do not have six-pack abs, Pepsodent smiles and arms that can lift a Toyota. It's great to have a positive attitude, but some reality is not such a bad thing.

Randy Sindelar Corturillo
Cleveland, Ohio

Holistic Hosanas

As a yoga instructor with HIV who has provided free classes for PWAs since 1993, I am glad to see POZ taking an interest in the benefits that yoga and mindfulness-based stress-reduction programs have on our lives ("Free Your Mind," February 2000). While the mainstream media seem to focus on yoga as simply a way to beautify the body, we should not forget that this 6,000-year-old tradition was intended to free the body and mind from disease.To my knowledge there is no medication in the world that can provide this.

I don't expect yoga to save me from HIV—any more than I expect my doctor to. What this practice brings to my life that my physician simply can't is a sense of real peace and quiet beyond the storms of viral load tests and day-to-day living. Health to me means wholeness. While the new drug regimens offer many more treatment options, the moment you can find a technique or tool that helps to address fear and anxiety, the better off life is. Kudos on attempting to bring your readership in touch with that which can't be touched.

Per Erez
Chicago

After suffering for a year with severe back pain that had me walking only very short distances with a cane, I tried meditation and yoga. My canes now sit as a collection in my umbrella stand. I have been on alternative treatments along with my meds for two years now. After reading your February issue, I've learned a few new yoga positions. Also, thanks for the "Herb of the Month." I think you're going in a great positive direction.

Roger Byers
Daytona Beach, Florida

Monkey Business

As a queer participant in an HIV vaccine trial, I reject and resent the false dichotomy between animal rights activists and AIDS activists presented by Douglas Sadownick ("A Star Is Torn," February 2000). Given what I see as the complete lack of benefit of animal research to understanding, treating or preventing HIV, one wonders why so many other "AIDS activists" don't understand that the animal research industry should be one of our targets. It is unfortunately true, as Sadownick states, that every "compound now in the pipeline, including vaccines, will be tested in animals before they reach a single human body." But that is because of politics, not science! Regulations require animal tests, and some researchers have built their careers on developing animal "models" that never replicate any human condition.

Who benefits from testing the vaccines and drugs on nonhuman animals? Multi-million dollar corporations that sell monkeys, rats, rabbits, mice and other animals, equipment and supplies related to animal research, and researchers who have substituted "AIDS" for "cancer" in all their grant applications. These self-serving companies and individuals are diverting funds from vital research, and thereby killing people. Sadownick states that critical "discoveries in immunology have also been made through animal research." However, he fails to name any. Every dollar spent on inaccurate animal models diverts funds from important epidemiological and clinical studies that advance the search for a vaccine.

Scott VanValkenburg
Virginia Beach, Virginia

Chronic Offender

Just thought you should know that somebody at The San Francisco Chronicle has been pulling Andy Humm's leg ("The Times, They Are a Changin'," February 2000). If they have three reporters assigned full-time to AIDS, then I'm Rudy Giuliani. Most of their AIDS coverage is done by one of two science writers, David Perlman and Sabin Russell, both of whom cover plenty of other subjects—and both of whom regularly teeter on the brink of competence without ever quite achieving it. The Comical, as it's known here, is most assuredly not an example to be held up for others to follow.

Bruce Mirkin
San Francisco

Adefovir's Outta Here

I am writing with regard to Dave Gilden's column "Dead on Approval" (February 2000). Gilden made two points about Gilead Science's clinical program for adefovir that are no longer accurate and should be clarified for your readers.Gilden writes that Gilead is trying to "cull some new data out of past and ongoing adefovir trials." He also writes that "adefovir is available through an expanded access program." While these facts were accurate through November 1999, Gilead issued a press release on December 2, 1999, announcing that it had terminated its U.S. development program for adefovir.

Gilead also announced that ongoing clinical trials of adefovir would be closed and that the expanded access program would be closed to new enrollment. Patients currently participating in clinical trials or expanded access were provided the option to continue receiving adefovir for as long as they and their physicians believe they are receiving benefit.

I am concerned that your readers may get the false impression that access to adefovir for new patients is currently available through the expanded access program. I hope that this letter will help rectify any confusion.

Jim Rooney, MD
Vice President of Clinical Research at Gilead Science
Foster City, California

Caris is Burning

I am writing this letter in regard to the profile you did on me ("Portrait of the Artist as a Sex Bomb," January 2000). I was appalled and saddened by the chosen spin that Jack Waters and his editor, Esther Kaplan, used. The story portrays me in a light I am offended by and uncomfortable with. I could barely read it, and I wouldn't wish for anyone close to me to read it either.

In the spring of 1998, I was asked by Jack if he could write an in-depth article on my life as an artist and a woman living with HIV. Had Jack and Esther honestly and correctly used the plethora of wonderful information provided by interviews and texts, then this letter might not have been necessary. I am, believe it or not, a very serious artist and have been lauded in high-art realms. I now understand that *POZ* was not the proper outlet for my story. What could have been seen as growth and strength on a human level was reduced to a sensationalized and pornographic version of my life. It is embarrassing, and I feel raped and cheated by this.

To bring you up to date, by October 30, 1999, I had left the rock band, dropped the calendar project and distanced myself from all objectifying and self-defaming acts, artistic or not, including burlesque, ProDomiNation and modeling on any level. I was married on December 5, and my husband views me as his jewel, not a public commodity. I have achieved what I have always wanted and what the fraudulent art world seems not to value: true love. I continue to enjoy dance, painting and percussion, none of which is done in an "exotic" fashion. I hope to become a mother soon.

I am sorry that Jack viewed his relationship with me in a light that would allow him to sell me and

himself out just to see his name in print.

Valerie Caris Conliffe
Los Angeles

Jack Waters responds: I'm quite saddened to read Valerie's response to my profile of her. The piece was intended as a loving tribute to a brilliant mind and a giving soul, and Valerie was involved at every stage during the several months I spent researching the piece. Her transformation by October 30—when, it seems, she altered both her current life and her perspective on her own colorful history—took place after the piece was sent to the printer.

Thanks for the lively article on Valerie Caris. In this age of blasé cynicism and unthinking conformity, it's nice to know that at least one soul exists who attacks life with unrestrained gusto. Caris' example shows us there are no excuses for not living life and loving it. You go, girl!

Anthony J. Williams
New York City

Although I've actually met Valerie Caris a couple of times, I always thought of her as just a hauntingly beautiful image in a couple of films. Jack Waters' profile of her imparted a wonderful portrait of a complicated, interesting, living, breathing human who is struggling not only with the multifarious difficulties of living with HIV and overcoming addiction, but also with the complex problem of creating art that is honest, beautiful and true to the intricacies of her life.

Jim Hubbard
New York City

A Case of Nerves
Thanks for including James Learned's informative work on myelopathy ("Sweet Chariot") in the February 2000 issue. My partner has been affected by myelopathy for at least four years. Because of *POZ's* article, he not only found that he was not alone, but he also has begun to take one of the medications mentioned at the end of the article. So far, so great! Thanks for keeping us all informed!

Matt Meko
Seattle, Washington

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