Mailbox

January 1, 2001 By Staff

Rest in Peace

I got such a shock when I read that Stephen Gendin died. He had an impact all the way around the world in New Zealand. I read his columns, often disagreed with him and wish I could have met him. I felt as though I knew him. Most of all, I admired him for all he did. I cannot stop crying. Too many wonderful people are gone.

-- Michael Stevens, New Zealand

As I write this I am still in shock and despair about Stephen Gendin's death. What shocks me most is that I don't believe the HIV community realizes what a huge loss this is for us. No matter what you thought of Stephen's lifestyle or opinions, you had to respect his honesty, openness, intelligence, hard work and dedication to helping those with HIV. We were lucky to have had him for the time that we did.

-- Kevin Craig, Fairhaven, Massachusetts

I had just written Stephen Gendin a letter thanking him for his honesty when I saw that he had died. From his writing in *POZ* I had started to feel that I had a friend. I will never forget him.

-- Celines Parra, Albion Correctional Facility, Albion, New York

Every month I have looked forward to *POZ* because of Stephen Gendin's writings about things that most of us PWAs only think about. He answered questions before we asked and tried things we only dreamed of, good or bad. Stephen's articles have kept me going to the ripe old age of 53. His spirit will always be with me.

-- José Flores, McAllen, Texas

When I tore open the wrapper of my October 2000 *POZ* and absorbed the cover title, I cried for Stephen Gendin's death. Not just a sniffle of empathy for some distant brother, but shaking sobs -- much as I cried over the death of my own partner some years ago. I only knew Stephen from the pages of *POZ*, but even from this distance I realize that we've suffered a loss that won't be filled by epitaphs and condolences. I was one of the readers who understood exactly why Stephen and his partner, Hush McDowell, would knowingly expose each other to infection for the simple sake of making love. Stephen's was a soul good and great enough to have left an empty space in the lives of those he never knew. I am sorry for all of us.

-- Steven Smith, Ashton, Illinois

I saw no justification for the elaborate attention to the death of Stephen Gendin. Not to discount his good works and deeds, but good people are dying every day. The only conclusion I drew is that his death was covered because he was well connected and cute. That is not enough for me. My partner, Durwin, died at home in my arms on July 4, 2000, diagnosed with AIDS for more than 15 years. His death will garner no space in your spotlight, nor attention from powerful, rich people like Larry Kramer. Durwin died while covered by Missouri Medicaid, which is now claiming the only asset we owned, our home, to repay his medical expenses.

I was a strident, radical member of ACT UP for 11 years, but Kramer's whining and the idiots in San Francisco embarrass me. My advice to Larry: Get out from behind the podium and do something. To ACT UP/SF: seek psychiatric help now. You are a threat to the safety and health of every HIV positive gay man in the world.

Do you think that we have exclusive right to pain, suffering, injustice or unmet medical needs, including drug and research development? Don't you realize the world is full of "manageable" diseases that are just as deadly as AIDS?

-- Mark Chaney, Kansas City, Missouri

Big Bad Kramer?

If Larry Kramer's "Be Very Afraid" (October 2000) was supposed to make me angry, it succeeded. What gets me is the fact that now Kramer has nothing nice to say about the pharmaceutical companies and the medicines we have. Wasn't it he and all his activist friends who fought for fast-tracking? That got us medicines that are more deadly than the virus and companies that no longer have to do all the studies and trials that used to be required. Kramer is right: activists are sellouts. The same companies he attacks are still treating them to lavish parties -- and making huge profits off of HIV -- while so many people are dying. The late Stephen Gendin, may he rest in peace, got this right in his column, "Last Word," in the same issue.

I know the medicines I am taking are toxic, but they do help, though no one knows for how long. We need to fight for more testing and trials of meds before they hit the market; we need to undo the harm Kramer and others have done by fighting for fast-tracking.

-- Jorge Rodriguez, Corona-Elmhurst, New York

Let me see if I understand this: *POZ* kills Stephen Gendin with the drugs you push, puts his lifeless mug on a special "dead fag" collector's edition to quadruple your sales and then carts out that feeble coot Larry Kramer to call for bombs and bullets to end the mess his "drugs into bodies" bullshit created? Make no mistake about it, you bought-off AIDS industry motherfuckers are the truly twisted ones.

-- David Pasquarelli, ACT UP/San Francisco, San Francisco

I appreciate all that Larry Kramer has done for us, but now he's using his own friend's death to attack the drug industry.

After 16 years of being infected with HIV, I now work at a pharmaceutical company. I agree that a cure could be in our hands already, but these companies are not trying to hurt everyone. Possibly they don't work hard enough sometimes, but they strive to cure all kinds of diseases every single day. So, this "slimebag" says, the meds have extended my life, and I am utterly thankful.

-- Jim Croker, Trenton, New Jersey

I just read the October 2000 issue from front to back without putting it down (except to wipe away some tears). "Be Very Afraid" is me to a T. I'm 38, a single parent, taking no meds, been hospitalized three times with pneumonia, but I will not let this disease control me. Like Larry Kramer, I have experienced some bad doctors, and at times I feel powerless. But I've learned to turn this disease into something positive. We all have to keep going, fueled by our own strength and will. *POZ* helps a lot, too.

-- HIV Momma, Clarksburg, West Virginia

AIDS in Wonderland

There's something in the October 2000 issue of *POZ* directly for me -- but what? Is it the absurd four-color ads with muscled climbers on mountaintops, when the HIV guys I know who take the meds in those ads are at home with kidney stones, wearing double Pampers? Is it the love and respect that jump off the pages for cover guy Stepen Gendin? Or the delight I feel that Larry Kramer is still spraying his much-needed gasoline on this 20-year-old fire? (May he never experience a gas crisis.)

You know, I think it's all of that: a rusty Brillo pad of hope, confusion, love and hatred labeled HIV. We are all in the middle of this. HIV is a confusing combination of *No Exit* plus the Mad Hatter meets "The Man That Got Away." Onward, *POZ*!

-- Don Wardell, Palm Springs, California

Cognitive Dissidence

I want to express my appreciation for Katie Szymanski's article, "The Boys in the Band" (October 2000), about the critical work of ACT UP/San Francisco. Szymanski went to great lengths to find AIDS establishment people whose silly, inane remarks reveal the latest desperation of the defenders of the infectious viral theory of AIDS, telling us much about the brittle but bloated activist structure desperately in need of major downsizing. Dave Pasquarelli and Michael Bellefountaine of ACT UP/SF run scientific circles around the lumbering dinosaurs of AIDS orthodoxy. I saw this firsthand while serving as a member of South African president Thabo Mbeki's AIDS advisory panel.

-- Charles Geshekter, PhD, Department of History, California State University, Chico, California

I thoroughly disbelieve HIV revisionists, Peter Duesberg and ACT UP/SF. I had seven T cells and was very sick. Then I started HAART and got better. I didn't abuse drugs or alcohol -- the things ACT UP/SF says cause AIDS -- and I ate well and exercised. HAART causes AIDS? What a laugh! Michael Bellefountaine and Dave Pasquarelli should get real. Perhaps then their activist energies would not be wasted.

-- D. Paul Reser, California Medical Facility, Vacaville, California

In an otherwise informative article, I was amazed to find ACT UP/SF described as "one of the few groups that takes to the streets against homophobia." Given the profound homophobia that characterizes so much of what they say and do, I can only assume Katie Szymanski made this absurd claim in jest. One need only read ACT UP/SF's explanation of what caused the AIDS epidemic -- in a nutshell, all us homos brought it upon ourselves -- to know you are hardly dealing with friends of our community. Let's be real. They are nothing more than street thugs and brown shirts who deal in physical violence and intimidation.

-- Gustavo Suárez, Communications Director, San Francisco AIDS Foundation, San Francisco

The story on ACT UP/SF is irresponsible and a slap in the face to those of us who are trying to dispel their dangerous message. ACT UP/SF is not a group that can be reasoned with; their views are not open for discussion. They are a gang of thugs who disrupt community treatment forums with violence.

It has been scientifically proven that HIV causes AIDS and that HIV drugs extend life, not hasten death. The only possible outcome of Dave Pasquarelli and Michael Bellefountaine's efforts is that at-risk people won't get tested, HIVers won't seek treatment, and the homophobic federal government bigots will cut AIDS funding.

-- Philip Alden, Survive AIDS, Redwood City, California

As a PWA who survived seven toxic opportunistic infections, who has had both feet in the grave, who was resurrected by protease inhibitors together with other medications and therapies, it was with sadness and shock that I read about ACT UP/SF and the damage they are doing. They say, "Don't take your HIV meds, don't take your anticancer meds." With this logic I suppose they don't clean their teeth because of the antiplaque and fluoride additives in toothpaste and don't use soap because it contains antibacterial agents. They do disservice to the memories of good men and women who have died in the fight against AIDS. These SF psychotics are only worthy of contempt.

-- Jake Peters, Toronto

Forgive a Little

Thanks to *POZ* and Lisa Kennedy for the article on Nushawn Williams ("The Miseducation of Nushawn Williams," August 2000). I don't agree with what Nushawn did, but we all make mistakes. I feel it is essential that we learn to forgive each other and move forward. Life is so short and precious, there's no time for hate.

-- Shelia Thomas, Sanford, Florida

Corrections: *In an interview with Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Mark Schoofs ("It Takes a Village Voice,“ October 2000) the surname of the doctor who opened the first AIDS clinic in Uganda was misspelled. The correct spelling is Katabira. Due to an editing error in the same piece, Schoofs is quoted as saying, ”In the U.S. there are particular social illnesses that help HIV to spread.“ He actually said ”particular cultural patterns." POZ regrets the errors.*

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