Mailbox

September 1, 2001 By Staff

Here Comes A Hero

Thank you so much for the cover story on long-term survivors ("Songs in the Key of Life," June 2001). Many a time I've felt extremely alone as a 16-year survivor. The many losses, especially of those we looked upon as heroes, have led many of us to wonder, Why are we still here? Yes, an old subject, but as the years roll on, even more valid.

I write this with a blessed but heavy heart.

-- Rich Cress, Palm Springs, California

Long-Term Progress

As a 17-year survivor with T cells still at 1,105 and undetectable viral load, I am thrilled to see your June cover story. It is up to the strong to tell everyone that we can beat this. I am living proof.

-- Thomas Stocks, Honolulu, Hawaii

Is there anyone doing serious research on long-term HIV survivors, particularly the asymptomatic? If so, I'd like to volunteer as a subject. I've been living with HIV since 1985, symptom free, med free, and with a low viral count. I continue to be obnoxiously healthy. If being poked, prodded and studied can point in the direction of a vaccine or better treatments, then I happily volunteer.

-- Anonymous, Via the Internet

***POZ* responds:** *Harvard's Bruce Walker, MD, is the man to see. Call 617.725.8332.*

Negative Exposure

I congratulate Walter Armstrong on finding a loving partner (Editor's Letter, June 2001). I know he means well and is committed to the cause. Nonetheless, I read the letter with a great deal of sadness. My partner is HIV negative, and I am living with AIDS. We have had to practice sex with condoms for 15 of our 17 years together. We make sex fun but still fantasize about the "old" days when we could fuck with abandon. We both fantasize about taking the other's cum as a commitment to our love and lust. It remains a fantasy. I'm glad for Armstrong's negative status but also extremely jealous. He gets to do without thinking what most of us can never do again. As the editor of *POZ*, he should never forget that.

-- Tom Morgan, New York City

As a longtime subscriber, I am so very disappointed to read Walter Armstrong's editorial about his and his boyfriend's issues in confronting "unsafe sex." Let me see if I understand the situation: two people, both monogamous and both negative...their problem is what? It would be more appropriate for Armstrong to air his crisis as editor in chief of *NEG*, so the valuable and shrinking space in *POZ* can instead be used for real issues of positive readers.

-- Charles Mattson, Via the Internet

I have read the June Editor's Letter several times and come away with mixed feelings each time. At first it did not bother me, unlike the admissions of Stephen Gendin, who was barebacking with his lover and infected him. I congratulate Armstrong and his partner on being negative and hope they remain so. However, to write about the joys of skin-to-skin sex in a magazine that is mainly for HIV positive people is like describing the pleasures of a candy store to a group of diabetic children. Unless a cure for HIV is found, and that looks doubtful, I cannot in good conscience ever have bare sex with another individual, negative or positive. The more thought I give to the letter, the more distasteful it becomes. It is like a slap in the face to the readership of *POZ*.

-- Charles Moore, Via the Internet

I am thrilled Walter Armstrong has fallen in love. And has found trus t. And flesh-on-flesh connection. In my own HIV negative life, I have been equally lucky. But in 300 brief words, Armstrong turned his back on *POZ*'s readers so entirely that I am shocked, really shocked. The language is so dismissing, so divisive and startlingly unkind -- can it ever be a worse burden being negative than positive? -- that I wouldn't be surprised if readers suffer a crisis of trust and love with *POZ* as a result.

-- David France, Via the Internet

As I picked up the June issue, I noticed something different -- the tagline, just above the date. Instead of "We're all over AIDS," it reads, "20 years, 20 million dead, Cure the Monster now." Finally, something that's not misleading. Unfortunately, my excitement changed very quickly when I read the Editor's Letter. How many people will misconstrue Armstrong's statements to think that means it's OK to go back to unprotected sex?

-- Gene Zurenda, Binghamton, New York

Thanks for the Editor's Letter. I needed that. Someone once said, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." When it comes to AIDS, that is so true. Life is all "flaming hoops of risk," and if we spend too much time in fear, we don't have time for the excitement. Thanks for giving me the inspiration that I needed.

-- Terry Tahir, Via the Internet

Walter Armstrong responds: *I truly regret the offense. I knew that my letter about being uninfected* and *in love* and *having safe condomless sex was risking reader envy and anger. But I imagined (foolishly) that you might appreciate, if not my good luck, at least the irony that HIV's legacy was still in bed with me and my lover. FYI: The fates also frowned on my flaunting -- the*

boyfriend dumped me before the issue was off the stands.

No More Pretty Boys?

I'm afraid that *POZ* is on its way out, and I know exactly why. It's because you're doing your job well. For years, AIDS was essentially a "gay disease," and your magazine reflected this. But the focus of the disease has turned to Africa, and your magazine has reflected this as well. The problem is that now you're an "African" magazine, and the gay community is losing interest. The more black women and children are the subject of your covers and feature stories, the more your readership is going to go down. Pretty boys don't realistically portray AIDS life, but they sell magazines.

-- Hal Campbell, Cotati, California

Correction: *Due to an editing error, the New Drug Watch in January 2001 reported that a new protease inhibitor, BMS-232632, had not yet entered Phase III clinical trials. In fact, at least one trial was open at the time. For more info, call 800.TRIALS.A.*

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