Mailbox

February 1, 1998 By Staff

Shame on Shalala

Thank you for the issues you raised in your interview with Elizabeth Taylor ("Elizabeth Taylor Tells the Truth," November 1997). It is important that the AIDS-and-substance-use debate be further aired.

I must comment on the role of Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala as a major stumbling block to what should be further relief in this life-and-death issue. That Congress could end up resolving this issue behind closed doors is a tragedy that may be laid at her feet! Her failure to act on the overwhelming scientific evidence in support of needle exchange as a formidable prevention tool is a major cofactor in the spread of AIDS. That this negatively affects women, people of color and gay men is not coincidental: They are seen by society as marginal and expendable.

Congress has put a temporary moratorium on federal needle exchange. Secretary Shalala could still take a courageous stance, reclaim some of the history for this terrible situation and develop an acceptable strategy. The Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS is grappling with an appropriate public-record response to the president regarding the necessity for federally sanctioned needle exchange.

-- Jeremy Landau
The Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Let's Get Physical

My friend Rick and I were talking about Aiden Shaw's article ("Choosing HIV?," November 1997) while we were on the treadmill today at the gym. In the heat of our discussion, we looked up and there, on a stationary bike, was Mr. Shaw rigorously pedaling—almost as if we had conjured him up from our minds! I'd been trying to explain to my friend that I felt the article was very concerned with the physical self and lacked a sense of the spiritual. Rick had been trying to show me how to read between the lines and see how Shaw was seeking those ideals by expressing the evolution of his own soul. Now we are both waiting to see if his stated desire to find "new depths of compassion" will take a physical form.

-- Douglas Everson
San Francisco, California

An Off-White Lie

I am writing to protest the subheading “lone wolf and longtime survivor, teddy bear and rapist” that accompanied my interview with author Edmund White (“The *Symphony* Plays On,” November 1997). As the interview reveals, it is not at all clear that the episode of unsafe penetrative sex (which White deeply regrets) was in fact nonconsensual.

-- Pat Califia San Francisco, California

Editor: Ms. Califia is correct. Rapist was an inappropriate term: Edmund White is, literally, no more a rapist than he is a wolf or a bear. He is, thankfully, a survivor.

He Really Means It

Bravo for brutal honesty. Marcus Wayland (“Suicide Watch,” November 1997) is right when he says: “[AIDS] gives you time to stop being false, strip away all the shit and appreciate things.” Exactly! When someone makes me happy, I let them know. Your magazine is great. I read it through completely. And reading about people having unsafe sex does not make me want to do it too, but I appreciate the honesty.

-- Brian Nathan
Tunnelton, Indiana

Judgment Day

I very much appreciated the insights offered in Walt Odet’s piece on prevention (“Hope Against Hope,” November 1997). It also helps that Sean Strub’s S.O.S. column attempts to understand the platform given to guest editor Aiden Shaw. Granted, Shaw’s piece helps to explain why some gay men actively court the virus. What troubles me, though, is this incessant exhortation to “not be judgmental,” as both Strub and Shaw plead for us to do. This is crap—put your pens down if you don’t want to be judged. Having said that…

Shaw’s editorial is one of the most confused, contradictory and pathetic pieces I’ve ever read. Perhaps when he has emerged from his cloud of self-pity, he’ll have something important and helpful to contribute. Truth is, most gay men feel victimized by society, and that is not reason enough to seek refuge in the transitory validation that HIV might provide. What I fear most is that only a minority of your readers will see his views as mere attempted illumination, while a majority may very well co-opt his romanticizing rationale—and either court infection or spread it unthinkingly to others.

As poz men, let’s quit coddling and justifying our infections, and be more proactive in preventing them in others.

-- Jim Bloor
Cleveland, Ohio

Parting Glances

In November's S.O.S. column, Sean Strub said that Aiden Shaw's views "challenged and influenced" him. I would have preferred that they shocked him. He also stated that Shaw's—and others'—views on unprotected sex may seem to some "at first glance, incomprehensible." That is the understatement of the year. At second glance, third and ad infinitum, I felt the same way.

I have been living with HIV for 16 years. For me, HIV information came too late, especially the knowledge on how not to get it and how not to pass it on. If I had known about HIV before I was infected, I would not be infected now.

I have practiced safe sex since 1984. I have no kind thoughts for those who do not.

-- Ralf Hughes
Via The Internet

Brown-noser

Please let Victoria Brownworth know that her column "Lost in Space" (November 1997) touched my heart and soul, and I am a better person for having read it.

-- Charles J. Ramella
Chicago, Illinois

Road Less Traveled

Thank you for the "Defiant Ones" (October 1997) article profiling those who are seeking out alternatives to the drug combination therapies. Many of us who have taken this road have had some measurable success with alternative therapies, although not all such therapies work for everyone with equal success, just as the antiviral drugs are not equally successful for all who try them. Individuals must do their own experimentation to learn what works due to the lack of hard data research in this area.

New York City's PWA Health Group began a support group for individuals trying to stay healthy through alternative therapies rather than through the traditional (or should I say experimental) combination antiviral drugs. By sharing our experiences and information, we don't only learn about how some of us are able to remain healthy, but also provide much-needed support to each other as some of us do face immense pressure from our physicians, families, pharmaceutical companies, friends and the media to get onto the combi-antiviral drugs. For more information, people can call the PWA Health Group at 212.255.0520.

Now if only insurance companies would recognize our efforts by providing some of the financial support that they seem so willing to provide for the much more expensive combination drugs.

-- James Jordan Smith
New York City

Stretch a Point

Sean Strub writes (S.O.S., October 1997) about a column I'd written in Out in 1994 in which I

discussed an unsafe sexual encounter I had (I got fucked without a rubber) while under the influence of a couple of drinks. He claims it was reprinted in *The New York Times*, under the headline "HIV Positive and responsible," and implies that my partner was positive and that I blamed him for the unsafe encounter.

That column was never reprinted in *The New York Times*. And I expressed not the slightest bit of anger, indignation or blame at my partner—I never even learned his status—and spent much of that column reflecting on my own irresponsibility. A column that I wrote six months later *was* reprinted on the *Times* Op-Ed page, discussing how we need to promote "equal responsibilty" for safer sex among HIV positives and negatives. In that column, an HIV positive friend revealed that he'd had unsafe sex and discussed his irresponsibility. I also discussed my own irresponsibility as an HIV negative person.

The *Times* editors headlined the piece "HIV Positive and Careless"—not "HIV Positive and Irresponsible." (It was completely inappropriate for the *Times* to weigh the responsibility to the positive person—something I did not do in the piece.) Ironically, Strub wrote his column, as he states, to show us how "the 'news' can be misreported, manipulated or modified." I think he indeed made that point quite clearly.

-- Michelangelo Signorile
New York City

Mom's the Word

Thank you for your fabulous article on Susan Rodriguez ("Not Working Is a Full-Time Job," September 1997). It was great to finally see an article acknowledging that getting entitlements is indeed a full-time job. Money from sources like SSI, SSD and New York City's Division of AIDS Services is earned, not given. PWAs and others spend hours filling out forms, waiting in lines, going to doctors and talking to caseworkers, and then wait months to see any money. In addition to working for her entitlements, Rodriguez does other work: Raising three children as a single parent is also a full-time job.

-- Lorna Gottesman
New York City

On His Knees

Throughout my years of reading *POZ*, I have been "positively" moved many times, but never as much as I was by the September 1997 issue. The S.O.S. column—in particular, Sean Strub's priceless insight that there is "much to learn from ill people about truth, intimacy, passion and finding the validity of one's own soul"—brought me to my knees. This insight was so wonderfully conveyed in Scott O'Hara's oh-so-accurate account of walking out of the tomb ("Get a Life"). His words were the threads of truth that bind together those of us who have experienced protease's rebirth.

Thank you for honoring everyone who has AIDS through your insights about the profound opportunity for enlightenment and hope that we have brought to all humanity. As those who were

cast out, humiliated, demonized and condemned to death, that is our highest achievement.

-- Aaron Hill
Via The Internet

Leave a Message

When I receive your magazine, I let my answering machine get my calls and my feet go up. I am an HIV positive woman who had to quit my job after 13 years and go on the system. *POZ* is inspirational for me. It feeds me with important information about new medications and about other women with the virus who are surviving like me. *POZ* talks about everything we want to hear. Love your work.

-- Gloria Guzman
New York City

Even Stephen

"Riding Bareback" (June 1997) was offensive and truly has no place in a magazine read by many PWAs who seek valuable information dealing with HIV. As a PWA of 13 years, I strongly recommend that you re-evaluate the essays submitted to your magazine. Not using condoms is a personal choice, but not a smart one. Maybe Mr. [Stephen] Gendin should start his own magazine called *Positively Crazy*.

-- Luis F. Moreno
St. Petersburg, Florida

Correction

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/Mailbox-1594-9248