Mailbox

July 1, 2003

Photo Finish

I am glad that a magazine has finally published an in-depth article about the bizarre cover-up of Herb Ritts' death ["Putting on the Ritts," April 2003]. When his passing was announced, I think many people assumed that any gay, wealthy and relatively young man who suddenly dies of "pneumonia" has most likely died of AIDS. The article suggests that Ritts was out about his serostatus (except to his mother) and active in AIDS-related charitable causes, so it seems doubly disturbing that his death would be covered up as if he had been deeply ashamed of having AIDS. Perhaps he was ashamed. It wouldn't be surprising that someone who is in the business of promoting health, youth and glamour would not want to be associated with such a devastating disease.

It is sad that we have lost a talented artist to AIDS, but it is sadder still that the shame about AIDS lingers on 20 years later.

Tien-Huei Tung
New York City

Degen Pener's cover story on Herb Ritts is comprehensive, well written and hits just the right note between objectivity and anger. I'm a bit surprised, however, that The Advocate is misidentified in Pener's article as "the LA gay biweekly." We are, as has been etched on our cover for about two decades, "the national gay and lesbian newsmagazine." I'm sure you would not want POZ reduced to "a New York disease periodical." As you well know, accuracy is everything in reporting.

Bruce C. Steele
Editor-in-Chief, *The Advocate*
Los Angeles

The New York Disease Periodical responds: *"The national gay and lesbian newsmagazine" it is.*

Super Model

How can Brad Peebles be an AIDS leader without being in touch with all of his family about his health and sexual orientation [Publisher's Letter, April 2003]? He really needs to do better than the rest of us. Otherwise, what kind of person should be a model of success?

Michael Aldridge
Laguna Beach, California

Brad Peebles responds: I am painfully aware of the contradiction between my openness and advocacy in POZ and some of my feelings and stances about certain personal relationships. It is difficult to explore and understand these things for myself, and it is certainly difficult to share them with others. My only hope in doing so is to show people a realistic portrayal of someone who's not perfect.

Gettin' Smart

I found a POZ article made just for me—in March, I joined the SMART study ["Good Morning, HAART Break," April 2003]. Off meds, I started feeling great, eating well and sleeping better. After a month I had my first doctor visit. Previously, I had lost 65 pounds, but the biggest thing that day was my nine-pound weight gain. I got bad news a week later, though—my CD4 count had fallen by a third and my viral load had gone from undetectable to 75,000. Thank God for the day I got my POZ. It reassured me that this is not uncommon, persuading me to stay with the study—and maybe help those unlucky enough to have to deal with these meds in the future.

Robert Popcke
Detroit

Bareback In The Day

Your article on the Bobby Blake scandal, which led to the firing of the leadership of Blacks Assisting Blacks Against AIDS (BABAA) ["BABAA Black Sheep," April 2003], neglected to mention one rather interesting dimension of the saga. Although Edgar Gaines may be advocating for HIV prevention now, it didn't look that way a few years ago when he starred in the bareback porn movie Niggas' Revenge. By fetishizing high-risk sex, bareback porn arguably contributes more than any other factor to the current mass delusion among gay men about the consequences of unprotected sex. As bareback culture becomes mainstream, AIDS service organizations like BABAA continually fail to counter its core message—that nothing is as important as having a hot man cum up your asshole right now. What will it take for gay men to confront the costs of such pleasures?

Alex Snell
New York City

Hype It Up

Your magazine is absolutely the bomb, but I have a request: I would like to see articles about people who got HIV and/or hepatitis C by sharing needles—and who are still using drugs. While some people want to stop, others want to just use less. And still others, like me, are on methadone maintenance and have been for a long time.

Cathleen A. Henes
New York City

Facing Reality

I’m sick of seeing plump, rosy-cheeked faces grace the pages of POZ. The only image of a visibly AIDS-impacted person in your February/March 2003 issue is
a photo of Ed Harris [“To Die For”]—playing a character! Next to his face we’re told that his “AIDS look is old hat.” I’ve lived with AIDS since 1995, and in the past three years I’ve acquired valleys where I once had cheeks. I even tried New-Fill, but the results lasted about two weeks, and I don’t have three grand to fill my face with collagen every few months. Those “fresh-faced HIV positive model” drug ads are doing our community a disservice. I’m sure your intention is not to ghettoize a significant percentage of the HIV positive community, but you have.

J. Hale
Chicago

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