Mailbox

May 1, 2004

Cancel My Subscription

We treasure most of our 1,169 reader letters, especially the many that say, “Thank you for being there”—to our ears, the highest praise possible. And we hope you know we return the gratitude, every month, as POZ—your magazine. But truth be told, the minutes of a mutual-admiration society do not make the most exciting reading. So on our 10th, we decided to reprint, for your howling entertainment, the greatest hits from our “Cancel my subscription”–type pile—the letters we don’t exactly treasure. The best you can say about pissing off so many people? POZ is an equal-opportunity offender, sparking rage and outrage in HIVers and non- of every sex and sexuality, color and creed, plus our allies in all areas of activism, zealots of every stripe, the White House, even our own house. So here’s to you dear readers—current and former—thanks for sharing.

The First Cut

I received the first issue of *POZ* and could not believe what I was seeing [April/May 1994]. Who is funding you? The Center for Disease Control, Burroughs Wellcome or both? I have never seen such a piece of trash as this in my whole life.

At this late stage of the game, you surely do not believe that HIV causes AIDS or that the so-called HIV test has any meaning whatsoever. Either you guys are calculating monsters trying to make money off of poor, deluded and persecuted gays or a tool of the establishment, which has committed iatrogenic genocide against the gay community. The only thing worth looking at in your magazine was the photo of Ty Ross; the rest of it can be thrown in the garbage.

--Fred Cline
San Francisco

Congratulations on the launch of your new magazine. I do have one serious objection to writer Kevin Sessums’ piece on HIV positive cover boy Ty Ross [“Ty Ross Comes Clean,” April/May 1994]. Nothing wrong with having chosen Ross as your cover subject—the guy’s cute, and there is that famous familial connection [to conservative icon Barry Goldwater]. But to have to read Sessums’ tasteless story of seduction—did he have to tell us he fucked him? Who cares? And if that weren’t bad enough, to have to put up with Sessums making a point of telling us he’s negative, so he’s scared. He portrays himself offering his comfort to this poor waif who’s about to keel over dead—just like his mother dying of cancer. He’s a regular Florence Nightingale—oh, man! It’s offensive. It’s unprofessional. And Sessums’ attitude is wrong, wrong, wrong.

--Michael L. Kinney
San Francisco

Grinning and Baring It

I do not recall any article in *POZ* that angered me more than "They Shoot Barebackers, Don't They?" [February 1999]. As a mental-health professional, I find that Tony Valenzuela's irresponsible and reprehensible behavior does not warrant the sobriquet "sacrificial lamb." He quoted his "number-one backer"—his mother—as having a "natural understanding" for the "value of skin-on-skin sex." It feels better to get fucked up the ass without protection, exposing your partner to HIV?

Valenzuela's logic—"I believe the risk for those who top bareback is minimal"—goes beyond rationalization. This is a dangerous narcissist who does not want to accept responsibility for people he might have infected. As for his mother, well, mothers love their serial-killer sons, too. Her son is a loser, his "beauty and brains" notwithstanding. He is one dangerous pay-for-sex person who can't even maintain a job. How dare *POZ* glamorize such behavior.

--Terrence O'Sullivan
New York City

Carefree Sugarless Gum

HIVer Stephen Gendin and his for-merly negative partner, Kyle McDowell, conclude that they are going to continue doing exactly what they want with no regard for the consequences ["Both Sides Now," November 1999]. Gendin—still struggling to use condoms with negative guys—apparently won't accept the clear medical fact that he can't fulfill his "spiritual" need to have someone's cum up his ass or his multidrug-resistant (MDR) HIV positive cum up anyone else's ass without being responsible for continuing the AIDS crisis into a third decade.

Are honesty and common sense really so difficult when life and death are at stake, especially between two informed adults? It also astounds me that McDowell is not at all concerned about his own reinfection or about reinfecting his positive fuck buddies with his supervirus. Do Gendin and McDowell really want to be protected from what they want, as stated on your cover?

--Peter Griffin
New York City

On the Brag

I have read the June "AIDS at 20" Editor's Letter [2001] several times and have come away with mixed feelings each time. I congratulate *POZ* Editor in Chief Walter 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

Examing Room

We are outraged that *POZ* could even mention, let alone support, the notion that gay male doctors should be exempt from medical conduct rules governing sexual relationships with patients [“Hitt and Run,” June 2003]. Yes, it is always wrong for a doctor to have a sexual relationship with a patient. Just because gay men have more casual sex does not exempt them from the laws of society. Gay doctors should be held accountable to the same laws as other doctors. By all accounts, [sexual-misconduct defendant] Scott Hitt was an inspired doctor who paved the way for better HIV services. It just seems like he forgot his responsibility to his patients as a doctor, not as a sex toy.

--Meigan Dickinson, John MacTavish, Joanne McAlpine
HIV/AIDS Regional Services
Kingston, Ontario

Dead Wrong

Writer LeRoy Whitfield had the opportunity to tell the truth in “The Secret Plot to Destroy African Americans” [December 2000], but he sidestepped that duty. A high percentage of black people believe that their government is trying to kill them. I showed Whitfield my chart, which connects 20,000 scientific papers over 15 years and which I believe represents the “missing link” in absolute proof of the laboratory origin of AIDS. He failed to mention it. He also cast me [an African-American, HIV positive lawyer and conspiracy theorist] as crazy in order to demean the evidence. His article was written to mislead the American people about the concrete evidence of a federal virus-development program. His gross failure to try to verify my hypothesis only assists the continuation of AIDS.

--Boyd E. Graves, JD
Cleveland

Till Death Do Us Part

Cancel my subscription! I am shocked and appalled by your “Death Issue,” [September 2001]. Are you out of your mind? I’ve read *POZ* for years now, and I’ve been positive for 12 years. I will never pick up a copy of your magazine again!

--Wayne Augustine
Medina, Ohio

Chock-Full of Nuts

Let me see if I understand this: *POZ* kills columnist 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 [“Be Very Afraid,” October 2000]? Make no mistake about it—you bought-

off AIDS-industry motherfuckers are the truly twisted ones.

--David Pasquarelli
ACT UP/San Francisco
San Francisco

Shake Your Moneymaker

We are canceling our subscription. Your article ["Dissing Disability Queens," October 2001] targets as pariahs a community of people who have relied on disability. Simply put, it is unforgivable. We have paid into the SSDI fund and deserve to make use of it for as long as we and our doctors agree we need it. For people with AIDS, the demands of work are so debilitating that at times one has to sit down, eat and re-energize—or risk fainting spells. Still, we make every effort to work, because it is good for the psyche and engenders a sense of accomplishment. Afraid of losing our jobs, some of us even stop taking medications because the sickening side effects will eventually interfere with work. The end result is that we still risk losing our jobs.

Tabloid journalism does not become *POZ*. It is irresponsible to pick out issues related to HIV positive people, find marginal, sensationalistic perspectives and run the story with no consideration of the effect it will have upon your subscribers.

--Charles Palmer and Tony Glover
Via the Internet

Work It Out

What is with your recent cover story ["Not Working Is a Full-Time Job," September 1997]? Cover woman Susan Rodriguez quit her job. Not fired. Not harassed. She quit. Consequently, she lost her health benefits, her life insurance and her salary. What was she thinking? Certainly not of her children. She now has a state-paid free ride, and I am the one (an out, gay and HIV positive employee) working to pay the taxes that support people like Rodriguez.

I work because I am capable of it and because it is the responsible thing to do. I have never taken a government penny nor any handout from AIDS organizations, so please don't compare her not working with working. Try smiling at your coworkers when you're nauseous or running like a madman to the nearest bathroom with a case of diarrhea during work.

--Martin E. Hollick
Somerville, Massachusetts

The Juice Is Loose

I am going to fight your magazine till death now! How dare you say that I, for example, am a drug user or gay ["Vagina Monologues," October 2001]? I got HIV from a woman who was out on a revenge rampage because she got it from her boyfriend. I am angry that the women on your cover would dare say there are only seven cases [of female-to-male transmission] in New York and maybe only one is really hetero.

I am grateful that because of gays we are where we're at in medicine and rights. But you want to destroy our integrity and morals because some bitches want to even the numbers up in the name of women. If those ladies think that it is OK to infect men because they have been sexually deprived, that is their problem. And it is a crime!

--Henry Calderon
Gastonia, North Carolina

Zip Your Lip-O

Seems strange to me that a magazine that is a great source of information to HIV positive people would use terminology that may be upsetting to them. Imagine an HIV positive person getting the magazine for the first time and reading an article about lipodystrophy that uses descriptions like "puppet face" and "buffalo hump" ["The New AIDS Look," June 2000 and "Pills! Chills! Thrills! Spills!" September 2000]. Perhaps this person sees the facial wasting progressing every month. The fat pad on the neck and shoulders has progressed from size 15 to 19—wreaking havoc with that wardrobe, I might add. I saw a person with Down syndrome—and imagine—I didn't stare, point and say, "Hey, look, a Mongoloid!"

--Name Withheld
Via the Internet

Ad Nauseaum

As a reporter who has been covering the AIDS epidemic since 1981, I was appalled that *POZ*'s January 2001 cover, "Whatever Became of the Cure?" was wrapped with an ad for Bristol-Myers Squibb's anti-HIV drug Videx (ddI). As a result of this juxtaposition, the cover answers its own questions about the cure with "Mission Accomplished! Introducing...New Videx EC." That is beyond irresponsible. It implies that the second-oldest anti-HIV drug, ddI, is curative. It is not—and taken alone, ddI can actually worsen the health of HIVers.

Why does *POZ*—which caters to the health and needs of people with HIV —sell cover-wrap space to a drug company, given the complexity of HIV treatments and the vital need for patients to separate hype from reality?

--Laurie Garrett
Science Writer, Newsday
New York City

Politics as Usual

I'm really sick of [*POZ* founder] Sean Strub's tirades against Bill Clinton ["S.O.S.," November 1996]. Will they continue for the next four years? Believe it or not, Sean, there are other issues besides AIDS for which I support Bill Clinton.

Your magazine is silly. "We're all happy little good-attitude people who don't want to read about the illnesses and death associated with AIDS. We're all asymptomatic and healthy, right?" Well, I'm not.

--David Armstrong
Dallas

Nude As the News

As a gay man, I'm very disappointed and, frankly, disgusted with your June 1998 issue. Who wants to see a straight woman showing her tit practically exposed on the front cover? I don't, and I'm sure most of your gay male readers will want to puke. What a turnoff! Couldn't you folks find a hot man with a nice body? This story doesn't belong in *POZ*. I think I'll burn this issue. Shame on you!

--Scott Sproat
Walnut Creek, California

The Passion of Christ

AIDS is an inhumane disease that has quelled the dignity and hope of millions of people. I fervently pray for a cure for this disease every day. I also pray for the millions of gays and lesbians whose lives have been held captive by the lifestyle they have chosen. You need Christ. He is the only answer to your questions. Only Christ will fill that void in your souls. I say all this in love and not in judgement, for it is only by the grace of God that I am not a lesbian.

Your magazine is a fist shaken in the face of God. It is vile, disgusting and pitiful. It doesn't lift up the people who are afflicted with AIDS; it praises a lifestyle that gave them AIDS.

--Jill Doster
Memphis, Tennessee

Banned and Noble

Barnes & Noble removed *POZ* from its stands because of a controversy concerning the September 1998 issue's condom insert. The company apologized for this "apparent error" and maintained that the magazine would be quickly offered for sale again. However, after several months of receiving promises and excuses from both the magazine and store manager, *POZ* has yet to reappear in the East Hanover, New Jersey store. Incidentally, there seems to be no shortage of books on Beanie Babies but nary a one on the disease that last year killed 2.5 million people worldwide.

--Wayne Rannelli
Livingston, New Jersey

And One Final Note of Praise

Not to continue the publication of *POZ* would mean my main source of knowledge and information would cease to exist ["S.O.S," July 2001]. That scares me. More important, to keep POZ going means one less heroin-addicted prostitute on the streets, one less drunk going home with someone she doesn't know and one less cemetery plot filled.

I have heartfelt gratitude for the knowledge, unity and dreams you have allowed me. My way of

saying thank you is my ongoing sobriety, the high school diploma I've just received and my determination to become an HIV educator once I am released from prison. You have helped give back to society a member it can rely on and womanhood back to a lady it can be proud of.

--**Regina Perroni**
Las Vegas

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