Mailbox

August 1, 2004 By Staff

BARED ESSENTIALS

POZ's 10th-anniversary cover [image by Spencer Tunick, May 2004] speaks volumes about who we are and how we feel about our bodies and sexualities. *POZ* has mirrored my life with AIDS over the past 10 years. First, it was accepting death. Then, it was dealing with HAART and living—facing unpaid bills, returning to work, hating the way the drugs reshaped my face and then learning to love myself again.

Once, during chemotherapy, I remember thinking, "I just want to feel healthy one more time." I've gotten that and much more. And almost all of my information on drugs and resources has come from *POZ*. You literally saved my life and many others'.

--Philip W.
San Jose, California

As a peer educator, I found your May cover disgustingly offensive. Pictures like this contribute to AIDS-phobia and stigma. We can make a stronger statement by keeping our clothes on and fighting to change the way PWAs are treated.

So many positive people have low self-esteem, and this cover will lower it even more. Instead of promoting pornography—like you do in this picture—we need to stop having casual sex. I do not condone using nude bodies to try to make an uplifting statement. Let's stay focused. Our aim is to educate so that one day we will eradicate this disease.

--Rosemary Thompson
Bedford Hills Correctional Facility
Bedford Hills, New York

As an artist and AIDS activist, I was extremely excited to see the beautiful and groundbreaking May cover. It's validating to see your imperfect self in the faces and bodies of fellow HIVers. Even though I have only a slight case of lipodystrophy, I am self-conscious about my appearance. This was a great way to put an inspiring light on HIV positive people everywhere. Thank you. I'm sorry that I could not be there.

--Joe De Hoyos
San Francisco

Please remove me [and my clinic] from the mailing list immediately.

-- Tom Coburn, MD
Co-Chairman, Presidential Advisory
Council on HIV/ AIDS
Muskogee, Oklahoma

Editor's Note: When POZ *contacted Dr. Coburn to learn the reason for the cancellation, his office manager politely said that the May cover was simply too graphic for the children he regularly treats.*

COMMUNAL LIVING

As I sat reading your magazine behind bars at a special-care camp for HIV positive and HCV inmates, it caused me to think back to the time when I first started using drugs to cope (or not) with my HIV. I tried to hide and run away by getting high. I didn't know there was an entire community out there with stories of hope or that the disease went beyond my little world of nightclubs and bathhouses. I have always been a proud person, and HIV could have quite possibly robbed me of my pride entirely if it weren't for you and others. I only wish I had found you sooner.

--Ryan Eddie
Central Florida Reception Center
Orlando, Florida

GOING POSTAL

You stated that your sampling of the magazine's angriest letters to the editor in your anniversary issue were "for [our] howling entertainment" ["Cancel My Subscription," May 2004]. But I am not laughing. The letters against barebacking contain the most logic I've seen in your magazine.

Intentionally infecting someone is no different from shooting them with a gun. Not only do I not see the "howling entertainment" of those letters, I question a magazine that coddles those who can't take a few seconds to put on a condom.

--Kim Guest
Frankfort, Indiana

SERO-STATUS QUO

Your May issue arrived at an appropriate time to help me understand the history of the AIDS community. I'm a 21-year-old HIV negative gay man who works at the local Ryan White Planning Council. Days before I read the issue, I went to a gay house party. After telling people where I worked, they clearly thought, "He *must* be positive, so I can't talk to him because I don't want to date an HIVer or challenge my own HIV stereotypes." Have we come to this after 20-plus years? I know that there is apathy, ignorance and denial in all communities. But this was the first time I've seen them firsthand—the first time that I was slapped in the face by them. And I'm stunned.

-- Greg Zhovreboff
San Francisco

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