Mailbox

February 1, 2002

The (Bare) Backstory

Thanks to Denny Lee for a very decent article raising the real issues behind *The New York Times* barebacking story and my job as an HIV counselor and peer educator ("Truth and Dare," November 2001). As I told Mr. Lee, I didn't transmit HIV to anybody after I knew my status. I had unprotected sex at anonymous venues with those I believed to be HIV positive or who had had sex with multiple partners prior to engaging in sex with me.

I spoke out about my own personal life and not about my job. My life decisions and behaviors don't influence my counseling clients. I adhere to all San Francisco Department of Public Health AIDS Office guidelines, ethics and laws. My goals were to share my experiences with others and to start a conversation among the community, AIDS organizations, prevention specialists and the country about the real reasons why a person may engage in unprotected sex -- and how to support them in reducing their risk.

I've dealt with ignorance and hatred from people like Dan Savage and an inquiry into my personal life by the U.S. Senate. I've been called many names in public and even been compared to the murderers of Matthew Shepard. I try to be honest with reporters, but I'm more aware now of what I say to them.

-- Seth Watkins, Department of Public Health, San Francisco

Tough Stuff

According to Doug Ireland ("Darkness at Noon," November 2001), the sky is falling and Armageddon is upon us. I have news for Mr. Chicken Little-meets-Pat Robertson: It's not the end of the world! Yes, the events of September 11 are profoundly changing our world, but HIV research has not stopped, federal funds for HIV have not been cut, and world leaders have not forgotten the epidemic -- hell, China held its first-ever conference on HIV in November.

Yes, the economy has taken some serious hits, but this isn't 1929 -- I wish Mr. Ireland could have seen the Roseville Mall here in Minnesota this past weekend: it was a zoo! It's easy to criticize, carp and complain, which Mr. Ireland does well. Still, I'm reminded of an old American adage: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." We have work to do, folks. Let's roll!

-- Bill Seed, Lauderdale, Minnesota

Pity-Party Poopers

I cannot believe the selfishness of some of the people who contributed to “Out of the Chaos, Voices” (November 2001). Mr. Noak wants to “smack” a woman while she witnesses the planes going into the WTC. Mr. Lugliani is arrogant and apparently one of those “it’s our disease” gays. Does he not think a straight PWA is also having those same feelings? What’s up with Mr. Dee’s “Welcome to my world, America” and, last but not least, Mr. Califia’s “United Fucking States of America”?

Do we not understand that willing or not, those of us with HIV participated in the acts that brought this virus into our bodies? And what about those who continue their behavior and pass this virus on to others, not caring how many lives they ruin? Having someone fly planes filled with other human beings into two skyscrapers that are also occupied has nothing to do with any of us who has this virus. How dare you even compare them to each other!

As HIVers, if my wife and I were living in any other country, we would be dead and our children orphaned and/or ostracized. If you hate this country so much, then go see Osama. Or else get off of your arrogant, selfish little pity-party machine and get out there and make a difference in someone else’s life.

-- Jesse C. Combs, Jackson, Tennessee

I am HIV positive and I volunteer for a nonprofit organization that struggled to provide Christmas gifts for a mere 26 children infected or affected by HIV. It has become so old to me, hearing so many people complain about what our government isn’t doing to help out the battle on AIDS -- as they do in “Out of the Chaos, Voices” -- while they themselves attend star-studded galas that cost enough to support our entire caseload for at least one year.

As for Patrick Califia, I am sure no deserving American citizen will attempt to prevent him from taking refuge in the arms of Osama bin Laden, since obviously he has such contempt for his own country. “Darkness at Noon” is to me another cop out. If our government doesn’t defend our nation, then we will have the situation that exists in so many poorer, war-torn countries.

-- Sam McCormick, Laurinburg, North Carolina

Silent Partner

I like that you changed your layout of *POZ* Planet again. It is much better, but still too confusing. I tend to skip these pages...but I really miss the *POZ* Partner section very much. That was my true source of information. Many of these ideas I discussed with my docs, and they helped me change or adjust my treatment.

I hope you are continuing your positive work and thanks for your great magazine.

-- Patrick Erni, Via the Internet

***POZ* responds:** *In our new (and still evolving) design,* POZ *Planet features not only the month’s news in AIDS but also all the treatment, research and other medical information that you once found in* POZ *Partner. So turn to page 13 -- and no skipping!*

Sin of Omission

I want to make one correction to your write-up on ArtAIDSAfrica (“Hearts and Crafts,” November 2001). AAA is the brainchild of Annemarie Eades, Folami and me. Annemarie, who was left off the “brainchild” list in the article, is an extremely vital part of the team. She got us incorporated, wrote the business plan, and designed and maintains the website. Without Annemarie, Folami and I would still be in the conception phase.

Thanks again for the piece -- and the opportunity to reach new markets in our goal to combat the effects of AIDS in Africa.

-- Shirley Harris, MD, Atlanta

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