Mailbox

April 1, 2002 By Staff

Sullivan's Final Contribution

Please remove me from your list of contributing editors immediately. I see no reason to support a magazine that takes every opportunity to bash me [see item no. 16, "Ass Online," in "The Year in AIDS," December 2001]. That you would retread one of the most homophobic and HIV-phobic witch hunts in recent times is one more reason to believe that your magazine has no judgment and precious little intelligence. The equation of my right to privacy with a public official's perjury and obstruction of justice is preposterous. I always defended Clinton's right to privacy. There was no hypocrisy issue -- just an attempt at character assassination to which you now contribute.

Why should it be for me to respond to that outrage [as *POZ* requested]? Responding would have fanned the flames. What was needed was for some *allies* who value HIV privacy to defend me and attack the fascists. You stayed silent. Your cowardice spoke volumes while an HIV-positive person was attacked for practicing responsible sex. I can forgive cowardice. I cannot forgive joining in the witch hunt.

Running hysterical leftist rants month after month makes for a bad and boring magazine. Here's an example: In your year-end round-up you predictably pile on Bush with no actual evidence, and you imply there's no White House AIDS Office. What do you hope to achieve by this? Your readers know you're lying. You don't even mention Scott Evertz, the first openly gay AIDS czar. It's not reporting; it's propaganda. When are you guys going to grow up?

-- Andrew Sullivan, Via the Internet

***POZ* responds:** *We regret losing the world's most famous openly HIV positive, conservative, Catholic, homosexual journalist from our magazine of "hysterical leftist rants." Before our last goodbye, though, a few clarifications: As soon as he was outed as a barebacker-hypocrite,* POZ *asked Sullivan to answer his attackers in our pages. Sullivan refused. When he finally did come to his own defense, it was in an anguished, articulate statement on his website (www.andrewsullivan.com) clarifying not only his right to privacy but his posting a profile seeking unprotected sex with other HIV positive men as a responsible act of self-disclosure.* POZ *agreed -- as our controversial coverage of the barebacking issue over the years confirms -- but we passed on the "rawmuslglutes" affair because Sullivan refused comment. Given all the sound and fury, silence seemed a kindness; it had nothing to do with cowardice. As for our "joining in the witch hunt" by recapping it in our year-end roundup, the event was newsworthy -- witness January's* Queer As Folk *segment parodying Sullivan (see "Living Spoof") Finally, with regard to our "lying"*

to readers, the hunted, haunted Sullivan might try reading POZ *a little more attentively -- in the year-end roundup, between callouts about Bush and himself, is item no. 6, which in fact mentions Scott Evertz, the first openly gay AIDS czar.*

Ain't it the Truth

Brad Peebles weaves an incredible fabric: humor and seriousness [Publisher's Letter, December 2001]. Thank you for sharing your journey, and some of your coping methods. The scary part? *You aren't lying.* People aren't used to that.

-- Rick Young, Via the Internet

Strange as it Seems

The blurb on your cover promises "New Research to Recharge Your Immune System." The article ["Sleeping With the Enemy," December 2001], of course, is different. It seems that a doctor who attended medical school in the mid-'80s is now "center stage in HIV science." That HIV is a "crafty tactician" that chooses certain cells to "pick off." And that without "orders from above" your immune system is stuck in some sort of Marx Brothers skit and can't organize.

I guess since I tested positive in 1986, have never taken HIV meds, have never had an opportunistic infection, couldn't tell you how many T cells I have, don't know my "viral load," never get a cold, that makes me a "long-term nonprogressor" AIDS denialist, and any day my ravaged immune system will bow to the mighty virus.

-- Greg Fortier, Via the Internet

Last Word on Dis

"Dissing Disability Queens" [October 2001] didn't point out the selective documentation by doctors helping "important" patients toward disability while the McDonald's worker gets nothing. I'm a non-med compliant PWA, so I've been denied disability insurance. Most of my friends have lied to get on disability, accepting prescriptions for the cocktail but not actually taking it. Some spend time volunteering. Some do the dance-circuit thing. One used his AIDS buddy program to care for his dog while he went to San Francisco for a four-day sex weekend.

Working 40 to 50 hours a week and not having enough money or time to eat properly or pay the rent and bills are what's killing me. My T cells are plumeting (150), my viral load is rising (80,000), and my hard-earned insurance premiums (35 years) are paying dividends to kids who have paid little if anything into this policy to continue their irresponsible lifestyle.

-- Tony Walecki, San Diego

We are cancelling our subscription. Your article ["Dissing Disability Queens"] 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. Most people don't feel comfortable saying to an employer, "I may have to miss a few days."

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

All Work and No Pay

It's about time someone spoke up about healthy HIVers working the system ["Dissing Disability Queens"]. Many of my friends have privately discussed this issue but are afraid to be burned on a cross for telling the truth.

I've been working full-time for three years. My T cells were at 200 with my initial diagnosis. When I began the meds, I became very sick and now have neuropathy and lipodystrophy. I still work full time and go to the gym as often as possible, but I barely make ends meet. When I tried to get help with the copay on my meds, they told me I make too much money.

I know many positive guys who do recreational drugs, go to the gym, look great, feel great, have great vacations and are able to work -- but don't, because they have it too good. I have often thought about going on disability, but I'm not going to until it's time -- meaning I can't walk or am sick.

-- D.C., Via the Internet

Twisted Sister

I cannot believe you would publish an article like "Vagina Monologues" [October 2001] or provide a forum for Dr. Joseph Sonnabend's twisted views ["A Negative Exposure"]. And your response to criticism of the articles was a joke [Mailbox, December 2001]. Saying the articles "convey Dr. Joseph Sonnabend's message that U.S. women cannot transmit AIDS to their male sex partners" is ridiculous. First of all, no one transmits AIDS. It is HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) that is transmitted. Second, Dr. Sonnabend refers to surveillance statistics as "statistical shenanigans." He is the one playing shenanigans with statistics by using the figures for heterosexual *AIDS cases* rather than *HIV infections*. The number of men who developed AIDS as a result of heterosexual contact in 2000, according to the CDC, was 378 (3 percent). However, the number of men infected with HIV as a result of heterosexual contact in 2000 was 1,271 (8 percent). *It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that Sonnabend is using the numbers that best suit his needs. Please think twice before you publish dangerously inaccurate information again.*

-- Russ Powell, HIV/AIDS Educator , Via the Internet

Dr. Sonnabend responds: *Nowhere did I state that women cannot transmit HIV to men. However, there is a tremendous disparity between the number of hetero-sexually infected men who become sick in Africa, compared to the U.S. Since this discrepancy does not bother you, you obviously have no interest in finding an explanation, and apparently think that those of us who do are twisted. If you had read and understood the material, you would have seen that I state that in the West women do infect their male partners with HIV, but it is much less likely here than in Africa that the disease will progress, even to the point of seroconversion. If we understood why, this might have great therapeutic and preventative potential. Fortunately, some, including scientists at the CDC, are starting to provide evidence that would explain this difference. As an AIDS educator, you are surely familiar with the literature.*

Ad Nauseum

As a drug-savvy long-term survivor, I was downright pissed at the crap being stirred in the name of protecting us "poor, unsuspecting" HIV patients from drug-company ads ["Splitting Image," July 2001]. I'm not saying we don't stop and admire the buff bodies on a Viracept ad. But I would like to tell those individuals who are supposedly fighting to protect me from such ads to save their time: Fight to educate the HIV negative on how to stay that way.

POZ has helped me "fight the good fight." I hope it is there for all of us as long as there is HIV.

-- Paul Harris, Tampa Bay, Florida

Poet's Corner

Murderers' Row

The Tigers are in town.It's windy, cool -- April nonetheless. My blue cap, team T-shirt shout the spirit of Detroit in this enemy lair; here comes a Bronx cheer.

A fraternity brother and I, way uptown past nosebleedland (ours would be a biohazard) scurry to our seats. In the sun across the stadium, a phalanxof young men, half-naked -- each emblazoned with a big letteron their newly hairy chests.These boys spell Y-A-N-K-E-E-S.

Who can see their goose bumpsin the breeze at this distance?

A stale bag of peanuts arrives -- a paper cup of beer, it's barely afternoon! My team wins -- aha! Aghast in his blue cap, my escort's mouth drops. A work acquaintance slinks up to us in the subway station. This Yankee fan, Bill, will be dead by fall. Everyone's so surprised. Only someone lobotomized couldn't figure out he was host to a retroviral conclave. On the trainI ask my Sigma Alpha Mu brother about our mutual friend, Michael.

Unbeknownst to us, Michael is already dead. We plan conversations for a visit not to be.

-- Jon Nalley, New York City

Corrections: *In the January issue,* POZ *made an error in reporting that a 500-person trial of New-*

Fill (polylactic acid) for the treatment of lipodystrophy-associated facial wasting was to be done by the New York City buyers' club, DAAIR ("Feds Nix Lipo Fix"). Plans for the trial were halted when the FDA stopped the New-Fill Personal Use Program. Several physicians have applied to the FDA for permission to do smaller trials. To date, one trial for 100 people has been approved, and by May, two to four other similar-size trials may be ongoing -- contingent on the FDA's approval for clinical study of an investigational new device. The latest info can be obtained at DAAIR's website (www.daair.org) by searching for New-Fill trials.

In the February/March cover story ("A Loving Spoonful"), POZ *mistakenly stated that Cathy and Robert Olufs met at a support group sponsored by Being Alive. The support group was run by Women Alive.*

In the same issue's "Drug Bust," a drug for Hepatitis C under development by Roche Pharmaceuticals was misspelled as Pegasus*. The correct spelling is* Pegasys.

POZ *regrets the errors.*

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