Mailbox

July 1, 2002 By Staff

The Queens of Obscene

These two self-proclaimed messiahs, Michael Petrelis and David Pasquarelli, assert that they are somehow fighting for the rights of HIVers throughout our fucked-up-enough-already country by throwing expensive, tiresome and prissy media temper tantrums ["Tweedledum and Dumber," April 2002]. I've seen this type of infighting before here in my own community -- and all the energy, time and money it takes away from those who could use a hot shower, a good meal, a clean needle and some place to sleep (not to mention the meds and education they so desperately need). Can't these drama queens with way too much money and A-list connections spend their time and efforts on something that actually will make a difference to those they pretend to advocate for?

-- Vincent Fernandez
Ewa Beach, Hawaii

As someone who's proudly been hauled off to jail 13 times to secure both civil liberties and medical necessities for PWAs, I don't think any fair-minded person could characterize me or my compatriots as establishment gays, opponents of protest or defenders of the status quo. Nonetheless, I know of no AIDS activists in San Francisco who support the Petrelis gang. Petrelis, Pasquarelli and Co. are attempting to destroy what two generations of gay and AIDS activism have built in this city -- a compassionate, progressive and science-based response to the epidemic.

Petrelis and Co. seek to lead a crusade against activism in the name of activism itself. It doesn't really fly in San Francisco. It's understandable that prosecution of apparent activists under the coloration of "antiterrorism" would cause concern among well-meaning civil libertarians 3,000 miles away -- unless they actually *are* terrorists. Thanks to articles like Alex MacDonald's, these mean-spirited reactionaries will get the long prison terms they so richly deserve.

-- Frank Richter
San Francisco

It is impossible to counter all the lies in Alex McDonald's hit piece on Michael Petrelis and ACT UP/San Francisco's David Pasquarelli. However, there is one particular lie that I find, at best, a bit hilarious -- that San Francisco AIDS Foundation head Pat Christen was pregnant at the time of ACT UP/SF's notorious Fat Cat Pat Attack. Christen took maternity leave some three years later, in 1999.

One species of crocodile from Africa incubates its eggs for up to three years. Is it possible that Pat is related to this species of crocodile? Or is she trying to gain sympathy from a public well aware that a $250,000 annual salary is enough to infuriate just about any indigent HIV positive individual in need of real services like decent housing and adequate health care?

-- Ronnie Burk
San Francisco

***POZ* responds:** *We apologize for the mistake: Pat Christen is neither a crocodile nor was she pregnant in October 1996 when one (could it be the same?) Ronnie Burk was charged with assault after ACT UP/SFers "stormed the stage and dumped 25 pounds of foul-smelling, used kitty litter over Christen's head," as the group's own press release described it. Another correction: Pat Christen makes $207,000 a year.*

Happy Hipster

"Hip to the Future" [April 2002] was a great article and long overdue. I've been feeling like a canary in a coal mine. I am 38 and have avascular necrosis (AVN) in both hips. All HIVers should tell their physician about any signs of joint pain or stiffness. Because I was among the first in my HIV doctor's practice to get AVN, it went undiagnosed for many months, even years. I felt signs of AVN before I took HIV meds: decreased mobility, a pinch in the groin and some stiffness after a workout or long hike. The thing to watch out for is pain in the groin. These seemingly minor episodes increased in 1996 after I started saquinavir. With the addition of prednisone, the problem became acute.

The good news is that my total hip replacement was not as mind-blowing as I first thought. On day two, I walked eight blocks with a cane. On week two, I was swimming. On week four, I threw away the cane. On week eight, I flew to Italy, hiked all over the gorgeous hills and climbed the 475 steps of the famous Brunelleschi Duomo in Florence, passing tourists on the way up and back down.

-- P.J. Edson
Via the Internet

Sullied Sullivan

Hooray! Now that self-hating, secretly antigay, conservative, barebacking hypocrite Andrew Sullivan has departed your pages, I'll read *POZ* more regularly. The AIDS and gay communities need to push *forward*, especially under a bigoted Bush administration. We do not need bitter religious zealots like Sullivan, who side with our enemies and revel in useless controversy and personal publicity.

-- Keith Kendrick
Santa Monica, California

Your publishing of Andrew Sullivan's resignation as a *POZ* contributor and your response to it are another example of the dirty-laundry airing that should be stopped. Our political and medical enemies read such diatribes with glee because it gives them further justification to maintain their

narrow-minded positions on AIDS funding and gay rights It is imperative that we maintain the appearance of a united front and settle our differences out of print.

-- Hal Campbell
Petaluma, California

Heartbroken I am not. I gave up reading Andrew Sullivan's articles and commentary years ago, as I no longer could stomach his self-loathing, conservative and preachy style and "do as I say, not as I do" views on the gay community. As he continues to call *POZ* witch-hunting and cowardly, I sit and laugh at his double talk once again. I've had my HIV status tattooed on my arm for nearly seven years. I am disgusted to hear him rant and rave about the right of privacy when he makes his living as a public person. If the heat in the kitchen is too hot, get out.

-- James A. Fielding
Miami Beach

I feel I have been remiss not to offer Andrew Sullivan my support in your forum. As a gay, Catholic, conservative, positive man, I take offense at your handling of the entire situation. One does not lose the right to privacy just because one is a public figure. Sullivan deserved better treatment than he received from *POZ*.

-- Tom Burke
Miami Beach

***POZ* responds:** *The e-mail Andrew Sullivan sent us requesting that his name be removed from the masthead was not intended for publication. We apologize to Sullivan for running it.*

Warning After

In telling of his midsummer night's gamble with HIV, Walter Armstrong seems to set himself up as a role model for those who play the AIDS lottery ["Editor's Letter," April 2002]. With shameless audacity, he concludes his chronicle of carelessness by declaring, "Those of us now and then reckless enough to play for the highest stakes deserve all the luck we can get."

The dictionary defines *deserve* as follows: "to earn or be worthy of, implying a meritorious service performed." I doubt anyone would find anything "meritorious" about Armstrong's night of living dangerously. After 20 years of widely publicized, detailed data and warnings about HIV-risky sexual behavior, he chooses to gamble with his life. Obviously, luck is something he would *need* afterward, but "deserve"? I don't think so. Like a gambler who knows beforehand that the odds are always heavily in favor of "the house," anyone foolish enough to wager his life playing rectum roulette is deserving of nothing.

-- Richard D. Saunders
Studio City, California

I felt that Walter Armstrong was describing me perfectly, except I was not one for PEP, and of course I am now handling the results the best I can with what resources I have. I'd like to thank

POZ for containing much-needed information as well as both pro and con reader mail, which shows me that you are honest in recognizing that not all is perfect in life but that with the correct attitude we can deal with the negative and bounce back.

-- Gary Lloyd R15109
Tomoka Correctional Institute
Daytona Beach, Florida

Walter Armstrong should feel ashamed. To think that his trick is going to tell him he's positive just as he gets ready to shove his unprotected dick in his ass is just plain stupid. I don't want another person to take their last breath and die in my arms like my poor, terrified and confused brother did. If Armstrong and those like him continue to let tricks bareback them, I will steel myself for more deaths and wonder when people will stop inviting this virus into their bodies.

-- Jon Howard
Via the Internet

I have to wonder why I am reading the editorial of an HIV negative gay man who, in the year 2002, finds it necessary to be "hiding in a bathroom stall at the gym to down my meds." I have spent the past 14 years being open about my status, both to combat internalized shame and to educate people.

I was profiled in *POZ* in 1996 as I bicycled to Atlanta from Washington, DC, to volunteer at the Olympics ["Rock the Boat," August/September 1996]. In the cafeteria, I set out my meds and took them along with my food. In the very traditional rowing world, I was known as a gay man living with AIDS. The exchange was mutually beneficial -- particularly to me in not having to be in any closet.

-- Donald AuCoin
Washington, DC

I've been positive since about 1986 and have spent most of my life as a nurse in AIDS care. Walter Armstrong's story of "getting lucky" last August really touched me. It's much more of a brave tale than he lets on. My closest friends have a personal supply of PEP -- put together from my own stock with help from a compassionate doc friend. When I began doing this, I was overwhelmed by the ignorance of so-called enlightened men and -- after a bit of investigation -- also disappointed by our hospital system.

The letter shines light on a "dark area" that we all encounter -- the dark, drunk and horny aspects of being a gay man. Don't let the bastards get you down. What I like most about *POZ* is the unafraid atmosphere you provide. Sure, it's not always comfy -- but neither is life.

-- Stephen D. Sinclair
Via the Internet

Try A Trial

As someone who has spent 20 years helping to identify, treat and control -- if not find a cure for -- HIV, I am saddened by the pessimistic mood in the population that would benefit most from new drugs and strategies ["Publisher's Letter," February/March 2002]. From the research perspective, I believe there is much to motivate potential study participants. Data collected during HIV clinical trials can provide answers to some of today's most pressing questions. As Brad Peebles eloquently expressed, participating in clinical trials does have the potential to improve one's own condition. At the same time, it *is a great and noble way to fight AIDS.* I strongly urge all HIV positive individuals to gather information, explore the options and consider participating in a clinical trial. For the AIDS Clinical Trials Information Service, go to www.actis.org or call 800.TRIALS.A.

-- Donna Mildvan, MD, Chief
Director of AIDS Research
Division of Infectious Diseases,Beth Israel Medical Center
New York City

Savagely Safe

It's not that Dan Savage is un-PC -- he's stupid and reactionary ["Scumbag Humbug," April 2002]. When I was an HIV negative twentysomething, I had a boyfriend for four years who was, and still is, HIV positive. He fucked me like crazy every day, with a condom. I sucked his dick like crazy every day, without a condom. Did I test positive then, from all that verboten (but so delightful) cock up my butt? No, it wasn't until years later, when I repeatedly engaged in unprotected receptive intercourse, that I seroconverted.

These days, I'm fucking my negative boyfriend like crazy. We use a condom with plenty of lube every time, and I never come with my dick still in his ass. He doesn't suck my dick, and though I sorta wish he would, I'm cool with his choice. This is what prevention is about -- honest communication and negotiation. And caring about your partner. It's not about unenlightened, hysterical blanket statements from negative queens who merely know how to provoke.

-- Jim Pickett
Via the Internet

Dan Savage responds: *I've had similar experiences with positive boyfriends. But I eventually concluded that I was not comfortable with the risks involved with being fucked by a positive guy, even with a condom. I know too many guys who got infected that way, and, as shocking as this may seem, I don't wanna get infected. If Jim wants to let positive guys fuck him, that's swell. That's his right. If I don't, and if I don't think other negative guys should and I say so out loud, that's my right.*

You Really Like Us!

This publication, month in and month out, tells it like it is, like it or not. We are not all alike, and we all have different opinions. Please, whatever you do, don't change a thing. Keep up the good work.

-- Dennis Puleo
Elizabeth, New Jersey

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