Milestones

September 1, 2000 By Denny Lee

Tribute

HENRY NICOLS
1973–2000

It isn't your typical teenager who holds a press conference to tell people he has AIDS. But then Henry Nicols (pictured, right, at age 24) was no ordinary kid. The 1991 announcement by the 17-year-old Eagle Scout, a hemophiliac who got HIV from a 1984 blood transfusion, rocked not only his world of Cooperstown, New York (pop. 2,000) but shocked and saddened families and Scout troops across the country. Following the news about Ryan White and the Ray family, and just before Magic Johnson's media slam-dunk disclosure, Nicols' story further pushed open the AIDS closet in America. Within minutes of the 1996 debut of the HBO feature Eagle Scout, the Nicols family phone was ringing off the hook with calls from well-wishers. "I never really thought of myself becoming a role model," he told POZ in a December 1995/January 1996 cover story. "It's not something I said as a little kid—'One day, I'm going to be a role model.' It's just something that happened."

Nicols, 26, died in a car accident May 8.

Though he devoted his life to educating about AIDS, he still found time for mountain climbing, waterskiing, baby-sitting and dating. His older sister, Jennifer Nicols Curtis, remembers him:

Henry was 12 when we discovered he was HIV positive. Overnight, he became Peter Pan—the boy who would never grow up. We mourn all that he will miss and console ourselves with the knowledge that during his brief life he touched the hearts of millions.

For too many people, growing up means trading in the things that give joy for things that pay the mortgage. Adults will tell you that you should never cut watermelon with a samurai sword; it's dangerous and messy. Henry knew that sword-sliced watermelon tastes sweeter—and just watched the pieces fly. For grown-ups, eating out is a rare treat; it's expensive and fattening. Henry knew that by skipping the entrée and ordering five appetizers instead, he'd get funny looks, but would end up with all the good stuff—and no vegetables.

Mature minds will tell you that you need a solid 401K. Henry never worried about money. He focused on investments of a different sort—friendships with everyone he met. Henry would

entertain complete strangers with stories about living with AIDS, the side effects of his medications or how his sisters used to beat on him when he was too little to fight back. Henry's investments paid huge dividends: He lived and died surrounded by people who loved and admired him. It's tragic that Henry's life was cut short. But while he was with us, Henry was Peter Pan. He had magic.

Donations in Nicols' memory can be made to The National Hemophilia Foundation, Upper Hudson Valley Chapter, P.O. Box 3707, Albany, NY, 12203.

Trials

A federal jury in Los Angeles ruled in April that the **Walt Disney company** had coerced PWA **Robert Jahn**, a senior vice president, to relinquish benefits worth $2.8 million before his death. Disney reps had conducted their negotiations with Jahn as he lay in a hospital bed—just three weeks before dying of AIDS in May 1994. According to testimony from Disney representatives, Jahn embezzled $60,000 and offered to sign away his benefits in order to avoid charges being filed. Jahn's lawyers denied Disney's account and said their client was simply too ill to rebut the allegations. A U.S. district judge will specify the money damages to Jahn's estate, which brought the suit.

Funding

Uganda, home to more than 900,000 HIVers, will conduct vaccine trials through a $3 million partnership funded by the I**nternational AIDS Vaccine Initiative**. Launched in May, the three-year trials will be run by the Ugandan Ministry of Health and Maryland's *Institute of Human Virology*, founded by HIV codiscoverer Robert Gallo, MD. Among the tested agents is an oral vaccine that employs a "bacteria robot"—using weakened salmonella to deliver vaccine DNA to human cells, which then produce actual vaccine. If successful, the price could be as low as $1 per dose. Later that month, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases announced a $29 million grant to fund nine vaccine trial centers in the United States.

Careers

Joshua Lipsman, MD., former executive director of Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), became health commissioner for New York's **Westchester County** on May 15. His rocky 10-month tenure at GMHC, which ended last November, was tainted by staff walkouts; he also drew fire for ordering $5,000 worth of new office furniture on the agency's shrinking budget. As Westchester's health head, he will focus on clean beaches, teen smoking and a different virus: the West Nile variety.

David Pieribone left New York City's **Community Research Initiative on AIDS** (CRIA) in June to become associate director of education at AIDS Project Los Angeles. During his three years at CRIA, Pieribone earned high marks for expanding education efforts in the city's outer boroughs. Pieribone is replaced at CRIA by longtime activist **James Learned**, who joined in December to lead a hepatitis C initiative.

Deaths

Janis Giorgi, PhD, a maverick researcher who expanded our understanding of HIV's interaction

with the immune system, died May 30 after a two-year battle with uterine cancer. While most scientists focused on HIV itself, Giorgi, 53, trained her microscope on the fact that some patients apparently had a natural resistance to the virus, despite repeated exposures. As an immunologist at the University of California at Los Angeles, she pioneered HIV vaccine research and uncovered the role of CD38, a CD4 protein that helps doctors predict AIDS progression. In 1996, POZ named her one of the “50 Most Innovative U.S. AIDS Researchers”; she was also the subject of a 1998 New Yorker feature story.

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