How to Survive a Plague

April 2, 2012 By Regan Hofmann

Just in time for Mother's Day, this issue is a tribute to many remarkable moms (and others who provide motherly-like love in our battle for survival). First we have Eileen Mitzman, board president of Concerned Parents for AIDS Research, who lost her daughter Marni to AIDS in 1991 and has been fighting ever since to find treatments and a cure for AIDS.

She works with other moms, like Carol Gertz and Ivy Duneier who have their own special connections to people lost to and living with HIV/AIDS. Then there's Mollie Pier who fires up her custom blend of kosher activism in the kitchen of Project Chicken Soup in Los Angeles—the organization she started in the wake of her son's death from AIDS.

In our Q&A with David France about his new documentary *How to Survive a Plague*, we learn about all the families who held onto not just the memories of their love ones but also their videotape footage of pivotal moments in AIDS activism in the post-protease era. France is hoping that the footage and his movie will inspire another generation of AIDS treatment activists.

And finally there are the warriors who work in health care settings along the front line of the AIDS epidemic. They prove that even people living with HIV in the most challenging of situations can be linked to and retained in care. When we asked them the secret to helping people with HIV get healthy, they all said the same thing: Treat them like a member of your family.

It's been 16 years since I first looked my own mother, father and sister in the eyes and told them I was living with HIV. Then, my options for lifesaving treatment were slim and my odds of survival low.

When I told my family I was going to die, they said, "No you're not. Not if there's anything we can do about it."

The fact they considered my life worth saving even though I was living with HIV helped me as much as the pills. Survival hinges on the belief that your life is every bit as valuable as anyone else's. Everyone has the right to existing health care. We must stand together as a community and help the rest of the world see it too.

It's time to redouble our efforts with our families and friends. Together, we must make sure that everyone who needs treatment gets it while we continue advocating for a cure. The amazing thing about today's HIV drugs is that not only do they keep people with HIV alive, they can also help

stop the spread of the virus by lowering the risk of transmission by as much as 96 percent in some cases.

Today’s challenge is getting the drugs to all in need. Tragically, 28 million people around the world—nearly 1 million of them in America—aren’t taking them.

I’ve borrowed David France’s wonderful film title for this letter. Go see his movie. It lays out the very simple answer to how we end this plague: We study the best examples of AIDS activism, we reapply them, and we don’t give up until we make history all over again.

So, here’s to our amazing mothers and everyone who loves us with the same ferocity, and to coming together as one big family to fight for our collective survival.

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