# POZ 5TH Anniversary Issue: Profiles

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**TY ROSS**

**You waxed on about two-stepping in your 1994 interview…**
The country-western phase is over. It was fun while it lasted but I was just doing it as an escape. I live in Tucson now. My boyfriend's name is Gary Ragadio. I found out he had a crush on me through our doctor, who wanted to set us up. It was nice. I didn't want to date someone who's negative. I tested positive in 1989—I need to be on the same page as the people I'm with.

He's a Sagittarius and I'm a Leo—so we're a good combination. He's a cashier trainer at Home Depot and we get along great. We've been together three years and have a little dog and a cat. We don't go out that much and when we do we just kind of go out to a bar and hang out.

**How did you feel about being a sexy trailblazer baring your bottom to POZ?**
I was just interested in telling my story. Kevin [Sessums, his *POZ* interviewer] is used to hanging out with fancy people—I'm just this piddly thing. So I was sexualized, I guess. But it's not like I was on a horse.

**How has your health been?**
Well, I'm still not on meds. My viral load is like 32 and my T-cells are at 470. I attribute it to getting a lot of sleep and listening to my body. I haven't stopped drinking or smoking pot—maybe the low viral load count comes from marijuana. But I'm not too proud to do meds. If I need them, I'll do them.

**What has your connection to the HIV community been like?**
I don't feel part of the community. I barely feel a part of the gay community. Everyone's busy being all sexy. I'm like, people are living nowadays. Go out and get a job. Be somebody. There's no excuse for staying down.

**You sound like your grandfather…**
Maybe. The Goldwater thing might be an off-the-cuff candor that can be off-putting at times.

**KIYOSHI KUROMIYA**

People born in the late '70s or early '80s, they didn't go through that time when we didn't know

*what* caused AIDS. A *lot* has happened in 19 years. Some of those people don't know that if we didn't march on the FDA building in 1988, we wouldn't be here. That's why I put up with public speaking—and being on the cover of *POZ*—even though I like to keep a low profile. I know a whole lot of people can benefit from others being visible.

I've been on Remune since 1995 or 1996. I turned John James [editor of *AIDS Treatment News*] onto it. We were in a rented convertible on 40 miles of a dirt road along a canyon in Superstition Mountains. I told him all about what it's done for me and really got him interested. You could say he was a captive audience.

Right now I'm getting ready for the first public hearing about challenging the federal government's restrictions on medical marijuana. It will be held in Philadelphia's court house—within 100 feet of the Liberty Bell. We've got an excellent case and I know we'll win.

**RAVEN LOPEZ**

A 9-year-old bundle of energy at the *POZ* photo shoot, Lopez left no doubt about who was the princess among the PWAs that Saturday. Arriving at New York City's Zoom Studios with an entourage of aunts and cousins (mom Michelle was busy at her new job in Albany), Lopez stole the show—even from veteran scene-stealer Rebekka Armstrong. But don't worry, there were no *All About Eve* feuds and the two became fast friends. After a few shots, Lopez kicked off her shoes to match her new playmate and whispered to her aunt "Rebekka's so pretty." And while photographer Carolyn Jones was busy greeting a fashionably late Moises Agosto, Lopez got on her tip-toes and peered through the camera, perhaps looking into the future at a possible career.

**SHAWN DECKER**

In the years after being on the cover of *POZ*, I was able to do a lot of education, through speaking and writing. It's all been fun, but recently I succumbed to AIDS-burnout. I feel like it's time to follow some non-AIDS passions and do things I may have been too afraid to pursue before. Like my music.

Of course, being in the positoid world is a lot like being in the *mafia*, you never really get to leave. I accept that, but I think I'm going to use that energy to communicate with people who have a basic understanding of what I'm trying to say: people in the community who are living with HIV.

I've also met a fabulous woman, so if I'm not writing as much it's not because of a lack of material, it's because I'm enjoying life and taking it one day at a time.

**SUSAN RODRIGUEZ**

I just moved into a three-bedroom apartment that I love. I hated my old place and always jumped at the chance to go to conferences. “I can sleep in my own bed in a hotel? I’m there.”

Right now I’m working a lot with SMART University (Sisterhood Mobilized for AIDS/HIV Resources and Treatment) and the Pediatric Working Group at the PWA Health Group.

I put myself out there. I know I was greatly influenced by Raven’s mother, Michelle Lopez, when she was on the cover of *POZ*. I was in total isolation then. When a woman with HIV sees another woman being out, it reinforces the idea that there is nothing to be ashamed of. Michelle, Rebekka, even Raven—we all support each other.

**ANDREW SULLIVAN**

**What’s missing from the current conversation on AIDS?**
A sense of the distant future. I guess I feel able to navigate the immediate term but sometimes the sheer idea of living a lifetime with this is unimaginable. We’re out of the plague, but the disease in some ways is just as difficult to cope with. The lack of closure either way is a real psychological and spiritual challenge. Funny, but I feel lonelier in this thing now than I think I ever have before.

**So how’s your love life?**
It isn’t very fruitful right now. I guess I’m looking for a husband and am tired of dating when I know from the beginning it’s not really going to work. So I’m in a bit of a gay rut, I suppose. I have a sporadic sex life—but not much of a love life, I’m sorry to say. I’m just glad I have my friends. And I think I’m going to get a puppy. I’ve always wanted my husband to be loyal, loving and very hairy. So a beagle is a decent substitute.

**You’ve said that your diagnosis made you more clear about what you want to do with your life. Is it as much a motivation now as then?**
It made it clearer for a while, but now I feel the complexities have returned.

I wrote about this a little in Love Undetectable. I may be suffering HIV fatigue, and I don’t mean the clinical variety. It’s been six years and thousands of pills and too many thoughts. In a way, I want to take a break from it for a while, which is why I can see the appeal of “drug holidays” or “barebacking.” They’re a means of escape, which is understandable if not defensible.

**What’s next on your plate?**
I’m writing essays for the *The New York Times Magazine* and a I’m also fixing up my Provincetown shack for the summer.

**MOISES AGOSTO**

For the first time, I am pursuing the things that make Moisés happy. I moved back to New York

City after three years in D.C. and now work with Community Access, a private company providing direct-to-consumer health education.

My best friend and—in a past life—girlfriend, is Maira Santos-Febres, one of the most respected new writers in Latin America. We started an e-mail conversation and we hope to transform it into a book.

The second project is a series of short stories, *The Puzzle*. It's a multimedia art concept—the idea of my ex-boyfriend Chet Holcomb, who painted the t-shirt I'm wearing.

I am off drugs, clinically stable, considering some combination when new drugs are available.

And, yes, I am single again and waiting for that secure-in-himself man willing to share life without regrets or fears.

**REBEKKA ARMSTRONG**

I'm going through a lot of changes. I've made a big move from Massachusetts to New York City. I'm hoping to do a lot more for HIV and AIDS with the help of *Playboy* and the community.

Becoming more independent is a big thing for me now, too. I'm surrounding myself with people who respect what I'm doing. I'm trying to find Rebekka. I was lost for a little while—going through a divorce.

To the women out there with HIV who are in bad relationships, I say that if you don't see that it's gonna change, get the hell out. We deal with so much as it is just being women, then you add in HIV…. We try to take care of the world and we just have to take care of ourselves first. It was hard for me to admit, "Hey, I'm falling apart here!"

For me, I really need to work to feel good. Sometimes I have a hard time being taken as seriously as some other educators—not only for being a woman but for being a *Playboy* Playmate. They think I got where I am because of my looks—that's really what they think sometimes.

Antonia Bird is getting ready to a documentary on me. We're meeting in New York City when her new movie *Ravenous* premieres. She's going to follow me around with a camera and tape my life. It sounds weird but I'm used to it. From Day One there's been a camera there.

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