POZ 5TH Anniversary Issue: Year One

May 1, 1999

APRIL/MAY 1994

In his first S.O.S., founder Sean O'Brien Strub sets the goal. Did we score? Read on.

Dear Reader,
Which is it? (choose one):

1. There is no cure. There won't be one. AIDS has become "cancerized." AIDS activists are dead, burnt-out or bored. AIDS groups are marked by dissent and despair. Too much of the fight against AIDS is driven by greed, ego and power.

2. PWAS are living longer and healthier lives. A vaccine is around the corner. New treatments are coming on-line soon. AIDS researchers work selflessly for long hours. AIDS activism has helped drive the campaign for reform of the healthcare system. Astounding individual stories of courage, compassion and commitment abound.

3. A lot of both.

That about sums up AIDS, doesn't it? But it is not that black-and-white. The fight against AIDS has been made of thousands of small steps forward and thousands backward. *POZ* intends to be one of the steps forward. *POZ* will cover AIDS from the eyes of everyone affected by the disease. We hope to shed light on the politics, people and practical issues and, in the process, help PWAs lead longer and healthier lives. In my view, for a newly diagnosed person, information is a more important first step than any pill, potion or prayer.

In "Ty Ross Comes Clean," the Goldwater heir crosses the subject/ writer, positive/negative line with Kevin Sessums.

Ty and I return to my hotel room after *Sunset Boulevard*.

"What are you going to call this story?" he asks me.

"What about L.A.I.D.S.? Get it? First of all, it spells laids, which has a certain connotation. And then, you you know, LA AIDS."

Ty looks hurt by my title suggestion. He starts to pout.

“What’s wrong?” I ask. “You don’t like it?”

“But I don’t have AIDS … not yet,” he quietly tells me and lies down on my bed. I kneel beside him and, as my mother did so long ago, reach out and touch a face that needs comforting. I lie down on the bed beside him. Slowly, hesitantly, I begin to kiss his pout away. We hold each other tightly before we begin to remove our clothes. Naked, our bodies find the ways that they fit. I kiss his neck, his chest, that scar that surrounds our heart.

“Bob Hattoy on the Record” by Donna Minkowitz gets President Clinton’s kitchen-cabinet PWA in hot water.

Hattoy: ACT UP had one advantage in dealing with the Reagan and Bush administrations—that anger totally freaked those people out. They were so shut down emotionally. But in this administration, that changed. [AIDS czar] Kris Gebbie, [health secretary] Donna Shalala, the president all say, “I feel your pain.” And I want to say to them, “No, you don’t feel any pain.” I want to say to Gebbie, “If you think AIDS is an educational process, then educate yourself, honey! It’s a war, and my side’s dying.” This feeling-your-pain business, there’s something evil about it. It doesn’t sit well with me—it’s the banal evil.

JUNE/JULY 1994

In Larry Kaplan’s “Bill T. Jones on Top,” the famed choreographer doesn’t dance around sex and death.

Jones: When [my lover] Arnie was dying in the hospital, we had an active sexual life. It’s no accident we were together 17 years. The last time I had sex with him was six weeks before he died. We’re talking real sex. And then about two weeks before it was all over, he was so weak, and I was so in need, worn out and tired, I just took his hand and put it to my face and held it there, and I remember feeling real satisfaction. It was sexy and very complete.

I spend a lot of time preparing for the shock of something to happen, and I use the terminology of the black church to describe it. ’Getting ready’ it’s called. It’s something my mother used to sing about. What they mean is that on that fateful day when you get to lay down all of your worries and let go of everybody, will you be ready? That’s what my work is about, holding my head up, loving the man I love, facing the things that scare me, acknowledging my fears of being unappreciated or penniless, and not being crippled by them, operating as a 42-year-old creative person at the peak of my powers absolutely unsure if tomorrow I’ll still be able to do it.

In “Oral Sex Just Ain’t What It Used To Be,” POZ *columnist David Feinberg captures the catch-22 that is safe sex for many PWAs.*

It had been a long time since I had spent an entire afternoon devoted to oral sex. It was Sunday. With glee and sheer abandon I took the No. 1 uptown to nosebleed territory and found myself at Columbia University. GMHC and Columbia’s Gay Health Advocacy Project had sponsored a community discussion on “Oral Sex and Possible HIV Transmission.” I left unsatisfied. I wanted

concrete figures and guidelines. I wanted to be able to measure on-site the probability of transmission using calipers and LCD metric devices. I wanted someone to definitely say that “data consistently suggests the per partner infectivity is about 1 percent,” in which case, I would stop after 99 partners. But the point is moot. I’m already positive. I’m left with the possibility that I might have seroconverted even if I hadn’t had unprotected anal sex at 9:45 pm on June 3, 1982, at 27 W. 11th St., Apt. 10, New York City.

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1994

“Pedro Zamora Leaves Us Breathless” may sound overheated, but his searing honesty with Hal Rubenstein will make a fan out of you.

Zamora: My generation doesn’t know a time when AIDS didn’t factor into a decision about sex. So it’s hard to excuse going to a club and finding young people not wanting to protect themselves. But what bothers me about dating is, the guy who comes up to you, says hi and, in the course of half an hour, is all over you, wants to take you home, never mentioning the words *AIDS, HIV* or *condom*. So you go home and somewhere between leaving the bar and getting into the bedroom, you say, “I’m HIV positive,” and suddenly it’s a big deal. That pisses me off. If you’re concerned *now*, you should have been that concerned about it when you were all over me in the bar.

Without a doubt, the hardest part of being HIV positive, of having this life-threatening virus, is that you don’t feel sick. You don’t feel there is anything you shouldn’t be doing. Yet you’re supposed to plan your life around it. The reality is, I’ll probably be dead in five years, but I try not to think about dying. But I do know the one thing I don’t want is a Cuban funeral.

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1994

“Proud Mary” Fisher, the first woman on our cover, tells Maureen Dowd about angling for love after HIV.

“Many people assume that if you have HIV, you stop having needs and wants, that you’re not sexual anymore,” Fisher says, hugging one of her animal-print pillows like a little girl. "People have said to me, ’I thought you just stop doing that.’

“And I must say, in the beginning, because of everything attached to AIDS, you don’t feel very sexual. There’s a period when you’re dealing with all the other issues of life and death. And then all of a sudden you realize you’re living. I made a decision to live a day at a time, and live as a mom, and then I had to stop and think: Does this mean that this part of being a woman is no longer a part of life?”

“The community I come from is not as welcoming for a woman with AIDS as the gay community is to itself. My world in dating and relationships is small to begin with: I’m divorced, widowed, whatever. A mom with two children, fairly independent. You know, you add HIV to it and the pool of potential men goes down to practically nothing.”

DECEMBER 1994/JANUARY 1995

In “A View With a Room,” art critic Stephen Greco extols the virtues of voyeurism.

It was last spring when I noticed that the interior of the apartment, unlike those of most ground-floor living spaces in New York City, was visible from the sidewalk. The show inside changed frequently. One time, votive candles would be burning on the mantelpiece; another time, disco music would be blasting into the street. Sometimes, in the background, you’d see a red glow emanating from another room or, in the foreground, the blue flicker of a video screen. The element that changed most dramatically, though -- and my biggest hint that whoever lived there might be gay -- were the slogans such as “One Million and Counting” and “We Are All Victims!” New ones came all the time.

If only more people had seen it. It was late in the summer, after I’d finally decided I should introduce myself, that the slogans grew more spiritual: “You’re Born. You Die. You’re Reborn.” Before long, I saw the windows draped with ghastly looking clear plastic tubing and IV bags. Then the show was over. A few weeks ago the blinds were pulled and lights are no longer visible inside.

Of course, I regret waiting until too late to learn the man’s name -- David -- let alone to say hello and trade vegetarian recipes. I keep hoping that there will be some way that his boyfriend, if he remains there, can keep the windows open to memorialize an act of creativity that was as natural as drawing breath. But closed as they are, the windows still say something: That time is indeed finite. If you want to invite yourself into the company of gifted people who are inventing new ways to live, you should do it now.

FEBRUARY/MARCH 1995

Bruce Edward Hall teaches “The ABCs of HIV”

PWA stands for what I am.

AIDS stands for a bunch of words I can’t spell.

HIV stands for a bunch of other words I can’t spell and gave me AIDS.

T-cells are what my friend Leon has so few of that he named his after the Seven Dwarfs. At least until Sneezy died.

AZT stands for something unpronounceable that some say will kill me and others say will keep me alive but which I keep forgetting to take anyhow, even though I keep them in this cool little beeper pill-box thing.

FDA stands for an organization that tells people with less than a year to live to wait two years before they can get into a clinical trial of a drug that may extend their lives by six months.

PhD is a degree you need to actually figure all this out on your own.

HIGHLIGHTS

Goldwater scion **Ty Ross** broadcast that one of *POZ*'s main goals is to celebrate the sexuality of PWAs when he appeared *au natural* -- and then bedded writer Kevin Sessums. FOB (that's *Friend*, not *Fellator*, of Bill) **Bob Hattoy** raised a fuss in the White House with a let-it-rip about how Clinton staffers just don't get it when AIDS is the issue. The flap ensured that the prez got our premiere issue, and maybe a safe-sex tip or two for Monica Lewinsky.

In June/July '94, dancer/ choreographer **Bill T. Jones** lamented his late lover and cursed the closeted. Vanquishing a 1995 high-profile slam of his "victim art," Jones is still dancing as fast as he can, currently in *Ghostcatching*. To *POZ*'s own "You're glamorizing AIDS" naysayers, Sean Strub said, "It's about survival, stupid."

HIV educator and heartthrob **Pedro Zamora** graced our pages with an interview one part *Real World* and 99 parts real world. Sadly he died three months later, the first of only three (out of 46) cover subjects to do so. **Larry Kramer** wrote about taking his first AZT capsules in **Barbra Streisand'**s bathroom, and AIDS mavens broke their like-buttah nails thumbing through our first *POZ* 50, a list of the top dogs in AIDS policy (40 are still barking).

Maureen Dowd put down her Liberties (*New York Times* column) poison pen to describe the Republican party's HIV gadfly, **Mary Fisher**. Last March, a lipo-laden Fisher made headlines when she angrily quit her combo, demanding more research on women.

Native American covergirl **Lisa Tiger** was looking for love and found it three years ago when she adopted *five* children. Then, last November, Tiger, now 33, married "a wonderful man." **Elizabeth Taylor**, an expert on Mr. Right Now, recounted a retort to a man who said HIV was only transmitted through the rectum: "I said, 'You *asshole!* No, the vaginal juices, *dear*!" It's a line worthy of sardonic sex columnist **David Feinberg**, who died as December '94/ January '95 went to press.

God of the gay party circuit **Thom Collins** knows enough dish and disenchantment to fill 10 anniversary issues, so stop by http://www.openyourheart.org/thomcollins for the scoop. Also in February/March '95, SWF prevention activist **River Huston** began her beloved -- to prisoners -- sex column.

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/POZ-5TH-Anniversary-Issue-Year-One-1493-1941