# POZ Legacy: Pedro Zamora

MTV's Real World star told the truth about life, sex and AIDS

February 1, 1995 By Hal Rubenstein

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He sat across from me at this little table at the Ben & Jerry's in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood last June, speaking with such passion it was melting my frozen yogurt. I tried to meet his gaze, so that he'd think he had my undivided attention, but I was repeatedly being distracted by four observations: 1) This could wind up the easiest interview I'd ever done; 2) It could be the best interview I'd ever done; 3) If this recorder isn't taping, I'll run it through everything I own with a Black & Decker logo; 4) Dear God, where the hell did Pedro Zamora get lashes like that?

Perhaps my distractions were a defense against being overwhelmed. Meeting someone who's smart, handsome, gay and 22 is nice but not beyond the realm of possibility. But encountering a gay man who's unhesitatingly articulate, relentlessly direct, remorselessly honest, focused as a raygun in a Bond film on teaching others how to live with compassion and self-esteem, blessed with a pair of brown eyes that define the adjective "bedroom" and a cadence as rhythmic as the mambo, HIV positive and 22 is about as likely as Hillary Rodham Clinton unveiling a revised version of her universal health care plan before the 104th Congress.

Interviews usually begin with 15 minutes of the weather / them Knicks / the food's supposed to be great here babble, but I never found out if Pedro's milkshake was any good. He didn't ask where I got my sweater. Instead, he responded to my first, deliberately casual question with a three-minute answer of single-minded um-kinda-like-you-know-free clarity. Though half my age, Pedro seemed my contemporary because he'd already acquired the maturity to process past experiences for immediate application toward the future. "I don't think I have a lot of time," he said, so he wanted to make certain to tell me everything he knew because "other people don't know how fast things happen when you find out the news." He knew a lot. We ran out of tape. And now everything has happened so fast.

He's not the first person with AIDS to come into my living room or yours by way of that most invasive screen. Yet, losing Pedro Zamora takes me right back into lost-another-best-friend hell because, in search of ways to reach us, he revealed intimacies, intimacies shared with such an absence of shame, he removed the embarrassment and fear of anyone else admitting, "Yeah, me too." When he said that "the fear kind of sneaks up on you when you least expect it," you no longer felt weak for admitting your terror. His death is the ultimate example that no good deed

goes unpunished.

So now I watch that runty dirtbag Puck doing exactly what he set out to do when he got on *The Real World* -- get himself a spot on MTV -- and I want to rip the guts out of the programming fool who fell for his bogus skanksta rap. I listen to Pedro's MTV housemate Rachel admit "I never once thought about it -- I never thought he would get sick," and I have to suppress the urge to smack her hard because naivete is no longer an excuse. President Clinton called Pedro before his death and told him, "All of us are very proud of you. Is there anything I can do?" Would you like a list?

Start with this one. "Who's going to pick up my torch?" asked Pedro. The young man was smarter than I am, however. He never reprimanded the government for very long. Because he never believed in them. "It has to come from us," he said. "From people other people can believe in. I think they can believe in me. I want to make sure that they hear me." They did. Now they don't. And there are definite signs it may get quiet again. Three weeks after this country elected the self-described "normal people" to Congress and 10 days after Pedro's death, I was in his hometown and overheard a South Beach bombolino declare that he wouldn't go to any AIDS benefit anywhere because "it's probably full of germs we don't even know yet." Right before he died, Pedro Zamora asked, "I wonder who's going to keep on screaming?" The next voice you hear had best be your own.

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