Publisher’s Letter

December 1, 1999 By Brad Peebles

I tested positive in March 1994--right when the first issue of *POZ* hit the newsstand. A few months later, I was in a magazine show and saw *POZ* for the first time--issue no. 3, with Pedro Zamora on the cover. I remember flipping through it and thinking, “This HIV I now have, this confusing, unsettling, fear-creating thing--there’s a whole magazine about it!” But despite being a huge fan of Pedro and MTV’s *The Real World*, I couldn’t bring myself to buy the magazine. I had the courage to leaf through its pages in the store but not to take it up to the counter, pay for it and take it home.

The shame I felt about becoming infected precluded my telling anyone. After all, I had grown up and come out as a gay man in the age of AIDS. I had been in ACT UP. The sexiest man I ever dated, James Assatly, who died in March 1993, had AIDS. Close friends of mine were positive. I felt that there was no possible explanation for my getting infected, and that no one could understand it.

The next spring, I saw posters of *POZ* with Larry Kramer’s Cheshire cat-like grin wheatpasted all over Manhattan. There was such a mythology around Larry that I thought if there was a chance any of us would survive, it was because of his loud, and wise, mouth. I wanted to hear what he had to say. Inspired, I went back to the same newsstand, bought a copy of issue no. 7, read it cover to cover and sent in a subscription card.

I read almost every line of the issues that began to arrive in the mail. I remember issue no. 9, in particular, featuring Ilka Tanya Payan. That cover is burned in my memory, not only because of Ilka’s beauty and fabulousness but because her presence on the cover confused me. What *was* this disease that included a Dominican TV superstar and me in the same community? I saved that issue with the others, hidden in the back of my closet or (the newer ones) covered up by a pile of *Martha Stewart Living* and *Rolling Stone* in the living room.

In the year or two after my infection, protease inhibitors were on the horizon, but their effectiveness was uncertain. People were still dying, including one of my closest friends, John Cook, in April 1995. I thought long and hard about my future and concluded that I might have five or 10 years to live. Anything beyond that seemed unrealistic. My very first thought after testing positive had been that I wouldn’t live long enough to pay off all those student loans.

POZ offered hope by challenging my deeply rooted conviction that AIDS was a terminal illness. It shwed me people--tons of them, from all walks of life--willing to come out about about their serostatus. The treatment information made me feel prepared to confront the medical

complexities and uncertainty of survival. Together, these things gave me the determination to take care of myself--to get the best possible medical care and to rebuild my self-esteem by coming out.

Still, I was hesitant to take a job at the magazine when it was offered to me. My first six months here, I was in the closet about being positive. The price I paid for that was severe. I could not avail myself of the support of colleagues, friends or family. I could not mine the knowledge of staff members in a way that might have bolstered my outlook and improved my health. And I could not reconcile my former activism as a negative gay man with my cowardice as a positive one.

More than five years after testing positive, I can confidently believe that survival is possible. The dawn of protease inhibitors in 1996 (see “The AIDS Decade” in this issue) was a watershed in the epidemic, marking a distinct turning point. The drugs contributed to a collective sigh of relief that we needed and deserved.

But that sigh is too often also one of apathy and denial. For as real as the treatment successes are for many, they are unavailable to more. The epidemic rages on, particularly in communities of color here and across the globe. Difficult-to-treat resistant virus is emerging. A wave of new infections threatens three generations of gay men. The social, psychological and scientific complexities of AIDS are far from understood, must less overcome. We seem to be waiting for the next Larry Kramer or the next ACT UP.

Many of us are now in some sort of deja vu-like second act, whether we are newly infected or whether we are still here by virtue of a Lazarus-like recovery. And so goes *POZ.* We will continue to articulate and contribute to an evolving survivor movement that includes all people living with HIV--one of which you, dear reader, are an important part. We will continue to provoke, critique and advocate for change. Where there are answers, we will provide them. Where there are non, we will look for them, together.

--Brad Peebles
Publisher

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/Publisher-s-Letter-12098-1790