Publisher’s Letter

July 1, 2005 By Megan Strub

As the publisher of POZ and other health information—and as a new first-time mom—I think about health all the time. Mine, my family’s and my seven-month-old son’s. He’s still wobbly but growing fast and is already trying to talk.

As I watch Henrik struggle for his footing—and, soon enough, his voice—I also think about our own growth at POZ, our own voice and how it has evolved over the years. With my husband and baby, I have my own family, but POZ is my family, too. Eleven years ago, when my brother, Sean, founded the magazine, he asked whether I would help. I thought I might be here for a few months, maybe a year.

We were just trying to get enough advertising revenue to enable us to get the magazine to more people, to give the magazine—and the community it serves—a bigger voice. Back then, most of what I knew about HIV was as a result of having an activist brother with the disease.

When he was first diagnosed, we were living together. I would often tag along when he went to meetings or demonstrations. I remember one rainy night in 1985 when we tramped through the mud of the parking lot of a gay bar in New Hope, Pennsylvania, putting flyers for a demonstration (in NYC) under windshield wipers. I thought nobody would be able to read the flyers because they were getting wet. He told me it didn’t matter—they would understand that there was a demo, that there was energy to fight.

Later, as he became more ill, I took a larger role in the management of the magazine. When he started treatment for various opportunistic infections, I would look in his medicine cabinet, write down the names of the drugs and call up the drug companies to try to sell them advertising in POZ. On most occasions, the companies did not even yet realize how engaged people with HIV were in their treatment, and I had to educate them—from scratch.

The HIV community and POZ have changed since those early days. Next month, we will introduce a redesigned POZ—an exciting new look and direction for the exclusive, cutting-edge AIDS coverage POZ is known for. July will also mark the official relaunch of POZ.com, which will help us reach a larger group of people with more resources, services, news and views. Our sizzling POZ Personals debuted earlier this year; thousands of people have already signed up. We recently launched Real Health, a magazine designed to reach African- and Caribbean-American communities with information on HIV and other health concerns, like asthma, diabetes, heart disease and hepatitis.

I am excited about the growth of our company and how it enables us to serve more people and spread our message of patient empowerment. But I temper my excitement with caution. Despite all POZ has undertaken to embrace new readers and follow the epidemic wherever it goes, this month's cover story demonstrates how much remains to be done.

Kai Wright's "Southern Discomfort" explodes the myth that AIDS is primarily a Third World crisis. Painting a nightmare scenario of slashed funding, drug waiting lists, stigma and fear, Wright uncovers the desperate plight of HIVers in the American South, especially African-American women.

Despite the tremendous medical gains that have been made, the battle against AIDSphobia remains enormous. Every day, POZ and thousands of organizations and individuals across the country fight to create the avenues and technologies that can lead people with HIV to the information and care they need—without fear, without discrimination, without self-hatred. Yet still, in Alabama, Kai Wright reports, many HIVers are afraid to walk through a clinic's front door. The fear is especially pronounced among African-Americans grappling with a down-low culture of sexual denial.

With the relaunch of POZ and POZ.com and the launch of Real Health and RealHealthmag.com, we hope we can combat this deadly fear. Stigma anywhere affects people with HIV everywhere. We must continue to fight it or we could become a nation of 50 Alabamas.

I hope Henrik never has to face any type of stigma from HIV or anything else. He will know that his uncle lives with HIV, and he won't be afraid if others know, too. And he'll understand the power that comes from finding his own voice.

The voice of POZ and all people with HIV is getting louder and stronger. Let us know if you like what you're hearing. Consider yourself part of our family.

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