# S.O.S.—August 1997

Survival has its advantages, but what obligations does “new” life bring?

August 1, 1997 By Sean Strub

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It’s now been a year since the disappearance of my viral load and the unexpected return of my energy, sense of well-being and confidence in my future. And it has been a most extraordinary year. I’m grateful, to be sure. But I’m also fascinated by the vagaries of fate.

When I found out I had HIV, I never questioned why I got it. I never wondered who “gave” it to me and I never stopped to ask, “Why me?” It just happened, and that was that. Now that I’ve been granted an extension of my lease on life (which, like all New York City lease extensions, comes with a hefty rent increase, this one measured in drug costs), I have found myself asking these big questions. Why me? Why have these treatments worked so well in my sick body and so poorly in the bodies of others? Why was I given this extra time, while Robert Woolley, Connie Norman, Tom Stoddard and other friends who died in the past year were not? Survival clearly has its advantages, but doesn’t it impose new obligations as well?

To bear witness; live for the moment; create a meaningful legacy, or what? I would be arrogant to be ungrateful for renewed life, but I miss the lack of expectations and, often, lack of judgment others grant the dying. I feel renewed and I enjoy -- with a childlike exuberance -- revisiting places, experiences and sensations I thought were forever part of my past. I appreciate life even more and am humbled by my own inexplicable survival. But sometimes I feel reluctant to assume an implied responsibility to accomplish something more important or different with my “found” time, a politically correct survival, if you will. I can’t live my life -- even my “new” life -- mired solely in obligation and gratitude. Survivors or not, we’re all a mixture of human strength and frailty, good and evil.

At its inception, *POZ* was often accused of cruelly dangling the unrealistic prospect of survival before the desperate eyes of doomed, terminally ill souls certain to die horrific deaths. Now that some measure of survival is available to many people with HIV, don’t be surprised if *POZ* is soon accused of becoming a belligerent, self-centered voice for the ungrateful. Enjoy *POZ* and enjoy your survival. Every day.

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