The POZ Decade-Bare Witness

May 1, 2004

Who: 80 HIVers, artist Spencer Tunick, *POZ* staffers
What: Our 10th anniversary cover
Where: Restaurant Florent, New York City
When: 7:30 a.m., March 13, 2004
Why: “Pose nude with POZ,”the invite read.

We asked as many HIV positive men and women as we could reach to collaborate with artist Spencer Tunick—famous for his installations of large numbers of naked people—and create our most important cover ever. It was classic *POZ*: provocative, communal, possibly illegal, potentially moving and meaningful (or alternately a big bust) and done days behind deadline.

HIVers line up in the cold at 7 a.m. outside Florent

On the bitter-cold Saturday of the shoot, a line of men and women stood outside Restaurant Florent at dawn, waiting to take off their clothes and stand naked and positive for all the world to see. The crush of press covering the event was incredible. Once inside, Tunick worked with the HIVers like a master, directing them to stand, lie down, touch, spread their legs, look into one another’s eyes—and stop laughing.

Most participants found the experience inspiring, even healing, but like the 10th anniversary of *POZ*—like HIV survival itself—it also raised intense, clashing emotions: pride and defiance,

vulnerability and shame, passion and compassion, desire, love and…loss. Plus, a bold new statement of PWA empowerment was literally beamed around the globe.

We had started the day looking for a good cover; we ended it looking forward to the future. Next year, we march naked on the Capitol.

How does it feel to be a part of an all-naked, all-postive sculpture by Spencer Tunick? These personal takes capture the magic.

"I was nervous, tired, hungry and worried about how my penis would look in the cold. Got to Florent, had a cup of coffee, and then I was ready to get naked. **The incredible sense of solidarity was overwhelming.** Lying in a stranger's arms, naked, made me feel so close to what humanity is all about. Male, female, gay and straight—this was something I'll remember."

"PWAs have had to deal quite often with **our bodies changing due to meds—premature aging, lipo, wasting.** And to be with my peers knowing they too have had to deal with these issues was comforting. We don't often have the place to let it all hang out. It was kind of tribal."

"Something very special happened, and I am not sure how to explain it. In a world where our looks, our clothes, our bodies—muscles, dick, abs—are all so important, somehow this was all cast away, and even **bodies themselves became incidental to who we are.**"

"When we first got there, everyone stayed by people they knew. **Within minutes of being naked, we became one, without fear,** our souls without judgments."

"My friends and I have been to Florent many times, but now I'm the only one left alive. I did this in their memory as well as for those, like myself, who are suffering but fighting like hell to survive. With each camera shot, I prayed for my friends and was comforted and amazed when **I actually felt the spirits and love of all those we have lost.**"

"The experience ripped up **a deep, ugly scar that had taken decades to heal**—and rehealed it by the time I had retrieved my bag of clothes behind the counter."

"I felt nothing but love and friendship among my many brethren, the type I rarely feel in the community at large where statuses are unknown and where we often encounter the 'Negative UB2' attitude. Acceptance filled the air."

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