To the Editor

June 1, 1999 By Kathleen Reeves

Barks and Bites

I received your issue on pets the very day my 14-year-old dog died in my arms. I, like (March 1999) POZ coverboy Greg Louganis, can attest to the healing power of a devoted pet's pure love and companionship. Rin was just a puppy when I tested positive and was always there for me. It is so wonderful to feel a dog's unconditional love. I'm a better person because of Rin. She'll always be a part of me.

Dennis Lee
Salt Lake City

I was disappointed by your choice to feature former Olympic diver Greg Louganis on the cover. My "pet peeve" with Louganis is that he capitalized on AIDS and came out as gay because he could no longer hide his rapidly progressing illness, even from his posh home in Malibu. His timing was convenient, but a tad too late.

Peter T. Coombs
Ipswich, Massachusetts

Congratulations on a fantastic issue. Thank you for the wonderful pictures of my darling Greg Louganis and for the best article I've ever read about him ("Dog Days in Malibu"). At 73, I am Greg's oldest and No. 1 fan. You made it clear that he is not just another pretty face with a gorgeous body. However, you didn't mention that he also has a wickedly delicious sense of humor.

Helen Headlee
Via the Internet

Am I the only one who is sick of seeing Greg Louganis in magazines and reading about his "tough" life? We don't need to know about celebrities' lives—we need to know how the average Joe handles HIV. POZ is good at doing that, so please don't get caught up in celebrity mania.

Michael Burns
Searchlight, Nevada

The Straight Dope

I really liked Dope Fiend's Corner ("Junk Mail," March 1999). I totally identify with Lillian Thiemann's experience. I, too, was infected during my dope-shooting days. There are many who perceive even sober IV drug users as a disposable population. Some people qualify their HIV with a disclaimer—"but I got mine from a blood transfusion" or "a faithless lover." Me? I don't have no-fault AIDS. I've got nothing to blame but my own behavior, which makes it an easier burden to bear.

I don't use drugs anymore, and I'm stronger, wiser, happier. I'm not about to allow anyone to treat me as a leper. Thiemann is right on target: Dope fiends have a lot of skills, or they'd be dead, as the lifestyle kills off the weak and the unlucky. So treat us as lepers at your own risk: If we've survived our lives, we are pretty tough characters—the kind of soldiers needed for this fight.

Maureen Cassidy
Fort Worth, Texas

All About Evelyn

Barton Lidice Benes' Aunt Evelyn's Letters speak to my life, reminding me of myself, my friends and family. I'd like to rip each column out of *POZ* to keep, but I'm hoping that Benes has collected these pieces of art in a book. If so, I'd like my own Aunt Evelyn.

Dan Roberts
Via the Internet

Stand Up for Your Rights

I am insulted by some comments in the article "Naming Names" (March 1999). A former volunteer at GMHC, I worked on a coalition that lobbied against Assemblymember Nettie Mayersohn's partner-notification bill. We did the best we could with our limited resources and volunteers. Instead of blaming GMHC for this loss, we should all look within our own communities. How many of us read about this bill and just assumed that agencies like GMHC would protect us?

Wake up! AIDS is no longer on the front page, and the money isn't flowing like it used to. We need to shatter the illusion that GMHC will always be there for us. We need to stand up for ourselves and make our voices heard. Nettie Mayersohn and other assembly members need to see the real face of AIDS again, hear our stories and see the fear in our eyes.

Michael J. Chisena
New York City

Bookmark This

As a faithful reader of *POZ*, I was so glad to see the mention of the America Online chat room Positive Living ("Secrets and Lies," February 1999). Having lost a spouse to HIV, I found the Positive Living room to be the most wonderful AOL site. Please encourage readers to visit.

David M. Lee
Orangeburg, South Carolina

Bare and Tear

Spare me the romantic, intellectual BS about bareback sex. Stephen Gendin's attempt to canonize Tony Valenzuela was crap ("They Shoot Barebackers, Don't They?" February 1999). To have sex without condoms, as a bottom or top, is an avenue for lethal infection.

Welcome to Jerry Falwell Land! You're doing his job for him.

John L. Ponce III
Via the Internet

I'd like to commend Stephen Gendin on his wonderful article. Tony Valenzuela reflects questions, statements and attitudes that come from the majority of us pozzers. I applaud him for his fight and integrity. I enjoy the controversial articles and alternative ways of thinking that *POZ* brings to its readers. It shows that you trust us to take what we want from the articles and leave the rest.

Steve Keller
San Francisco

How could Stephen Gendin not have asked if Tony Valenzuela a) has opted to forgo any med therapy or b) is on some drug regimen? A pretty significant hole—the question, not the subject.

Ged Kenslea
AIDS Healthcare Foundation
Los Angeles

I applaud Tony Valenzuela's courage for talking about the life that many men have chosen. I am disturbed by the reactions he received. The truth has the tremendous power to force people to examine their beliefs. As long as there are sexually active men, there will be unprotected sex, willingly engaged in by folks who've made an informed decision to do so. To not acknowledge this is a mistake of major consequence. While I don't bareback, I realize how much I miss the intimacy that Valenzuela speaks of.

Jim Norris
Culver City, California

That Stephen Gendin has proved himself to be a loose cannon among your stable of mostly terrific writers is self-evident. However when that cannon is turned on the lives of readers, it is surely time to say enough is enough.

Scott James
Via the Internet

To Tony Valenzuela and those who consider infected semen a “gift”: Walk in the shoes of a PWA whose days start at 6 a.m., swallowing 15 or more pills ranging from antibiotics to antifungals and including protease inhibitors and antivirals. Repeat every eight hours. Add two or three bags of IV gancyclovir or foscarnet, and a once-a-month treatment of aerosolized pentamidine. Aside from the virus itself, you also have to combat diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, fatigue and headaches. If you endure those nasty side effects, you can only hope that the drugs are effective.

As long as there are people like Valenzuela and those who look for “gift givers,” AIDS will be with us for a long, long, long time.

Anthony Mombro
Wilmington, Delaware

I’m a 68-year-old lifelong defender of liberal causes, but “bug chasers” make me draw the line. If gay sex is so great, why do gay men court death as a high? Or are such risky acts the ultimate narcissistic self-indulgence? How can straights be asked to empathize with these barebackers? I don’t. Life should be more than a child’s trip to the circus.

Patricia Calvert
Chatfield, Minnesota

I am a psychiatrist who has been treating people with HIV for 17 years. Imagine my surprise at the February 1999 issue. Seeing the headline, “Bareback,” I read on—with disgust. Complimentary copies of *POZ* are presented to our patients under our good name and we are truly offended. Presenting barebacking proponents as having anything valuable to say is irresponsible. When I got to the “Safer Barebacking Considerations,” I couldn’t tolerate it. I discarded all copies of POZ, then called every HIV service agency I’ve worked with and recommended they do too.

Charles J. LoPiccolo, MD
Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

I am amazed at your glamorization of a subculture that continues the spread of HIV. From the get-go—with your cover heralding “AIDS activism’s most misunderstood man” nude on a horse and the author’s smitten tribute to the affirmations of “No Rubbers”—a bias and lack of responsibility shone through.

Michael Scarce's "Safer Barebacking Considerations" were provided by *POZ* to me as a draft for my comments. The 544 words I submitted were not run due to "lack of space." Instead the copywritten material was forwarded to the author without my authorization. He misappropriated a partial quote, which *POZ* published. It seems it's not only the barebackers who are ethically challenged! You completely downplayed or omitted key issues I addressed, such as negotiated unprotected behaviors within a framework of HIV testing and shared serostatus.

Prevention practices are a collective challenge that requires individual, community, corporate and governmental reinforcement. Why would *POZ* run an incomplete piece that could weaken a responsibility the HIV community bears? You have tested the threshold of compassion in many and have created new "considerations" in the distinction between those who are unintentionally infected and those who choose deliberate infection.

Devin Kordt
Aggressive AIDS Prevention
San Francisco

POZ *responds:* *We asked several prevention activists to comment on Michael Scarce's "Safer Barebacking Considerations," with the understanding that we'd select from these pieces the best quotations for a sidebar. Due in fact to space constraints, we decided to run the most cogent criticisms—one of which was Kordt's—in the body of the article. Although we regret that Kordt feels his words were "misappropriated," we intended to use his opposing view to balance the piece.*

A Point Well Taken

Thanks for the info on peripheral neuropathy in "Numb and Number" (January 1999). I agree that "d-drug" [ddI, ddC, d4T] neuropathy seems to be most difficult to treat. Patients need to monitor their symptoms on these drugs. Several patients report helpful results from taking nutritional supplements mentioned in the article, especially L-acetyl-carnitine and alpha-lipoic acid. Thousands can attest that acupuncture helped them relieve some neuropathy symptoms.

Gene London
American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine
San Francisco

A Doll's House

Barnes & Noble removed *POZ* from its stands because of a controversy concerning the September 1998 issue's condom insert. The company apologized for this "apparent error" and maintained that the magazine would be quickly offered for sale again. However, after several months of receiving promises and excuses from both the magazine and store manager, POZ has yet to reappear in the East Hanover, New Jersey, store. Incidentally, there seems to be no shortage of

books on Beanie Babies but nary a one on the disease that last year killed 2.5 million people worldwide.

Wayne Rannelli
Livingston, New Jersey

Bill's Content

In November 1998 an excerpt from Andrew Sullivan's *Love Undetectable* read: "Gay liberationists promoted the tragic lie that no avenue of sexuality was better or nobler than any other…, that even in the teeth of a viral catastrophe, saving lives was less important than saving a culture of 'promiscuity as a collective way of life.'" ("The Eye in the Storm").

His assertions constitute a remarkable grouping of smarmy smears and egregious falsehoods, the sort of thing I'd expect to find on right-wing talk radio. As a gay liberationist, who was politically active in the crucial decade from '75 to '85, I can attest that from the beginning of the movement there was vigorous debate about "avenues of sexuality" and that at no time in the complex history of the community's response to AIDS did we put promoting or even preserving promiscuity ahead of saving lives.

What's creepy is Sullivan's paranoid assertion that gay-lib "insiders" were complicit in a "communal bloodbath." In fact, gay liberationists were almost never insiders; we were dismissed by straight politicians and largely ignored by the gay masses. Interestingly, in San Francisco, the one place where we achieved a degree of political power, many gay activists supported the divisive 1984 bathhouse closings.

In some ways I might feel sorry for Sullivan, who is clearly not a happy person. But his slander of gay liberationists—the most humane, generous and brave people I knew—is intolerable.

Bill Weintraub
Via the Internet

Corrections: *In the May obit for Vernon "Copy" Berg, photographer Marcus Leatherdale was mistakenly referred to as Berg's partner. Berg's lover was the late Paul Nash.*

In the March issue, the art on the To the Editor page was incorrectly credited to Ben Fishman.

In December 1998's Annual Givers' Guide, the NAMES Project's services weren't listed. The NAMES Project does prevention outreach and gives grants to other AIDS organizations.

POZ *regrets the errors.*

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/To-the-Editor-10112-9392