To the Editor

December 1, 1998

Pill Chill

Now that Sean Strub has had his drug vacation, I hope all is well (S.O.S., September 1998). But I want to say to Mr. Strub: People like me follow life with you and are supported by your faith and fight. Don't take the low road—it is not the right thing nor the health-conscious thing to do. I have followed your progress, now you have proven the axiom "No pills = viral progression."

Jeremiah Andrews
Miami

I know many people who stopped their therapy and reported how well they started feeling. This, however, led others to stop therapy. In most cases, viral loads increased dramatically and CD4 cells dropped. I will carry copies of Mr. Strub's September editorial with me, and when any of my fellow "club" members start talking about stopping their drug regimen, I'll provide a copy for their information.

Richard A. Gowan
Churchville, New York

Kudos and a bit of compassion to Mr. Strub for his editorial. I'm an AIDS educator in a large university town in Florida. Many of the young adults think there is a cure for HIV or that you can stay on meds for a while and—poof!—you're cured. I'll use your editorial as a very frank and positive reminder that HIV, so far, is here to stay.

Mark J. Stuart
Gainesville, Florida

Teen Beat

I enjoyed the September POZ "Youth Issue." When it comes to the topic of HIV, both youth and the elderly are often neglected. The ideas and attitudes in this issue were admirable (Justin LiGreci's in "Growing Up in Public") and questionable (some of the young adults' in "Talking 'Bout Their Generation"). More credit should be given to gay youth who grow up so fast in today's world.

If only I had listened to my parents more when I was growing up, I wouldn't have made many of the mistakes I did as a young adult, including contracting HIV.

Dan Devine
Houston

We were surprised to see no mention of our group, Bay Area Young (BAY) Positives, in your September youth issue, except in the Sean Sasser interview ("Reality Check"), where we were inaccurately called "Bay Area Positives." As a peer-support agency for people 26 years old and younger with HIV, we were disappointed that we weren't notified of this youth-specific issue. In fact, the resources list does not include any Bay Area organizations. With POZ's wide circulation, a mention of BAY could have reached many young people with HIV in need of our support.

The Staff
Bay Area Young Positives
San Francisco

BAY is located at 518 Waller St., San Francisco, CA 94117. You can reach them by phone at 415.487.1616 or e-mail baypoz@aol.com.

I want to express how super your magazine is and how much I, along with other PWAs, am grateful to you. I share my subscription with as many as 30 to 40 guys in order to promote AIDS awareness and prevention education here in prison. All are super-satisfied and amazed at the wide range of information in POZ.

The September youth issue put a jolt in my heart as my eyes filled with tears. Feel the world out here expressing our appreciative love.

Jay Armstrong
Texas Dept. of Corrections
Huntsville, Texas

I've used various POZ articles as references in my graduate work and teaching. Your magazine has educated me tremendously, and I look forward to each issue and the lessons therein.

The youth info that you ran in September was great, but unfortunately, by the time people are 17 and have already been positive for a few years, their perspective is jaded. We need to reach youth 16 and younger with prevention messages.

The computer survey described in Gazette ("All Wired Up") was used in a prevention program that focused on urban African-American youth, was conducted by researchers at the University of Maryland and was recognized by the CDC as one of five "programs that work" in the nation (for more info, e-mail Jennifer Galbraith at jgalbrai@umaryland.edu). The researchers found that in

addition to kids being more honest when communicating via computers, parents were more willing to let them participate because they regarded the computers as an educational tool.

Gail Broder
St. Louis

Let's Get Physical

What kind of doctor performs a gloveless physical exam on a person whose immune system is compromised ("You Can't Touch This," September 1998)? I kept reading the Gazette article to get to the part about the patient's reaction to having someone's filthy hands messing about in their body, but it never came. I've always interpreted the CDC guidelines on universal precautions to be for the protection of the *patient* as well as the medical worker. While I understand that hand washing is effective, gloves are better—for the patient.

Kathleen Beechinor
Nelson, British Columbia, Canada

Parking Violation

I'd like to make it clear that I did not make the offensive "trailer park" comment on HIV in the semen that appeared in Gazette ("In the Sack," September 1998). First of all, it is factually incorrect—the semen has not been proved to be a sanctuary site that the drugs can't get at, and the study is speculative. Secondly, I talk to people who live in trailer parks pretty regularly, and that kind of stereotypical urban inference bores me.

Richard Jeffreys
AIDS Treatment Data Network (ATDN)
New York City

POZ *regrets the error.*

We Get Your Point

In the Gazette piece about the ad promoting needle exchange in New York City ("And on the 7th Day…" September 1998), the campaign is introduced as the first of its kind in the United States.

But over 18 months ago, the San Francisco AIDS Foundation HIV Prevention Project introduced a citywide campaign, "NXCH: (888) 48 YOUTH." Not only did we produce bus-shelter posters in locations where young IV-drug users congregate, we also did wheatpasting, card distribution through street outreach, and stickers in phone booths. Calls to the toll-free number went from virtually nonexistent to nearly 1,000 per month.

The pro-bono ad agency that developed the campaign, J. Walter Thompson/ SF, won the Outdoor Bulletin Board Association's award in 1997. Log on to our website at www.sfaf.org and click on the "HIV Prevention" button to check out this campaign.

Derek Gordon
Communications Director
San Francisco AIDS Foundation

Gender Benders

To say that I am disgusted by Scott Sproat's misogyny would be putting it mildly (To the Editor, September 1998). Sexism is sickening and should never enjoy our silent complicity. Queer men, especially those of us with HIV, should be taking up the cause against this reactionary behavior. Ask yourself, "Where would we be without our sisters?" Answer: A whole lot worse off.

So, to Scott: Your suburban-mindedness has no place on this planet, much less in the AIDS community. To the rest of us: Let's make sure it doesn't.

Paul Dalton
San Francisco

I guess I shouldn't be surprised that some queen would find the June 1998 issue offensive. I, and countless others, have fought to be equal as gay men in a straight world, and now those of us living with HIV must fight to be equal in a healthy world.

I'm a gay man with AIDS, and an AIDS educator who goes into schools and churches in my southern Tennessee community. I teach that AIDS is not a gay disease. Why can't some gay men realize this? We are not special. We are part of the human race just like Rebekka Armstrong and all the other women and children living with the same disease called AIDS. I encourage you to bring even more diversity to *POZ*.

Tim Jones
Columbia, Tennessee

I'm sorry that gay guy didn't like Rebekka Armstrong. I met her at the *POZ* Life Expo in Houston, and she's a very nice girl. It's a big magazine. Skip the parts you don't like. Because like it or not, we're all in this battle together.

David Porter
Deer Park, Texas

I'm a negatoid longtime reader of POZ. I tell my positoid friends that if there's one thing they should read, it's your magazine.

I loved the June 1998 issue with Rebekka Armstrong as the centerfold. I've supported so many positoid friends through that horrible time when they're ashamed of their bodies and don't want to be seen in public. To see that wonderful woman with her gorgeous body was heart-healing for me and, I'm sure, for thousands of others.

I wasn't surprised, though I was saddened, to see the letter from the man who was horrified by breasts. I've heard this misogynistic attitude before. My heart got some extra healing from your wonderful and hilarious response. You may have lost one subscriber, but you're keeping this one.

Liz Augustine
Via the Internet

I'm a single father with AIDS. I have three handsome young sons. It was refreshing to see a hottie like Rebekka Armstrong on the June 1998 cover of POZ. Maybe you can hook us up; my kids need a mom. Thanks for a great mag!

Curt Barrett and sons
Vista, California

Straight Talk

I've been reading *POZ* for about two years and have found it to have some very helpful info on HIV treatments. But, as a single father with HIV—I have two girls, both negative—whose wife passed away, I'd like to see more articles on heterosexuals with HIV. It's been hard raising two kids and taking care of myself.

Stephen P. Yurcik
Kew Gardens, New York

Stiles Files

In response to the letters from the Mark Stiles Unit (To the Editor, August 1998), I can't deny that the issues mentioned do exist, but I noticed there were no suggested solutions. Lack of knowledge, improper training and a shortage of funds are the real issues.

This unit originally was designed as a maximum-security facility, where employees were trained with a "security first" type of mentality. That same mentality exists to this day, despite the fact that this unit now consists mainly of HIV positive inmates. A real solution would be to bring in a medically trained staff of officers and better educate them about the issues that medical inmates experience.

Many people have written to you whining about the living conditions here, but has anyone asked about the efforts that the medical staff is making to improve our living conditions? Has anyone told

you about the Unit Hospice Care Program? In the end, I believe that everyone involved here—inmates, officers, medical staff and even the administration—wants change.

Ed Boggess
Mark W. Stiles Unit Hospice Director

Regarding the letters about the Mark W. Stiles Unit: I am an inmate who has been in that unit for four years, and I agree with the complaints about pill-window access and untrained security staff. But there are those who really stick their necks out for us, such as nurses Savoy, Barksdale and Moore, and the psychology and dental departments, and more. We have a new warden who is experienced in running a medical facility, and we welcome him and the changes to come.

We were allowed to start a hospice program run by inmates, the first of its kind. Ms. Savoy, Ms. Barksdale and Ms. Moore see to it that if we must die in prison, we'll at least be as clean and comfortable as possible. They cannot grant us clemency and we don't expect it, but a kind hand is the humanitarian thing to do. We don't have to die alone.

So, let it be known that we inmates at the Stiles Unit are not all ax murderers and that we do seek positive, healthy lifestyles. Nevertheless, we know why we are here, and all we ask for is fairness. After all, are we not still Americans?

Gerard Natiello
Mark W. Stiles Unit
Beaumont, Texas

Corrections: In the November 1998 Letter From Canada ("Double Crossed"), due to an editorial error, POZ *misidentified PWA Johanne Decarie as a woman with hemophilia. In fact, hemophilia among women is incredibly rare, and Decarie does not have that condition.*

In the October 1998 issue, POZ *neglected to credit make-up artist Michael Ransom for his work on the photo shoot for the cover and cover story ("Climb Every Mountain").*

In the introduction to "Open Wide, AIDS Ride" (October 1998), the origin city of the 1998 Washington, DC, ride was incorrectly identified; that ride began in Raleigh, North Carolina. The final ride of the 1998 season was also misidentified; the last AIDS Ride is in Texas this year, October 5 through 11. The $40 million raised for AIDS organizations refers only to revenue through the end of 1997.

POZ *regrets the errors*.

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