Tributes

We pay homage to the 10 deceased HIVers who once lit up our cover-minus our own beloved Stephen Gendin

May 1, 2004 By Staff

Pedro Zamora
(1972–1994)

There was nothing very real about MTV's reality show *The Real World* until HIVer and AIDS educator Zamora showed up on the program in 1994. As America watched, the 22-year-old openly gay Cuban immigrant with the bedroom eyes disclosed to his roommates, fell in love—with a black man—and suffered through PCP pneumonia. But our August/September 1994 cover subject wasn't just a poster boy. "I'm frustrated with programs that are more concerned with offending people," he told Congress, "than with saving lives." Says costar and pal Judd Winick, "He accomplished more in 22 years than most do in a lifetime."

Ilka Tanya Payán
(1943–1996)

"I look beautiful," Payán said in a speech to the U.N., "but AIDS is an ugly and terrible disease." An attorney, an actress—she once had a role on a telenovela—and a member of New York's Human Rights Commission, Payán announced that she had AIDS to a roomful of TV cameras in 1993. (By then, she had already founded a program for immigrant PWAs at Gay Men's Health Crisis.) The media ate Payán up—we put her on our August/September 1995 cover. She died of AIDS at 53. "Ilka was full of love and passion," recalls GMHC colleague Jairo Pedraza. "She always wanted to fight for more for her community."

Tom Stoddard
(1948–1997)

Likened to a "young Kennedy" in our October/November 1995 cover story, the dashing Stoddard was one of the leading gay-rights advocates of his generation—he piloted Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund to national prominence. When he tested positive in 1989, he hid his diagnosis—"I didn't want people to believe I was an advocate for my disease," he told *POZ*—but later disclosed and served as vice chairman of amfAR. He died of AIDS at 48. "A main theme of Tom's life was hope," Walter Riemen, his lover of nine years, says. "That sense of hope continues to be justified by events he didn't live to see."

Henry Nicols
(1973–2000)

In our December 1995/January 1996 cover story, Henry Nicols told *POZ* he didn't consider himself a role model, but he was one: In 1991, Nicols, then a 17-year-old high school student and Boy Scout, decided to reveal that he was a hemophiliac with HIV—as part of a Scout leadership project. Instantly, he was in demand at schools nationwide. In 1996, he was profiled in the HBO documentary *Eagle Scout*. Nicols died as a result of injuries sustained in a car accident in May 2000. "He showed us the way during a difficult journey. It's our responsibility to continue the tradition," says his father, Hank Nicols.

Michael Jeter
(1952–2003)

At a Hollywood AIDS symposium in 1997, Jeter, the openly gay, Emmy- and Tony-winning actor who costarred with Burt Reynolds in the sitcom Evening Shade, stunned colleagues by taking out a pillbox of HIV meds and announcing, "I want you to meet a friend." The compact, hunky redhead with the mischievous grin appeared on *POZ*'s January 1998 cover with this quote: "I was the whore of Babylon." He died in March 2003 of undisclosed causes, after completing work on *The Polar Express*, with Tom Hanks. Executive producer Jack Rapke remembers Jeter's "boundless energy and talent."

Kiyoshi Kuromiya
(1943–2000)

Kuromiya knew plenty about injustice: This tenacious AIDS activist was born in a Japanese-American internment camp. Kuromiya cofounded ACT UP/Philadelphia and campaigned for medicinal marijuana use (he posed for *POZ*'s February/March 1996 profile while toking up). His greatest legacy is the Critical Path AIDS Project, a website that offers free Internet access to Philly HIVers. Kuromiya was also "the most important person in stopping the Communications Decency Act," which would have criminalized posting AIDS-prevention information online, according to friend and *AIDS Treatment News* publisher John James.

Mary Clark
(1964–1999)

Coming out as positive in prison is courageous. Posing for the cover of *POZ* with a big smile while in prison, as Mary Clark did for the November 1998 "Prison Blues" issue, is sheer audacity. As an inmate at New York's Bedford Hills Correctional Facility serving time for drug possession, Clark was active in AIDS Counseling and Education (ACE), the oldest prisoner-run peer-education group in the country. Clark died while still in Bedford Hills. ACE cofounder Kathy Boudin remembers Clark's winning grin, frequent laughter, and empathy. "She was always there for other people," Boudin says.

Suzana Murni
(1970–2000)

A fashion designer who tested positive at 25, Murni was the first woman to go public with HIV in the conservative Muslim nation of Indonesia. “We value politeness at all times,” she said. Murni also refused meds until shortly before her death to protest lack of access in her home country, setting a bold precedent for future activists. “Anger has been the motivation that drives me,” she told *POZ* in July 2000, the month she posed as the cover girl for our Asia issue. Murni died the same year of AIDS-related lymphoma. “Suzana was very hopeful. Even in the face of incredible stigma, she felt that change was possible,” recalls former *POZ* editor Angelo Ragaza.

Marsha Burnett
(1954–2002)

Rape, drug addiction, separation from her kids, hep C, HIV—Marsha Burnett endured it all, as we recounted in our June 2001 cover story on long-term survivors. “When God feels like I’ve done all he wants me to do, then I’ll go,” she said. Burnett, who died of heart failure in 2002 after a 14-year battle with HIV, left a peerless legacy as an African-American AIDS educator and activist. On a trip to Nicaragua, her colleague Njoki Njehu remembers, she “put condoms on cucumbers. In a very Catholic country, it was an outrageous thing to do, but Marsha always had the courage of her convictions.”

Herb Ritts
(1952–2003)

POZ’s April 2003 cover story honored the handsome, soft-spoken superstar photographer—and asked some tough questions. Ritts’ positive status was an open Hollywood secret, yet when he died of pneumonia, the press never mentioned that he had HIV. “[It] wasn’t something Herb was really public about, but it had nothing to do with being ashamed,” singer k.d. lang told *POZ*. Ritts supported several AIDS charities and “helped a lot of people who couldn’t afford their own HIV medications. He was very generous,” recalls friend and Ritts model Mark Findlay.

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