Carry On

There are many ways to be of service through HIV advocacy.

February 14, 2022 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

I tested HIV positive in 1992, the day after my 22nd birthday. However you slice it, I've been living with the virus for three decades. I'm grateful to still be here and of service.

As a journalist living with HIV, I've been lucky to be of service simply by doing my job here at POZ. I believe in advocacy journalism. To me, there is no conflict in presenting facts while having a point of view. We strive to do that every day. By doing so, we aim to serve our readers.

I hope you noticed my use of "advocacy" instead of "activist" to describe our journalism. The distinction is subtle but not insignificant. In this special issue of POZ, we'll be focusing on activism and activists.

In my mind, advocacy is an umbrella term that includes activism. Advocates have a point of view, but activists are like partisans. Not that there's anything wrong with that, of course. Our cover subject, Peter Staley, certainly fits that description.

As a long-term survivor and a member of ACT UP, Peter is arguably a textbook example of an activist. The actions that he's participated in are legendary. Remember the one where an activist unfurled a 20-foot "Silence=Death" banner on the awning of the Food and Drug Administration building? That activist was Peter.

He recounts that moment and countless more in his memoir, Never Silent: ACT UP and My Life in Activism. From childhood to the present day, the book details his life as an activist. The excerpt in this issue is from the chapter titled "Searching for ACT UP." Just as AIDS activism itself is blossoming, Peter begins to feel ill and somehow finds his way to ACT UP. Click here to read more.

As his memoir makes clear, Peter has been consistently engaged in activism ever since those early days with ACT UP. From his creation of a meth awareness campaign to behind-the-scenes engagement with the director of Dallas Buyers Club to his current support of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), he continues to fight the good fight.

In uplifting Peter's efforts and the work of so many others like him, a question does come to mind: What makes an activist? Plenty of people living with HIV as well as our HIV-negative allies are engaged in activism but struggle to consider themselves activists. What gives? Read the essay by

Mark S. King that tries to answer that very question.

In his essay, not only does Mark share his own journey to identifying as an activist, but he also tells the advocacy stories of Queen Hatcher-Johnson and Matthew Rose. Spoiler alert: It turns out they're activists too. As Queen and Matthew demonstrate, the HIV epidemic has changed and so has the activism.

Case in point: Kalee Garland. Born with HIV in 1986, she struggled as a child living with the virus. As a youth, only her family and close friends knew she had HIV. In 2020, Kalee took a leap of faith and created the Instagram account @aidsbaby86. She was surprised by all the support. She now uses Instagram to fight HIV-related stigma. Read about her activism at the end of this issue.

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