We Are the Champions

This special issues honors 25 years of POZ.

April 1, 2019 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

I will always remember the day I was told I have HIV. In 1992, the day after my 22nd birthday, I was informed by my commanding officer in the United States Marine Corps Reserve that I had tested positive for the virus.

I sat and cried for a long time that day, then I told my best friend, and we sat and cried together. The advent of effective HIV treatment in 1996 was still a dream when I tested positive. I never expected to see 30. The next few years only reinforced that dread as I lost loved ones to AIDS.

My experience is far from unique. The early '90s were trying times in the epidemic. The initial suffering of the '80s had been compounded by the continuing crisis—with no end in sight. It was a challenge to believe that tomorrow would be better.

POZ founder Sean Strub thought otherwise. Frustrated by the media's coverage of the AIDS epidemic, he launched the magazine in 1994 to amplify the voices of people living with HIV. Sean, who tested HIV positive in 1985, sold his insurance policies to invest everything he had into the launch.

As Sean tells it in Body Counts, his 2014 memoir, "We tried to tell the story of the epidemic in all its complexities, through the experience of those with HIV. And we would do so in an attractive, engaging, and hopeful format. On glossy paper."

Twenty-five years later, POZ persists. We've seen the fight for effective treatment lead to the fight for expansion of access to that treatment. We've gone from countering the fear of people who have HIV to promoting the fact that being undetectable means not being able to transmit the virus sexually.

Through it all, the core of our mission has remained unchanged—to be a mirror for the HIV community. From cure research to celebrities, from treatment improvements to personal stories, our coverage reflects the journeys of all of us affected by the virus.

In that spirit, for our 25th anniversary cover image, we created a collage of people (as well as dogs, artwork, a Muppet and more) spotlighted on our covers through the years. Although it's not comprehensive, the image is representative of our content. Click here for a complete list of names.

For this special issue honoring 25 years of POZ, we caught up with 25 advocates who were deeply affected by their appearance on the cover. Whatever the effects, appearing in POZ marked a milestone. Click here to read more about what POZ means to them.

I certainly know what POZ meant to me as a reader, well before I had the honor of being editor-in-chief. I don't recall exactly which cover I saw first, but I can say for sure that I was captivated by the Pedro Zamora cover. That was the third issue of the magazine. Click here to read an excerpt of that interview.

Our inclusion of the Q&A with Pedro is meant to honor all those lost to the virus. He is one of the countless people from the pages of POZ who are no longer with us. Remembering our history must always include keeping our late brothers and sisters in our thoughts.

As a long-term survivor, Sean knows what it means to remember. He has certainly made the best of his survival—including serving as executive director of Sero Project and mayor of Milford, Pennsylvania. Click here to read more about our founder's life after POZ.

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