We Are Young

November 10, 2014 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

I was 22 when I tested HIV positive. Now that I'm 44, that was literally half a lifetime ago. Back then, I remember feeling hopeless. I definitely didn't feel empowered to take charge of my own health, let alone feel like I could change things for the better, for myself or others.

I have certainly changed my mind since then, but it took a while. I needed time to mourn the life I wouldn't have before I could embrace the life I did have. I needed time to grow older before I could believe I would grow old. I needed time to accept I would have a life before I could plan for it.

Everyone has their own journey; that was mine. Having spent my youth expecting to die, I admire the courage of young people living with or at risk of the virus who have joined the HIV/AIDS fight. Their hope for a better tomorrow is based on their belief in being part of the solution today.

Even if a cost-effective cure and vaccine were here now, we still would most likely not get to the end of this epidemic without the leadership of the next generation. We must encourage them to lead. To that end, it is my great honor to introduce the 2014 POZ 100, which celebrates youth power.

Our fifth annual list spotlights the efforts of 100 unsung heroes under the age of 30. These young leaders come from across the country—and some from around the world. Some have HIV and some do not, which seemed appropriate. Regardless of their HIV status, everyone should be encouraged to join the struggle. Click here for the list.

When it comes to empowering the next generation, Adam Tenner walks the walk. As executive director of Metro TeenAIDS in Washington, DC, he helps youth provide HIV education. His group also hosts youth leadership programs that have trained hundreds of young health workers and activists. Click here to read more about his work.

As World AIDS Day—marked annually on December 1—again focuses our attention on the pandemic, the United Nations continues to craft its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Advocates are working to include HIV/AIDS in the post-2015 U.N. agenda.

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) is coordinating those efforts, which include getting young people to advocate for HIV/AIDS in the SDGs. For more on UNAIDS, click here to read our Q&A with Regan Hofmann, the former POZ editor-in-chief who is now a policy advisor in the UNAIDS Washington, DC, liaison office.

We all may not be young in years, but we all can strive to stay young at heart. In that spirit, I'd like to acknowledge yet another milestone for POZ this year. We marked our 20th anniversary in the June 2014 issue. Now we mark our 200th issue. On behalf of the entire POZ family, both past and present, I thank you for reading. You are why we keep doing what we do. Stay strong, know hope.

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