Flesh and Blood

May 12, 2014 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

Twenty years, two decades, a score or even a generation—call it what you like, but for me reflecting on such a length of time feels like the end of an act in a play. Intermission. Time to get some air before the curtain goes up again.

As POZ marks 20 years of service to people with HIV/AIDS and our allies, I know how proud our entire staff is to be a part of telling the ongoing story of the epidemic. We will continue being a mirror for the HIV/AIDS community.

Reflecting back on what we see isn't always easy because people living with HIV are a diverse bunch. We have a virus in common, but it often feels to many of us that HIV is all that we share. However, if that were true, POZ wouldn't still exist.

As someone living with HIV for more than two decades, I believe the fact that we share this virus also means we share in the related stigma, discrimination and criminalization. Thankfully, we also share in the benefits of overcoming such foes.

Effective treatment has changed the image of the virus from a certain death sentence to a chronic condition. We all share in the comfort of knowing that effective treatment can now lead to a virtually normal life span.

For all of the hope that we rightfully share, we also share in the grief and loss that come from HIV/AIDS, which cannot —and can never—be swept neatly away. Too many souls were claimed too early by this virus. We must never forget them.

In this issue, we celebrate the survival of 20 people who have graced our cover. Doing so was an act of defiance, if it was anything. So many of our former cover guys and gals have passed away, as well as many more from within our covers.

To the countless faces I never knew across the country and around the world, may you rest in peace. To the many faces who graced the pages of POZ these past two decades, may you also rest in peace.

I would be remiss, however, if I didn't take this opportunity to put actual names down on paper to

underscore the fact that those we've lost to this virus were once flesh and blood.

To Anthony, I say that I'm sorry we never gave you what you needed most. To Manny, I say that I'm sorry I didn't get to say goodbye. To Rafael, I say thank you for being a role model for me at a time when I had few. And to Michael, I say that I understand now and I forgive you.

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