



Personal Farewell

In a blog post titled “A Personal Farewell to aidsmap From the Activist Who Was There,” POZ contributing writer Mark S. King gives the last word to long-term survivor and HIV journalist Gus Cairns. Below is an edited excerpt.

September 23, 2024 By Gus Cairns and [Mark S. King](#)

The abrupt closing of aidsmap.com, the stalwart HIV and AIDS information and resource site based in the United Kingdom, has sent a mortal shudder through the ranks of those with a history in the HIV arena. The loss is incalculable.

It is also a very personal milestone for people like Gus Cairns, an HIV survivor and journalist who discovered his powers of activism, and his identity as a leader, through his work with aidsmap and the groups that preceded it.

Gus is a master storyteller, and his remembrances on social media about his years in the thick of HIV drama, triumphs and losses are dishy and fascinating. His behind-the-scenes tales literally chart the history of HIV treatment, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and Undetectable Equals Untransmittable (U=U) and bring a lot of its most important figures to life.

Why am I talking? Gus should tell you himself. Here is the post Gus shared on social media. Enjoy.

From Gus Cairns:

I’m so, so sad—and angry—about the demise of aidsmap. Sad to lose an organization that served as a nexus of HIV activism, joining together academics, physicians, policymakers, activists and patients in a channel they all read and relied on (I have the emails to prove it).

And sad to see the sunset of one of the most significant chapters of my own life, with an accompanying feeling of loss of contact and identity.

Angry because aidsmap was a shining example of the patient-led organizations that grew out of activism and Made a Difference, and we still don't seem to have a way of sustaining those beyond the emergency phase of HIV.

The AIDS crisis was the first time in history that the fight to tame a violent plague was initiated by its targets, by people like me, instead of health professionals. But, like much of the rest of the HIV movement, it remained reliant on pharma money too much for too long, and we should perhaps have taken steps to wean ourselves off it many years ago. Too late now for aidsmap, I hope not for others who need to take note of our demise.

Aidsmap changed my life. It helped turn me from someone who might have muddled along being an occasional helper into someone who helped bring about change himself, in league with some brilliant colleagues.

Aidsmap allowed me to pair information with activism. We gave readers the facts and then used the facts—but just the facts—to compel change.

Knowledge is power, and aidsmap understood that better than almost any other organization I know of.

But it also understood its own need to survive to spread that knowledge. In that respect, I'd pay tribute to Caspar Thomson, the executive director at the time I joined. Caspar quietly kept the SS Aidsmap engines running, nurturing its crew through the turbulent seas of finance while the wild-eyed Darwins on deck steered toward whatever new Galapagos of fact loomed on the horizon. (Matthew Hodson, his successor, was more the Admiral on the bow deck.)

Other aidsmap colleagues have played crucial roles too. I'd especially pay tribute to Roger Pebody for nurturing and mentoring other writers from all over the world to equip themselves with the scientific literacy and eloquence to be mobilizers of change too.

The discipline aidsmap's mission demanded had its own reward. I was given a key to a huge and ever-growing mound of information, ready to fish out a gem for anyone who needed it.

I'm honored to have been one of the Monks of AIDS, one of the chroniclers of the story of How We Beat AIDS.

