



Sharing a Life, a Diagnosis and a Future

Mark S. King covers every angle in *My Fabulous Disease: Chronicles of a Gay Survivor*.

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Writer and long-term HIV survivor Mark S. King has never shied away from sharing his opinion. His thoughtful essays about surviving with the virus—and living life fully in the here and now—are emotional, funny, challenging and always bracingly honest.

Many of those essays, written over the course of four decades, have been collected in his new book, *My Fabulous Disease: Chronicles of a Gay Survivor*. They have been culled from King's GLAAD Award-winning blog, *My Fabulous Disease*, as well as from his newspaper columns and magazine pieces, including work published in POZ. The book also includes a couple of fictional essays.

My Fabulous Disease depicts people living with HIV as much more than their diagnosis. In his essays, King muses on everything from his survival during the early days of the AIDS epidemic in Los Angeles to his present-day life as a married man living in the Atlanta suburbs. In between, he reflects on lust and love, drug addiction and recovery, loneliness and community, and more.

In the book's foreword, Olympic gold medalist Greg Louganis writes that King "presents people living with HIV as the multi-dimensional people we are, who fall in love, crack jokes, have sexual misadventures, and are funny and thoughtful—and sometimes not so thoughtful. Because, after all, we are human." Following are some excerpts:

On surviving AIDS in the 1980s, from "Once, When We Were Heroes":

"There was a time when we knew all the intensive care nurses by name, when a phone call late at night always meant someone had died. And just who, exactly, was anyone's guess."

On recreational sex in general from "My Gonorrhea Nostalgia":

"During my early years of recreational sex in the busy gay mecca of West Hollywood, I caught The Clap so many times I called it The Applause."

On a one-night stand with Rock Hudson from "Revisiting My Sad and Trivial Night With Rock Hudson":

"Magazines and television news stories were talking to me specifically," he writes. "ROCK HUDSON HAS AIDS, the headlines screamed, AND MARK KING WILL DIE AS WELL."

On stigma and ignorance, from "Will HIV Ever Be Safe Enough for You?":

"The greater threat, folks, isn't positive guys who think they are undetectable but are not. It's men who think they are HIV negative and are not. But we'd rather stay focused on the positive person being at fault because, well, people with HIV lie a lot. We miss doses constantly because we have a death wish or we're too busy finding our next victim....

"If you still have the arrogance to believe that you could win the HIV Powerball Lottery and be the one person who gets infected in ways that science has disproven, you're perfectly entitled to that point of view.

"Here are some helpful suggestions, however. Carefully step away from the computer and don't touch the cords because 50 people die of product-related electrocutions each year. Walk slowly to your bedroom, being mindful of debris in your path because slip-and-falls kill 55 people every single day. Now slip into your bed of willful ignorance and try to make yourself comfortable."

On shopping with Larry Kramer, from the fictional "Shopping at the Mall with Larry Kramer":

"It was hard enough getting him to the mall at all. I had arrived at his place just in time to break up an altercation between Larry and the mother of a Girl Scout from whom he had ordered 80 boxes of Thin Mints, which were presently scattered across his front porch and had suffered the wrath of Larry's ACT UP boots.

"Larry had no intention of paying for the cookies, as it turned out. He was ferociously screaming that his non-payment was to help bankrupt the corporate pimps EXPLOITING THAT LITTLE GIRL!

Both the mother and the girl in question had taken refuge in their car, the girl crying hysterically about not wanting to be exploited, while I managed to hold Larry back from beating their Honda with a lawn sprinkler until they made their eventual escape.”

On seeking community at the expense of maintaining ties to his biological family, from “Did I Abandon Family for Gay Community?”:

“Maybe I kept a distance, geographically and otherwise, out of some deep shame, as if it would simply be better for all concerned if I stayed away. Or perhaps it was pre-emptive. I’ll leave before you tell me to leave. Through the years I collected a patchwork of close friends, and I even adopted gay catch phrases like ‘we chose our own families’ because maybe it’s true. And then again, maybe I was comforting myself with substitutes.

“When I tested positive in the 1980s, the stretches between visits home grew even longer. I couldn’t bear the thought of household dilemmas—Would they watch which drinking glass I used? Should I hold the baby?—so I decided to sit out those years by visiting less, even if it meant the chance of dying 1,000 miles from my nearest relative.”

On hitting rock-bottom, from “The Terrifying Crystal Meth Story I Have Never Told”:

“He is sitting across from me. Seconds earlier, we had both injected ourselves with meth.... But even in my delirium, I have the feeling that something is off. I am blinking through watery eyes and have begun to focus on him. He is staring at me, his gaze fixed with an intense and completely unexpected contempt.

“And there is a gun in his hand. A gun a gun a gun a gun.

“‘You’re not who you say you are,’ he says, softly and suspiciously. He trembles from the impact of the meth. I have no response. I don’t know what he is capable of, or if the gun is loaded, if he will pull the trigger, if this is a sadistic sex game. I met the man maybe an hour ago. I wonder if you can die of fright.”

On his relationship with his now husband, Michael, from “The Odds of Love”:

“You would think that after many years writing about living joyfully with HIV that my own happiness would be a given. That’s hardly been the case. After several false starts and some complete misfires—primarily due to my own deficiencies—I had stopped believing I’d ever get the whole relationship thing right. What are the odds of getting another chance, after so many wasted ones?

“‘I am not a very good boyfriend,’ I told Michael early on. ‘I’ve either been terribly immature or in active drug addiction. I’ve never been faithful, or even very thoughtful.’

“‘That doesn’t mean you can’t be,’ he replied, as if it were the simplest response in the world, as if none of my past faults had any bearing in the here and now. Suddenly it clicked, a switch in my head I had been grappling with my whole adult life, and Michael’s statement made perfect sense.”

