HIV and Latinos Down South: A Message From the POZ Editor

In this special issue dedicated to Latinos, we highlight others who are making their mark.

September 26, 2022 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

It was undoubtedly hot this past summer. The long days and nights of back-to-back heat waves tested us all. I run hot, so to speak, so even average heat can tax me. I always enjoy the cooler air of spring and autumn.

I still equate the idea of heat with the South. I was born in New York City, but I spent two summers in the South for Marine Corps boot camp and schooling. I appreciated those experiences, but I never wanted to go through that kind of heat again.

I did, however, gain an appreciation of the South and its people. A major difference between those two summers and now is how the Latino population has grown. As these new arrivals provide the region with benefits, they continue to face challenges and barriers.

Our cover subject, Elias Diaz, knows these issues well. He is a Mexican-American man living with HIV in the border town of Eagle Pass, Texas. A native of the town, Diaz cofounded Eagle Pass SAFE (Sexual Advocacy for Everyone), an LGBTQ nonprofit organization serving the rural communities of South Texas.

Diaz and many others are working to address hurdles for Latinos living with HIV in the South, which include language, immigration status and discrimination. The Latino Commission on AIDS even has a dedicated program called Latinos in the South. Go here to read more.

In this special issue dedicated to Latinos, we highlight others who are making their mark. HIV advocate Francisco Ruiz is one of them. In 2010, he was named to our inaugural POZ 100 list, which described him as a “real up-and-comer.” Now, he’s pursuing a doctorate in public health. Go here to learn more about his journey.

As part of our Latino theme, this issue of POZ also includes another edition of POZ en Español and a poster on sexual health. Both are in Spanish.

One of the most far-reaching decisions by the Supreme Court in recent memory is the overturning of Roe v. Wade. Protecting sexual and reproductive rights is a concern for everyone. People living

with HIV have much at stake as well. Go here to find out what you can do (hint: vote!).

Through the years, POZ has spotlighted countless books, both fiction and nonfiction. As the decades of the AIDS era stretch on, so do the books. And they should—there's still so much to remember and document.

Among all the reminiscences and historical accounts, Rasheed Newson's debut novel stands out—it is a work of historical fiction. Many of the people and events are real, but others are fabricated. Set in 1980s New York City, the novel tells a very different story about ACT UP, Larry Kramer and more. Go here for our Q&A with the author.

Finally, on the topic of HIV history: The first successful heart transplant between a positive donor and a positive recipient took place earlier this year. Go here for more.

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