



The Way It Is

In this special Pride issue spotlighting the LGBTQ community, we catch up with advocates including Jason Veasey and Tony Valenzuela.

May 12, 2025 By [Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.](#)

It's a special occasion when one gets to bear witness to a "first time" for anything. I'd say that being there when someone first discloses publicly that they have HIV is an even rarer event. I had the privilege of experiencing just that when Jason Veasey shared his status.

The actor and advocate did so during an intimate gathering to commemorate World AIDS Day in New York City in 2024. I was one of the lucky attendees.

Jason gave a lovely speech in support of the HIV community, in which he said: "There are many people living positively with HIV, like me." I'm sure I wasn't the only one to focus on those two words. Did he just say what I thought he just said?

After his speech, I made a beeline to him. I introduced myself, said thank you for the speech, geeked out a bit about being a fan of his character in *Only Murders in the Building*, then made my pitch for POZ to share his HIV journey. I'm so grateful he said yes.

[Go here](#) to read more about how Jason, our cover subject, who tested positive in 2015, decided to share his HIV status, as well as his creative ideas for more uplifting HIV representation in media.

As a Black gay man with HIV, Jason has particular insights on queer folks. In this special Pride issue spotlighting the LGBTQ community, we catch up with other such advocates, including Tony Valenzuela and Brett Klein. We also take a look back at the legacy of the late journalist Randy Shilts.

Tony is currently the executive director of One Institute, a nonprofit organization dedicated to telling the history and stories of LGBTQ people. As a Latino gay man living with HIV long term, he's been through some things, including being shunned in the 1990s by HIV and queer activists. [Go](#)

[here](#) to read about his redemption and why he remains a proud activist today.

Brett has been living with HIV for over three decades and has been an advocate for all folks with the virus for nearly as long. One of his passions is participating in the California AIDS/LifeCycle, a yearly fundraiser in which bicyclists ride from San Francisco to Los Angeles over several days, raising HIV awareness as they go. This year is the final ride. [Go here](#) for more.

When Randy published *And the Band Played On* in 1987, he achieved a major feat of journalism. The book was heralded for exposing just how the AIDS epidemic was allowed to spread, which had as much to do with neglect, apathy and incompetence as it did with HIV. The 1993 movie further elevated his work.

In the years since his death in 1994 from AIDS-related illness, Randy's work has been studied. As a result, his legacy has taken some hits. Writer, researcher and educator Michael G. Lee, PhD, took an interest in learning more about Randy the person in an attempt to know more about his journalism. [Go here](#) to read what lessons Michael's new biography of Randy has to offer the current HIV fight.

As the Trump administration continues to upend longstanding bipartisan support for HIV treatment and prevention, it's ever more important to uplift the struggles and needs of our communities. [Go here](#) to learn the basics about transgender people and HIV. Then go to the back of this issue for a chart of the latest biomedical HIV prevention options.