



AIDS Candy Lady

January 31, 2011 By [Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.](#)

Sometimes the stars align. Such was the case with "[Southern Discomfort](#)" by Carl Gaines in the January/February 2011 issue of *POZ*.

I was introduced to Carl when he became the [inaugural winner](#) of the National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association (NLGJA) Kay Longcope Scholarship Award, which seeks to further the role of diversity by supporting LGBT students of color who plan a career in journalism. At the time, Carl was a student at the City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate School of Journalism. He recently graduated.

His final thesis for CUNY was to create a multimedia project about the funding crisis in AIDS Drug Assistance Programs in the Southern United States. [Click here](#) to see his project.

We at *POZ* already had been planning a major story on AIDS in the South, so I was more than happy to work with Carl on having him write our article. It was a great collaboration.

Here's an excerpt:

When Juanita Davis, director of HIV prevention and education for the state of Mississippi, visits church or school groups to teach about the virus, she arrives armed with Mounds bars, 5th Avenue bars and lots of Sugar Babies.

She brings the sweets not to bribe her audiences to pay attention, but rather to help illustrate, with physical

analogies, the things she is not allowed to say in the places she visits. Imagine trying to teach HIV prevention without being able to say “penis,” “condom” or “semen.”

That’s where the candy bars come in.

The fact that Davis must use candy as euphemisms for body parts, contraceptives and bodily fluids says much about the environment in which she--and others--are trying to fight the next big wave of HIV/AIDS in America

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The HIV/AIDS epidemic is raging across the Southern United States like an out-of-control fire.

Because of her innovative approach to HIV prevention, the titles “AIDS lady” and “candy lady” now greet her whenever she gives one of her talks.

Here’s a YouTube video of Juanita at work:

In traveling to Mississippi to report on his thesis and our article, Carl conducted face-to-face video interviews with Juanita Davis and others.

“Southern Discomfort” documents the complex circumstances that fuel the HIV/AIDS epidemic in

the South, including poverty, funding shortfalls, natural disasters, immigration issues, language barriers, lack of transportation and homophobia.

Although from an admittedly biased source, I encourage everyone to read it. [Click here](#) to read the article.

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<http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/aids-candy-lady>