

by Jim Christopher

Recently I was introduced as "Bob," an AIDS "victim," on a local radio talk show. One of the first questions asked me was "How does it feel, Bob, to know you are dying of AIDS?"

It happened to be my birthday that day, and I previously had been thinking, as I think a lot of people do on their birthday, about how every year it's like a new beginning, a fresh start, a time to plan new ideas and goals.

Confronted with the question of mortality on that day, and it somehow seemed like an insult to an existing injury, and an affirmation of sorts, of my own death by someone who had no right whatsoever to make that decision for me.

PWAs speak OUT

I would like to quote a fellow PWA (person with AIDS) from New York, named Max Navarre, whose article appeared in the November, 1985 issue of the "PWA Coalition Newsline":

"Look at our lives and see the encouragement and support of the idea of the noble victim whose existence is validated by dying in the end. The faggot, the woman, the slave, the *invalid* always gets it, and is thereby redeemed. Ugh! And if you don't get it in the end, then you get saved by someone or something bigger, stronger and better than you. Again, Ugh!

"I have AIDS. Everything I do, say, believe in and live for goes against the idea of myself as a victim. I know that I am not on this earth to live out that scenario. I am not here to play touching deathbed scenes with some ego-driven, misdirected but loving Florence Nightingale. I am not here to be remembered fondly when I'm gone. BUT, right in the center of my consciousness where beats the little heart of my romantic soul, lives a lost and helpless lamb.

"I so need to go beyond the image and I work so hard at getting past it that I deeply resent anything or anyone who encourages me as a victim. And let's face it: The image is all around us. Services of all kinds — medical and social — are based on that image. And there have been a lot of victims too — too many. A lot of people have died and more are dying, young and wonderful and a joy to know. And they're gone. But, a lot of us are alive. And kicking, by the way."

My choice right now, is to live, and be another medically unexplained statistic that defies the explanations only common to science and medicine.

I do believe the best advice to other PWA's, is to avoid, at all cost, confusion and indecision. Make a determination of what is right for you, what you want and choose to believe most in, whether it may be the medical aspects, including "experimental" drugs from other countries; religious aspects; holistic health and nutritional aspects; spiritual and metaphysical aspects; or any combination thereof. And then believe in it, like you have never believed in anything else in your life. And most of all, remember you have the right

to live, and by making that choice, *nothing* else can be more powerful than you.

Ironical as it may seem to some, I believe I am more alive today than I have ever been in my life. AIDS, for me, has given me the opportunity to realize the importance of myself, my life, and my capacity to love all others, regardless of their views of life, their sexual preferences, and, yes, even their attempts to victimize me with what I call "negative affirmations." Thank you just the same, but I choose to make my own, and I choose to live in a much healthier mental capacity, and more loving environment, without guilt or resentments of any kind for what's past.

PWA Speaks Out will be a continuing series of observations and commentary by persons with AIDS/ARC. Thus far in the crisis little has been heard publicly by those most affected. Just Out is pleased to provide space for this forum.

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