

The straight stuff

People, Newsweek, SatEvePost and Willamette Week take AIDS to middle America, even acknowledging gay PWA's along the way.

B Y W C M c R A E

The impact of AIDS on people's lives was one of the hottest stories of the month, ranking right up there with Reagan's cancerous nose and California freeway shootings.

The media has popularized AIDS as the "gay plague" by dutifully citing statistics indicating the prevalence of the condition among gay men. However, when the media has chosen to highlight the "human interest" side of the AIDS crisis — its impact on real people's lives — the media concentrates on straight people. Numerically, more gay people are affected by the dis-

ease than straight people, but only straight people get human interest coverage — because of their presumed "innocence" in contracting it? However, this month two major stories in national weeklies finally acknowledged the devastation of AIDS upon gay lives and the gay community.

People Magazine (August 3) weighed in with "Breaking America's Heart," an eponymously appropriate exercise in anguish. Thirty correspondents provided day-in-the-life (June 19, to be precise) vignettes about the affect of AIDS on the lives of people across the country. Gay people were included, unabashedly, along with

the straight people, and readers are given a rich insight into many levels at which AIDS has affected lives. Gays and straights are each seen caught in the web of fatality, medical dilation, and social intolerance that stratifies our country's response to AIDS.

Newsweek (August 10) rolled out a yearbook-style memorial to a year's worth of AIDS' dead. From August 1986 to July 1987, "The Face of AIDS: One Year in the Epidemic" presents a page-a-month of photos of the faces of those dead from AIDS, along with a brief account of the person's life. It is a numbing viewing experience, and should give Newsweek readers an insight into the acute sense of loss, grief and rage felt by the gay community. Page after page of photos convey the enormity of the devastation in more human terms than a story of comparative length could ever do. Also, the number of gay men pictured highlights the unique price the gay community has paid more effectively than any story that Newsweek would likely publish.

The Newsweek editors make much of the fact that this August issue is the magazine's eighth cover story on AIDS. However, it was only a year ago when Newsweek published a story on "The AIDS Doctor" about the anguish of a straight doctor whose straight female patient dies of AIDS. From reading the story, one would never have realized that the awful irony of dying young was anything but a straight phenomenon.

Since his death, Rock Hudson has provided

the *sine qua non* for coverage of gay men with AIDS. With these two stories, perhaps the voyeuristic exemplum of Rock-Hudson-as-gay-AIDS-cover-boy will be laid to rest, and the media will realize that gay peoples' lives admit of "human interest" as well.

Meanwhile, in the journalistic backwash, the Saturday Evening Post also ran an AIDS cover story (with a curious painting of Elizabeth Taylor as a drag queen on the cover). Its focus is typical gays-as-statistics, straights-as-victims stuff. However, the Post is clearing new journalistic ground in its advocacy of AIDS patients from transfusions. One story tells of the brave plight of two clergymen who contracted the syndrome from transfusions, and another details the success of the Saturday Evening Post's AIDS Mobile which travels from church to church, testing parishioners for HIV antibodies. Even if the articles and (especially) the AIDS Mobile weren't bizarre enough on their own, ponder that President Reagan named Saturday Evening Post editor Cory Servaas to his national AIDS advisory committee. Servaas' advancement of Christians as a high risk group for AIDS will surely count as one of the Reagan Right's most creative contributions to the ongoing health crisis.

Closer to home, Willamette Week ran its August AIDS feature "All about AIDS" (August 12). The WW stable of writers did a commendable job of charting the trajectory of AIDS through various fields of concern. Long on information, short on punditry, the feature is a real benefit to WW's readership.

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Health department succumbs to AIDS hysteria

National Gay Rights Advocates has charged the Kern County Health Department in Bakersfield, California with gross abuse of its authority in contact tracing for AIDS. According to NGR, the department responded to an unsubstantiated anonymous phone tip that a man is bisexual by contacting his wife, questioning her about her husband's sexual orientation, and urging her to be tested for HIV antibodies. The department made no attempt to counsel the man or ask him about his medical status, and even refused to speak with him when he phoned on his own initiative. He then contacted NGR, which wrote to the department demanding that it apologize to the couple and develop strict guidelines to avoid similar abuses in the future.

Benjamin Schatz, Director of NGR's AIDS

Civil Rights Project, said: "It is inexcusable for health departments to institute AIDS-related contact tracing on the basis of unsubstantiated anonymous tips. It is even worse for them to do so without counseling or even speaking with the subject of the rumors." Added Schatz, "Fortunately, our client's wife knew that he is gay and that he had recently tested negative for HIV antibodies. Under other circumstances, the department's rumor-mongering could have ruined both of their lives."

"This case must be viewed in a broader context," commented NGR Executive Director Jean O'Leary. "In several states, legislators are seeking to give local health departments broad authority to allow contact tracing, quarantine, and the storing of names of people who test HIV antibody positive. Unfortunately, it is clear that even health departments are vulnerable to AIDS hysteria. As long as this is the case, gay people will be afraid to turn to public health officials for counseling and information about AIDS."

Lawyers organize against Bork nomination

A prominent group of attorneys has formed a committee to oppose the confirmation of United States Supreme Court nominee, Robert H. Bork. Lawyers Against the Bork Confirmation is sponsoring a resolution against Judge Bork's confirmation to be presented at the annual convention of the Oregon State Bar, September 17-18 in Seaside. The resolution has been endorsed by former Oregon Supreme Court Justices Jacob Tanzer and Betty Roberts, former U.S. Attorney Sid Lezak and other attorneys, including Don Marmaduke, Dennis Lindsay, David Slader, Jerome LaBarre and Charles Hinkle.

Lawyers Against the Bork Confirmation

contend that the record and public statements of Judge Bork repudiate a half century of American legal tradition concerning civil rights of racial minorities, and the rights to privacy, free speech, full and fair participation in elections and the separation of church and state. According to spokesperson Jim Lang, "Judge Bork's judicial philosophy, measured by numerous judicial opinions and writings, poses a direct threat to many of our most cherished individual liberties."

In addition to urging the State Bar to resolve against Judge Bork's confirmation, the lawyers' committee will seek to educate Oregonians, including Senators Hatfield and Packwood, about the important public issues raised by Judge Bork's confirmation through public speaking and writings.

Food Front to relocate

After fifteen years of increasing growth, Food Front will move to larger quarters around October 1. Food Front is a cooperative, a community owned business, which has been able to find financing for expansion in a time when coops have been failing. Food Front's new location is three blocks east of its present location on NW Thurman Street.

The new building will more than double existing space; plans call for about 4,000 square feet to be used for retail space in a total area of

6,000 square feet. The larger location will feature a fresh meat counter, a much larger produce section, a self-service deli and a sit-down deli.

The new location will also feature a mezzanine with offices and a multi-purpose room which will be available for classes. Plans for the new store which were drawn by former Food Front manager, Steve Fosler, include large windows and skylights. The new location will also feature ample parking.

Food Front is scheduling a Grand Opening celebration to begin November 1.



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