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Deadline for submissions is the 15th of the month preceding publication.

Out About Town is compiled as a courtesy to our readers. Performers, clubs, individuals or groups wishing to list events in the calendar should mail notices to *Just Out* by the 15th of the month preceding publication. **Listings will not be taken over the telephone.**

Display Advertising will be accepted up to the 17th of each month.

Classified ads must be received at the office of *Just Out* by the 17th of each month, along with payment. **Ads will not be taken over the telephone.**

Editorial policies allow the rejection or the editing of an article or advertisement that is offensive, demeaning or may result in legal action. *Just Out* consults the Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual on editorial decisions.

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Steppin' Out

Photo by Jay Brown



Condom Awareness Day

C O N T E N T S

Letters	3
What's going on here	4
Between the lines	5
AIDS 101	6
World News Briefs	7
Just News	8
Just Youth	10
Profile	13
Out About Town	16
Eating Out	19
Just Entertainment	20
Music	22
Cinema	23
Books	24
The Amazon Trail	25
Counsel	26
Classifieds	27

P A G E T W O

The real issue of AIDS

Just mention AIDS publicly (especially in a gay bar) and you soon find yourself standing alone

B Y D L W E A V E R

Writing in a rage is something I have never done before but I am doing it now. I've never felt this much frustration, or felt so powerless or victimized. Articles about AIDS I read are always sad, hopeless, and filled with death and dying — after all, why not give the public what they want!

Quite frankly, I'm tired of it all; particularly the second-class status people with AIDS (a phrase I've learned to hate) are relegated to. The focus on these "red herring" issues blurs the fact that people with AIDS are silently suffering not only from a serious medical problem, but also from a social problem: isolation and poverty. Even within the gay community, which supposedly knows the facts about this disease, we continue to remove the "problem" from ourselves, hoping that if we don't see it, perhaps we'll be safe.

How long has it been since this person with AIDS has been held, touched, loved, hugged, kissed by anyone? Where is all the concern, help, compassion everyone talks about, and just who does it serve?

To deal with this crisis, organizations have formed within gay communities to help the people afflicted with this disease. The work they do is commendable — should your need counselling, education, or referral to outside agencies. And while gay communities rally to these organizations, thinking how much they're helping people with AIDS, the real problem continues. Bureaucracies continue playing their games of giving with the right hand while taking away with the left, and perpetuate a system of false trust. Society can think that the "victims" of AIDS are taken care of thereby releasing itself from guilt. After all, there is Social Security, Welfare, and the Cascade AIDS Project!

In December 1987, I went, overnight, from ignorant bliss to full-blown AIDS, specifically, cancer. To say that it changed my life is an

understatement. Since I had no insurance, I was advised to quit my job. I would then be eligible for state medical benefits, and other forms of aid. My income went from \$16,800 annually to exactly \$4656 annually, which was liveable until about six months ago, at which point my lover left. I was left high and dry in a living situation that had required two people to support it. At first I tried to deal with it; I did not need the extra stress of moving, adding to the trauma I was already experiencing. I thought I could get by, either by finding a roommate, or by locating cheaper or subsidized housing. But this has not been the case. So I wait; for someone I could live with to appear, for my application to come up, for help that simply doesn't appear.

Out of my annual income of \$4656, rent costs me \$3300, for which I get a comfortable, well-lit, two-bedroom, all-electric apartment. Many studios and one-bedroom places cost as much or more. The housing authority offered me a dump in Columbia Villa, a ramshackle building near Union and Killingsworth and another place at Oak and Grand. I also got a lecture about how gay people should keep their mouths shut and not tell everyone about our sexuality or our disease — so that life would be easier for everyone. I declined their offers and was dropped to the bottom of the list and told I'd have to wait another three to six months for any help.

Meanwhile, winter set in and my all-electric modern living has become a living nightmare with \$150 electric bills and my energy assistance long gone. So I limp by, using food stamp money for gas, borrowing here and there, doing without almost everything I once took for granted — always praying to make it one more day.

I managed to scrape up a dollar so I could go out to the bars the other night. So many friends commented on how long it had been since they had seen me. True! Not because I was sick, but because I couldn't afford to go anywhere. In my hand-me-down clothes, eating hand-out food, living on "charity" and getting by with practically nothing, who wants to go out and flaunt it?

Besides, just mention AIDS publicly (especially in a gay bar) and you soon find yourself standing alone.

Don't get me wrong; I'm grateful for the fact that I'm alive and can still move around and that I eat regularly and that I have a bed to sleep in. But you can't imagine what it's like until you have to live in it. Well-meaning people suggest, "Why don't you get a job?" (I did work a part-time job for a while.) Try explaining to an employer why you haven't worked for over a year, or why you can only work part-time, or need to be paid "under the table" and see what you get. Or figure out how you will repay every cent the government has given you for being "disabled" should you return to the work force, fully employed and thus, no longer "disabled."

How many people are there out there like me, who get tired of asking — begging — for help, needing much, getting just barely enough? After awhile, you quit asking, preferring to sit quietly at home, watching TV or reading. And when questioned, you reply, "Fine, thanks." You know they don't want to hear. You learn to smile when people from the AFS, HAP, CAP, SSI, SSD, United Way, the food banks, church organizations, whoever you can find who might offer help, all start saying the same thing — "Good luck, hope you find what you're needing. Have you tried . . . ?"

So while you are deciding whether people with AIDS should be called "victims" or "patients," while you organize and raise funds and gather cans of goodies to distribute to those of us "struggling" with this disease, remember that we are quietly banished to living in isolation and poverty while life goes on for those not yet affected by AIDS (but keep your fingers crossed). If we don't speak up, or come out of our "hiding" it's not because we're not there, or are too sick; maybe it's because we're too tired of talk, of asking, of needing, of wanting, and of going empty-handed and embarrassed. Or maybe we're just ashamed to be associated with you.