

just out
since 1983

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steppin' out



Gabby's earache doesn't faze Sam (left) or Risa (right), but it gets her moms' attention. For a tale of three babies, turn to page 17.

PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

guest editorial Reality bites

...and Generation "Q" tries to chart previously traveled territory—possibly alone

by Aaron Bong

I t used to be that I was immune. No one that I knew had HIV or AIDS. Well, at least they weren't my age. The people that got sick were older. The people that died were older. Even the people telling me to practice safer sex in ads and commercials were—and are—older. Their generations were, and very much still are, removed from mine, in our terribly divided and fractured communities.

Intellectually I learned how not to become infected. I took a crash course in educating myself emotionally earlier this year. But still, my generation was removed. We didn't need to worry. Until MTV chose Pedro Zamora for *The Real World*.

Two years ago MTV producers came up with an idea to put six twentysomethings in a loft together in New York. MTV's *The Real World* was born. The most recent season was filmed in a house in San Francisco. Pedro was selected out of over 30,000 people to be a part of the show.

When Pedro was eight his family emigrated from Cuba. At 14 Pedro began having sex with other males. He came out to his family by the time he was 18. His life story is replicated by many young gay men I know. But then it changes. Before he graduated from high school, while he was still a senior, he tested positive for HIV.

Immediately Pedro began to educate his peers, my generation, about AIDS and HIV. He spoke locally in Miami, then nationally and internationally. He became a resource and an inspiration for many.

In the late spring of this year, Pedro's already low T-cell count was obliterated when he contracted pneumocystis pneumonia (PCP). He soon overcame the PCP, but by then his body had progressed into AIDS.

On Friday, Nov. 11, at about 5 am, Pedro Zamora died due to complications of AIDS. He was 22. The same age I will be in less than 20 days. To say that I have been mildly affected by

Pedro's life and death is to state my feelings lightly.

In my world—where AIDS has been a fact of sex since I can remember—Pedro is the first person from my generation to publicly pass from this life due to AIDS. He gave me and my generation mortality through his death. All of the people, both public and private, that I have seen mourned have been from other generations—though their passing has at times affected me, too.

Every week I can watch what I now know to be the last months of Pedro's life agonizingly played out on the screen of my television set. Pedro was the show's first HIV-positive cast member. And, as long as the information is needed, I hope not the last. Through his personal disclosures to the television cameras, he turned the light on in the room and showed my generation what has been quickly spreading and killing us.

Pedro said, "For a number of reasons, some legitimate, we fail to include young gays in our community; partly because we are afraid. Mention young gays and immediately the association is with pedophilia and recruitment. But young gays exist. To open our arms and accept them means accepting the unique responsibility that comes with them. But, if our goal is to be a whole community, it has to happen—and it has to happen now."

I am learning to mourn a person who has died from AIDS. I am learning how to deal with my own mortality. It's difficult. I want to learn how from people who have been there before me. But our communities have been too fractured, too compartmentalized. To echo words I recently read: I'm 21, I'm your son. Please get over your differences so you can teach me, together.

I only hope that my generation learned something through Pedro's openness before too many of us fall.

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