

STONEWALL BABY

Testing... 1-2-3

*Waiting for those results never gets easier:
Every long-dormant fear comes raging to the surface*

by Will O'Bryan

Last month I was diagnosed as having a bout of thrush. To the best of my understanding, thrush is any fungus growing in one's mouth. It can be a symptom of HIV. The fact that I'm a gay man sounded my doctor's alarm, that I'm a hypochondriac sounded mine.

Following two negative tests in as many years during an ongoing monogamous relationship (three years and counting...), I really didn't have much reason to worry. Nevertheless, when someone in a doctor's smock with a stethoscope wrapped around her neck tells me with a concerned face that a diagnosis of thrush should be followed by an AIDS test (a test for HIV antibodies to be absolutely precise), monkeys that I carried on my back long

and female, all freewheelin' college students, felt the same way.

But ignorance wasn't bliss, either. We nearly gave ourselves ulcers examining every bruise-lesion, questioning every cold... I had night sweats a few times that I regarded as the nails in my coffin. Our only comfort was that our fear was collective. We dubbed ourselves STOPAA: Students Overly Paranoid About AIDS.

After a couple of years and a bellyful of a tedious lifestyle, I met Mr. X.

Kate, a founding member of STOPAA, was rational when I was not.

"How can I risk exposing him?" I asked her. "If you're that worried about him," she reasoned, "you should be that worried about your-



ago start screeching, doing little dances and tugging at my hair and ears.

My fear of HIV and AIDS has followed me through my years. As surely as Sigourney Weaver's Ripley has run around the galaxy in a trilogy of *Alien* films simultaneously hunting and running from her human-hosted demons, the human-hosted virus I fear hasn't caught me, yet the chase never ends. Considering that Ripley is going to be brought back for a fourth film after being killed in the third by said demons, it's really only fitting that I should get another wake-up call from mine.

The first time I had sex with a boy, I was a high school junior. He was a sophomore. As you can guess, it wasn't safe.

During my de-flowering, I was more worried about my mother walking in than HIV. That changed after Mr. First-Time told me he'd been to the home of some older man who'd been cruising him at the local Wal-Mart. He wouldn't tell me what he'd engaged in exactly, so I was left to fear for my life, sweating bullets at the high school blood drive.

Shortly thereafter, the very popular Mr. First-Time got a girl pregnant who gave birth to a perfectly healthy Mr. First-Time Jr. My first AIDS test? Not very responsible, I grant you, but what do you expect from an awkward 16-year-old living in rural Florida—during the Reagan years—not too far from Arcadia, where the home of some HIV-positive hemophiliac children was fire-bombed?

I didn't really become a staunch safe-sex practitioner till I was 21. Likewise, it wasn't till this time that I was a jaded, heart-broken lush, ready to take on all comers—but not without protection. I became such a poster boy for safer sex that I could drunkenly rattle off the shortcomings of lambskin and oil-based lubricants just before saying no and passing out.

This behavior, while relatively safe, was not entirely without risk. That risk left me too frightened to get tested. Some of my friends, both male

self. Get a test!"

For both Mr. X's sake and my own, I needed to get tested. Domesticity was delayed. I was terrified, but I knew it had to be done.

Another friend, Jason, assured me that all the anxiety was perfectly normal. He recalled going in for his first test. In the clinic waiting room, just prior to the pin prick, his nerves got the better of him. He fainted, collapsing headfirst into a metal rack of health brochures. It was fortunate he waited till he was in the clinic to faint, as he required a few stitches in his noggin.

Despite Jason's assurances, I was a wreck. I remember driving to the clinic to get my results—or judgment, as I regarded it. That R.E.M. song "Man on the Moon" was on the radio. Michael Stipe was singing "See you in heaven if you make the list, yeah yeah yeah yeah." I was employing a very literal interpretation. I cried as I drove.

Lo and behold, the test was negative. So was the second one, two years later. Test No. 2 was prompted by Mr. X's doctor's suggestion that, as a gay man practicing unsafe sex (with me), he get a test. Mr. X was so rattled by the whole situation that I acted as his guinea pig, my blood standing in for his.

This last test should've felt routine. It didn't. I was still shaking. I estimated the chance of a positive test at roughly half a percent—still a chance. Had I engaged in some infidelity that I was so ashamed of that my psyche was blocking it from my conscious memory? Could Mr. X have been having an affair during the half hour a day when he's not at work or home with me?

Every fear came to the surface. These pathways for AIDS anxiety have been scarred into my brain. I was going to find out once again if they had any merit.

They did not, and life is back to normal. Nevertheless, this fear will haunt me till I die. I'm grateful for it. It may give me stress that fuels my rate of hair loss, but it may have kept me alive as well. HIV may not be in my veins, but it will always be in my life and I will always be vigilant—as should we all be.

echo

Marketing & Design

Graphic
Design

with

Business
Savvy...

Imagine That!!
On Time • On Budget • On Target



Fabulous Fares

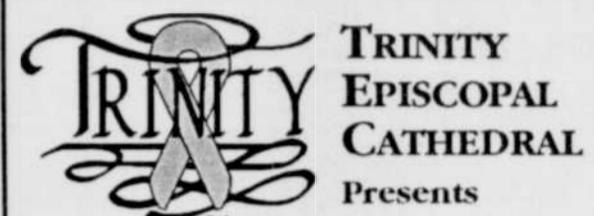
Honolulu: \$279 RT* London: \$520 RT*
Maui-Kauai: \$349 RT* Hong Kong: \$585 RT*
Waikiki—air, 7nts: Paris: \$625 RT*
from \$538ppdo Tel Aviv: \$895 RT*
Kauai—air, 7nts, car: Frankfurt: \$620 RT*
from \$665ppdo Sydney: \$1197 RT*
Cruise Specials—up to 50% OFF & FREE Upgrades—CALL NOW
* taxes not included

RSVP Cruises '97:

Mardi Gras—Feb. 8, from \$1695
South America—Mar. 21, from \$1395
Northern Europe—Jun. 22-28, from \$1495
All rates cruise only, ppdo. Air/tax/gratuities extra.
Club RSVP—Nov. 8, from \$695 (land only, Puerto Vallarta)

ULTIMATE TRAVELS

621 SW Morrison, Suite 435
220-8866 (Portland) or 800/446-4117
e-mail: ultravel@teleport.com



TRINITY
EPISCOPAL
CATHEDRAL
Presents

VESPERS & HEALING SERVICE
with SPECIAL INTENTIONS FOR THOSE
LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS...

SPECIAL GUEST

HOMILIST:

CHRIS MCMANUS

visiting Deaconate from San Francisco

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 10th, 1996

5 PM HEALING and VESPERS SERVICE

6 PM RECEPTION to follow...

(hors-d'oeuvres & beverages served)

CORNER OF NW 19TH AVENUE & EVERETT

SNAP



how we love



how we live

FOR



who we are

Community Forum

Wednesday
Oct. 30
7:00 pm

METRO
Council Chamber
3rd Floor
600 NE Grand
Portland Oregon

to discuss the
results of a
5-year survey of
over 1200 gay men
in Portland with
Colleen Hoff Ph.D.
of the Center for
AIDS Prevention Studies

Speak To Your Brothers
is a program of
Cascade AIDS Project



For information telephone 223.5907 extension 145