

profile



Alazar has penned approximately 100 letters to famous black figures, but thus far has heard little in response. He remains optimistic that this aspect of his fundraising efforts will yield results before AIDS Walk, but says getting adults to listen—let alone talk to him about HIV—has been a frustrating undertaking.

“People don’t want to talk about [HIV] with each other, and they especially don’t want to talk about it with kids because there’s so much bad stigma with it,” Alazar says.

At a recent trip to the barbershop, he tried to persuade the barber to let him leave a flier about his campaign, but the conversation was quickly waved off.

“When Alazar got back to the car he was asking, ‘Why can’t we talk about it? Why can’t we talk about HIV in the black community?’ Everybody at the barbershop was black, and we were asked not to bring it up,” Robert explains.

Robert helps Alazar with the typing for his blog, along with email correspondence. Still, he’s quick to note that his assistance with the project is minimal. Upon meeting father and son in their Southwest condo, it’s immediately apparent that though the typical guidance and support from Robert is strong, Alazar is an independent, remarkably bright 11-year-old. His goofy personality contrasts a serious focus on his goals. Alazar is often told to temper vocalizing to his peers what he knows about HIV—which is more than most adults know.

“My dad tells me not to talk about it at school because I don’t know what they know,” Alazar says. “If you talk about HIV, you have to talk about how you can get it, so you have to talk about means of transmission, and I don’t know if they know about that.”

Alazar rattles off data on individuals infected with HIV in the world, and their relation to statewide and citywide percentages, the same way other kids might discuss unearthing secret levels in a video game.

“It certainly is rare to find someone as young as Alazar that is such a strong force in raising awareness and funds,” says Kaplan. “He’s really quite incredible.”

Kaplan’s partner Sean Sasser, who became a mentor to Alazar in 2008, spends time each week with the youth, engaging him in conversations about growing up, being responsible, having fun, and HIV.

“It has been a joy having Alazar in my life,” says Sasser, who is HIV positive. “I feel honored that he thinks of me as his mentor.”

Just a month before the AIDS Walk Portland fundraising deadline, Alazar has already surpassed his 2010 mark with \$2,770 as of press time. His A-Team is currently in sixth place.

In the meantime, he continues to spread his message to “be smart, get tested, and have safe behaviors” to anyone who will listen.

“I hope people take after me and do what I did. Follow my example, and talk!” Alazar says. “One out of five people infected with HIV don’t know they have it. By the time they do, they have AIDS. If we talked about it, everybody would know how to do the right things.” JO

For more information about Alazar Manning, or to sponsor, pledge or help him raise money for AIDS Walk Portland 2011, visit ateamfund.wordpress.com. AIDS Walk Portland takes place Sunday, October 2. For more information, visit aidswalkportland.org, and pick up the September 16 issue of Just Out.

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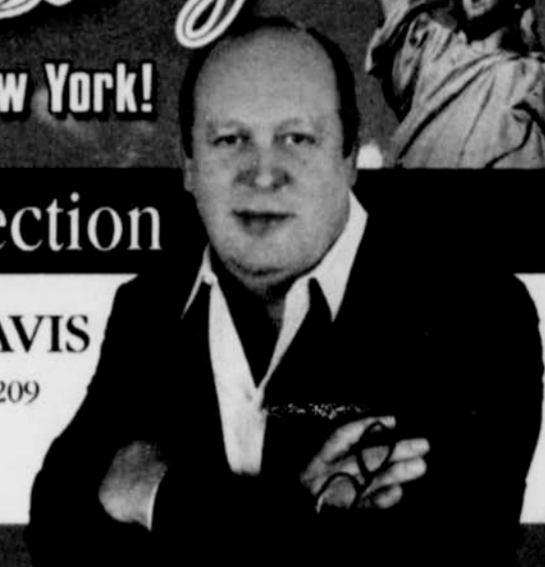
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