

KOOL AIDS ON ICE



IRIS DE LA CRUZ

KOOL AIDS WITH ICE

By Iris De La Cruz

I'm calling this KOOL AIDS WITH ICE because it sounds good. Also, when my daughter was young, she called me 'Ice', she couldn't say 'Iris' and she never heard anyone call me 'mommy,' (except maybe the degenerates playing dominoes on Ave. C) I don't know if she ever heard her daddy call me 'mommy', since the only time he did that was in the throes of passion. Maybe twice in our relationship. Then he started calling me 'bitch'. So now you know why the title is what it is.

The response to the last KOOL AIDS piece has been overwhelming. Most people are real happy to laugh at themselves, while a few will always be content to go through life like human hemorrhoids, with puckerred and scowling faces. There are some that wanted to tie me up and force-feed me condoms to shut me up. But fuck 'em, I had a good time getting this disease and I'm going to have a good time dealing with it. Although maybe not in the same way.

So here goes some more sick AIDS humor. I run a couple of support groups for the coalition. Since T-cell counts seem to be the real hot topic of conversation, I thought maybe people could get the number printed on football jerseys. Just come in with these numbers on your shirt and start up a conversation. And all the wanna-have-HIV's can fake it. Oh, yes, getting HIV is a very chit disease. There are a lot of sero-negatives hanging out, giving a pass. You can recognize them by their lack of beeper going off every forty hours. Poor Carl at the Living Room luncheon is inundated by responders wanting a free lunch. How far we've come! Why, wasn't it only yesterday people were afraid to even breathe the same air as us, much less eat with us!

The spring holidays are upon us. My mom is having her annual Passover Seder for people with AIDS. We're going to have drinks with *egg lipid sauce, wheat grass juice and vegetables, prayed with *pentamidine. There will be candy bowls filled with *AZT and we'll sip on *DDI cocktails. For Easter we're going to make brightly colored Easter eggs filled with condoms. And all the good little bunnies will parade down Christopher Street snaking their cute little bunny tails.

I tried getting a support group together for people suffering from AIDS-dementia, but it fell through. Nobody could remember what day it was or when the group met. Now I use the disease as an excuse to be totally unshameful and obnoxious. "You can't expect me to remember appointments or be cute. I have AIDS."

I LOVE IT. KEEP SMILING

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*egg lipid - was thought to be a holistic cure
*pentamidine - a medication
*AZT - a medication
*DDI - a medication

**‘ SPEECH IS CIVILIZATION
ITSELF
THE WORD-EVEN THE MOST
CONTRADICTORY WORD-
PRESERVES CONTACT. IT IS
SILENCE WHICH ISOLATES.’**

THOMAS MANN

SEX, DRUGS, ROCK AND ROLL AND AIDS
AN ODYSSEY
By Iris De La Cruz

My earliest recollection is of wishing my parents would just hurry up and kill each other so I could go live with my grandmother. My father used to come home drunk and proceed to beat my mother bloody from one room to the other. It got to the point where she would stand by the door, cowering as he tried to break in and screamed like a crazy man. I always prayed that she wouldn't let him in but she always did. And then I would try to get him off of her only to have him order me to bed. Eventually, bruised and bloody she would run to my bed and grab me in the hope that he wouldn't beat her in front of me and my brother (who would be standing up in his crib with wet diapers, screaming. I guess it's hard to change diapers when you're getting your ass kicked.) Running into my room never worked...my father would just drag her out, begging and crying, into the living room. This ignited a rage deep within me that burns low even today. I swore that nobody would ever beat me like that. And if they did, I'd kill them.

I'm still convinced that school is a concept cooked up by adults to harass and intimidate children. The rule of the day is mediocrity. Any form of self-expression is discouraged. I spent my time in elementary school wishing I had long, straight blonde hair and was skinny. Instead, I was a fat, ugly girl who was too tall and had wild hair. I was the only white girl coming to school with a head full of Dixie Peach. This was the time my parents Divorced and I started peeing in bed again. I'd wake up crying from dreams that my father was killed.

Junior High School brought the beginning of the Viet Nam war and the hippie movement. Since fat girls are notoriously bad at sports, I concentrated on drawing, cutting out from school to hang out in the village or copy paintings in museums. Since I was 'artistic, I was allowed to get away with basically doing whatever I wanted. It was at this time that I learned the fine art of manipulation. When I needed attention (or just wanted to mess with someone) I would draw pictures of gravestones with people's names on it. This prompted visits to a wide assortment of psychiatrists and social workers. Since I was into reading Political Science and psychology books at the time, I had enough knowledge to totally mess up the tests. I guess I seemed like a future axe murderer to them, but I liked how they took all that nonsense seriously.

These were the wonder years. I realized that math was a foreign concept. Numbers were alien creatures with no personalities and no stories. They were just there, you couldn't manipulate numbers. My brain would flash 'does not compute' when faced with algebra. And the math teachers were suited for nothing else but teaching. They couldn't see the beauty of art of music and had the personalities of amoebas. I kept up an A+ average (except for math, which I kept getting mandatory 33's in for absence.)

In High School the rage exploded. I had discovered diet pills and lost weight. Boys were coming on to me but I was already dating what I thought were grown men (19-25 years old) Besides, we had nothing in common, I wasn't into cheerleading and football. There is a sort of divine retribution in turning down the same boys who ignored me when I was

fat. The only problem with the guys I was seeing was most of them ended up going to Viet Nam. They were mainly poor Latinos. The white boys I grew up with would get psychiatric notes or college deferments. I didn't want to think about what they were going through in 'Nam. I never saw any of them again. This was the time I refused to pledge allegiance to the flag and my mother was called up to school. My homeroom teacher (who was also a math teacher) thought my refusal to pledge was due to religion. The fact that the government was into murder and outright genocide and I refused to support this in any way, wasn't even considered.

These were the years of fallen Gods. I found out my family was never going to be Donna Reeds (and by that time TV families, and the whole concept of families in general, was a bad joke.) The whole American dream was a failure and we were going to change the world. Bobby Kennedy just got killed and there were race riots all over. The Black Panther Party was every white mans nightmare. I started smoking reefer and tripping. The uniform of the day for me was raggedy jeans and love beads. Neighbors would make little comments like 'Halloween's over' or 'take a bath'. I remember taking the train into the city and feeling like I was finally home. I'd go to the lower East Side and sit and sketch for hours. I was where I belonged.

I was still vaguely in High School, dropping in for classes I enjoyed, such as World History and Art. There were riots with the black and Latino kids against the whites. I was hanging out with the Latinos from East New York. There were uniformed cops patrolling the halls and I got great pleasure in muttering "off the pigs" as I passed them in the halls. With hopes of getting me into the school spirit, the principal asked me to do a mural for the lobby. I had won the art award in Junior High and was basically allowed to do as I pleased because I was 'an artist'. Well, the mural really got me into the school spirit. It was 5'x6' and I cut all my classes to stay in the art room painting it. By this time I would only show up in class to take tests. The mural depicted the school as a concentration camp and the principal as Hitler. The cops were pigs in uniforms, and in the middle, in bright red letters, was the word 'FUCK'. There was also a larger-than-life erect penis.

Needless to say, the powers that be did not share my view of the school. I was suspended, which suited me just fine. A little while later, Martin Luther King was killed. I had to get away from the junior racists of America, which was the populace of my hometown. So I hitched to Boston.

Boston was great. Everyone was young and into radical politics and reefer and LSD. It was one big party. I lied about my age and moved into a commune in Roxbury where I counseled runaways and talked people down from bad acid trips. The saying of the day were "don't trust anyone over thirty," and "turn on, tune in, and drop out." I got into speed (methamphetamine) which was even better than diet pills. This went on until I started hearing voices in the shower and I stopped all the drugs.

One day I was working the switchboard when a call for help came in. We used to drive out to where ever the call came from and talk the person down. The guy was on the roof of a building, so we had to climb what seemed like 90 million stairs that gave off the

distinct aroma of eau de urine. When we finally made it to the roof, we all saw in the shadows a small figure lying on the floor. When we went closer we discovered a little boy lying in a pool of vomit. His eyes were half closed and a gurgle was the only response he made. I held him and he was silent. I thought I helped him but he died in my arms. I had never seen a heroin overdose before. The boy was twelve. I had just turned fifteen. I left Boston.

I returned back to New York, lied about my age again and took and passed the High School equivalency test. I also started dealing LSD for some yuppies. One day, I was busy selling my wares in front of the Fillmore East yelling, "mescaline, mescaline," when this beautiful man walked by. He had long, straight black hair, tan skin and perfect white teeth that looked like an ad for toothpaste. He took me to Chinatown and I took him to bed. I moved in with him a week later.

The relationship was going pretty good, we were the perfect hippie couple. Peter was working and I spent my days dreaming of babies and cutting out coupons and recipes. The movement was getting played out and it occurred to me that the hippies could afford to be hippies because they could always run home to their parents. But the poor people on the lower east side were stuck there just trying to survive. The balloon burst and I found myself, at sixteen, pregnant. Nobody told me that babies leaked at both ends. My daughter was beautiful and I spent my days wondering how I ever had such a perfect baby. She came as a major shock that makes horrible sounds periodically through the night. It wasn't about hanging out in the village anymore; amazing how a seven-pound baby needs fifty pounds of equipment to go from one place to another. I had gained around sixty pounds and sat around waiting for Peter to come home from work. He'd come home, take a shower and go back out to fuck anyone who'd stay still long enough. So I was stuck out in Suburbia, scared to death that this was all my life was going to be for the next 20 years. Suzy Homemaker was about to commit suicide.

Roseann moved in next door with her baby and a husband who put on light shows. Roseann was a nurse. She was working part time and we spent the rest of the time together with the babies being bored. Then Roseann came home with Demerol. Demerol is a synthetic opiate. She used to find veins in my hands and shoot me up. At first I couldn't watch, but after a while I got real good at hitting myself.

Demerol was heaven. All of a sudden I was relaxed with enough energy to clean the house and deal with the baby. Peter's dick could have fallen off for all I cared. I could handle anything. Peter couldn't cope with my drug usage, having grown up with junkies in El Barrio. After threatening to bust Roseann's ass, he split.

After a huge scandal, Roseann lost her job. I lost my Demerol connection. I didn't know you could get addicted to Demerol and the sweats and the vomiting came as a great shock. We started getting heroin.

I remember seeing the prostitutes on Third Avenue. I started getting high with them and before long, I was out there turning tricks. I thought it was great. I had enough money to

take care of both my heroin habit and my child and maintain an apartment on East 14 Street. I walked to work at night. By this time, I was taking courses at school of Visual Arts and shooting up before school in the bathroom. My daughter was attending daycare (which was affiliated with the Puerto Rican Socialist Party. Old habits die hard) and I thought I was doing all right.

When I started hustling, most of the women were white. Nobody turned a trick for less than \$25 and if you were picked up for loitering, they let you out in the morning. They even had a squad of cops known as the 'pussy posse' to round up whores. I thought I had made it. I liked the feeling of power having men honk their horns as I walked the streets. And the idea that these men thought I was pretty enough to pay me for sex was a big ego boost. This went on for years with the drug habit increasing subtly.

During this time, I started writing and got a job writing columns on drugs and sex for men's magazines. This was the mid-seventies and drugs and disco were considered very chic. All the good parties had lines of coke on coffee tables and sex clubs were making millions. The party continued. Same faces, different drugs. My drug usage escalated. I dropped out of college and sent my daughter to San Francisco to live with her father. I still kept writing.

My editor set up a meeting with a woman who was organizing prostitutes out on the west coast and she asked me if I was interested in reviving P.O.N.Y. (prostitutes of NY) My best friend had just been found, nude, under the Brooklyn Bridge with her throat cut. We used to watch each other's backs out on the stroll. Hookers needed to be protected since it was obvious that the police and government thought we were expendable. I became the spokesperson for PONY. I did all kinds of interviews. The media has always been enthralled with articulate 'street people'. I kept the ratings up. This went on for about a year while I spent more and more time in shooting galleries. Finally, the unions started getting interested in prostitutes and PONY started becoming enmeshed in politics. I walked away.

A couple of years passed and my drug habit became the only thing I was interested in. I had lost my apartment and was basically living in shooting galleries. I was still hustling but the wait between tricks became longer and longer. I looked and acted like your basic run of the mill junkie. I had amassed 26 arrests, two of them for second-degree assault. I had meant it when I said that no one was ever gonna beat me. I became real good with a knife and felt nothing cutting someone. I felt nothing anyway. If I called my daughter and any feelings of love or regret came up, I would sedate myself. My life consisted of getting high (I was now addicted to heroin, methadone, sleeping pills and tranquilizers) and turning tricks. Emotions were not something I wanted to deal with. I used to pray to die. I'd overdose almost every month and then raise hell with hospital staff for reviving me. I tried getting into drug treatment but they were overcrowded and had a waiting list. This was a very exciting time in my life. Too bad I wasn't there to experience it. I had a boyfriend whom I really did love (I just wasn't wild about myself) so there was someone to watch my back and get high with. But I was getting tired. There is nothing more pitiful than an old junkie whore.

It was about that time that I started noticing that a lot of my friends were getting sick and dying. When I had to be hospitalized for pelvic inflammatory disease, the rage kicked up again. I returned to the streets with a vengeance and became known as La Blanca Loca (the crazy white woman) I fought with everyone until in a spaced out rage I stabbed a man that tried to rip me off.

I was given one and one-half to three years. I kicked all drugs in jail, complete with convulsions, vomiting and diarrhea. I hated being locked up, it never occurred to me that the main reason people are locked away is because they're a threat either to themselves or to society. On drugs, I was both. I copped to a program after spending eight months dealing with the insanity the New York State Department of Correction is notorious for. It was time to start over.

I stayed in treatment for about nine months and learned some very important things, like how to channel my rage, and loving support and encounter groups. I learned how to accept and give love. I also learned why so many of my friends were dying. We started losing people in the program. The enemy finally had a name. It was AIDS.

After I left treatment I took a course as an emergency medical technician. I had been drug free for some time and was making Narcotics Anonymous meetings. So I worked as an EMT with plans to someday go through medical school. After years of destructive behavior, I really felt I had to pay back for the very fact that I was still alive. I guess it's true what they say about the Lord protecting fools and children. So I worked and tried to ignore the little things that kept cropping up, such as the white stuff in my mouth and the fatigue.

I used to transport AIDS patients a lot, since I was the only one that didn't give the dispatcher a hard time about it. By this time they were finding out that the disease wasn't airborne, and it was only transmitted by bodily fluids. So I would wear gloves but refused to wear a mask or 'suit up' to transport AIDS patients. Emergency Room nurses would run all kinds of guilt trips about what I was bringing home to my family. I once had a big fight with a charge nurse after I suctioned a patient in the E.R. with PCP (pneumonia) He was left for over an hour all congested. Medical staff, on the whole, resented AIDS patients. The feeling was that they were all faggots and dope fiends and deserved what they got. By this time, I knew what the signs and symptoms were. I knew I was positive for the AIDS virus.

I was still working, even though I was tired all the time. Finally I had a patient go into cardiac arrest in the back of an ambulance. The man had a urinary obstruction and was semi-comatose. I panicked and started CPR without a mask. I found out later he had active tuberculosis. A few weeks later, after working with soaring fevers, I had to be hospitalized.

My temperature was spiking up to 105.5 degrees and the nurses were telling my mother to stay with me because I would not make it through the night. I was delirious and spoke

with my father and grandmother. They're both dead. But I made it; I guess I'm too much of a bitch to die.

I got out of the hospital 90 days later looking like the National AIDS poster child. I spent the next 10 months getting my weight and strength back. Locked in my mom's house, I felt like a germ. Back to feeling ugly and unloved. I didn't want to be touched because I felt unclean. In this society women's bodies are unclean and have to be deodorized before they're acceptable. So now, on top of everything, I was diseased.

My mother wouldn't hear it. She kept hugging me despite the fact that I shied away, and began attending a mothers group and forced me to go out. My first time on a train, I sat there looking at lovers and families and thinking that these options are closed to me. I would look at the person next to me and think, "would they still sit next to me if they knew I had AIDS"?

I started attending a group for women with HIV. I felt like I was the only woman in the world with AIDS. It was all gay white men. This group changed that. All of a sudden I discovered other women with the virus. There were black women, white women, Latinas, rich women, poor women, addicts and transfusion women. They were mothers and sisters and lovers and daughters and grandmothers. Some were militant lesbians and others were republicans (imagine that! Even republicans get AIDS) and we were all connected by the virus. Outside differences became trivial; feelings and survival were everyone's concern. And I learned that there was still a lot of love left in me. The rage mellowed.

I was diagnosed with AIDS two years ago. I kept attending the women's group until the leader left. Then I took over the facilitator's role along with my best friend, Helen, who has ARC (has not come down with any sickness yet) A few months ago I started a group for gay and heterosexuals dealing with HIV. I do AIDS outreach and education. I teach safer sex and show addicts how to clean their works. I encourage them to seek treatment. The rage that burned is now a hot anger. I've been to too many funerals with this disease. I'm tired of my people being neglected and left dying on the streets. My child is now 19 and we're very close. The legacy I want to leave her is for her to remember her mama was a survivor. She survived drugs and she survived her own worst enemy, which was herself. And she taught others survival-she may or may not have survived AIDS, but she kicked ass while she was here.

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I HAVE SURVIVED
By Iris De La Cruz

I have survived
The dope
And the coke
And the meth and pills
And fights in Cabrini's E.R.
With staff
For reviving me.

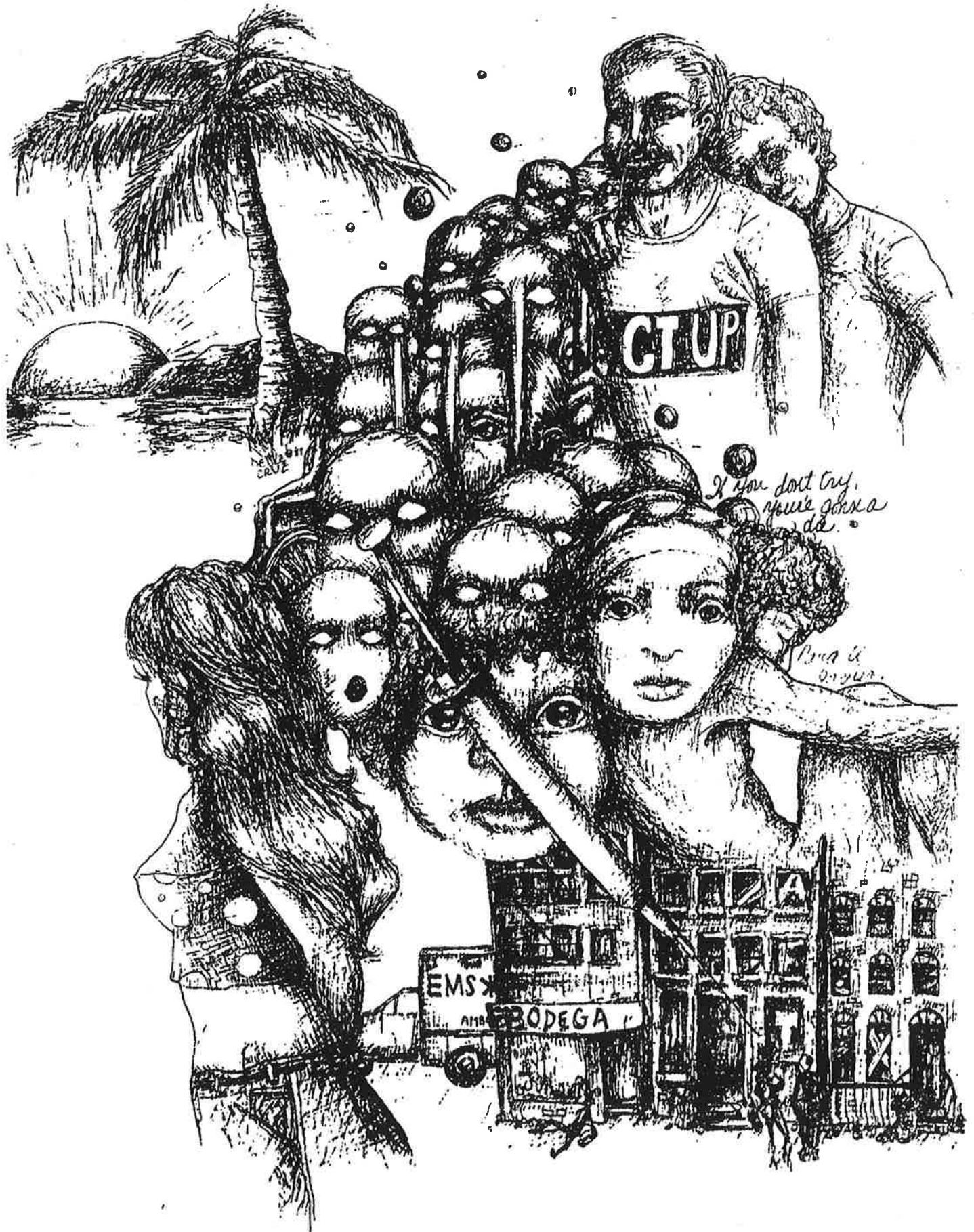
I have survived
Blizzards in mini skirts
Tricks who thought \$25 gave them property rights
And men who thought they could silence me
With their fists
All they discovered was
That I could take a punch.

I have survived
Razors under my skin
And sleepless nights
Enough tears to gag me
And prayers of death to end the pain.

I have survived ME
And people who've said
You can't
Shouldn't
It's impossible.
But I have survived
With love in my heart
And fire in my eyes.
Now tell me I can't survive AIDS.

Yoko Ono was right on when she said "Woman in the nigger of the world". And if I wasn't all that aware of it before, AIDS has definitely raised my consciousness. I've been hospitalized three times last year; twice for TB and once for PCP. The last time I started getting these hellified cramps. I truly thought I'd have to change my name to Mary to await the birth of the Baby Jesus! Immaculate Conception in the age of AIDS! Well, the baby never came and neither did the gynecologist. It was a lot easier for the powers that be to shoot me full of Demerol than to persuade someone to check me out.

TB tuberculosis
PCP AIDS related pneumonia
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NEW YORK
CRUZ

*If you don't try,
you're gonna
die.*

*Book 6
2-1967*

by Iris De la Cruz

JAVIER TORRES
By Iris De La Cruz

Javier Torres was my man, my best friend, and my partner-in-crime. We loved each other, unfortunately, we loved drugs more.

Finally, I got busted and made a commitment to straighten out. Javier stayed in the street and did what he had to do to get his drugs. I saw him 3 years ago and he looked really bad. I cried that night.

I had been doing well, had a new career and living drug-free. Then I got really sick and had to be hospitalized. AIDS.

A few months ago, I saw a show on AIDS. They were interviewing prisoners. Then the camera panned to a silent, solitary figure in a cell. Even with the obvious ravages of the disease, I knew it was Javier. The film was made in 1987. Javier looked terminal. Given his lifestyle and lack of care for prisoners, I believe he's dead. And that's the word on the streets.

In spite of our obviously negative relationship, I did love Javier. So I wrote this poem for him. He had no family in the states. And I just want it known that there is someone out here remembering him with tenderness in my heart and tears in my eyes.

Papi, yo te necesito

PARA JAVIER

Mi conquistador
Barrio words
From an aristocratic face

Mi companero
Long sensual hands
Tapping out a conga beat

Ai Papi, qui pasando?
Those beautiful hands
Silenced
Searching for the music
Of your veins

Mi amor
It could have been better
I would have been stronger
I would have loved you more

I would have saved you
But I have the same disease as you.

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EX-MEMORIAL?

MORE OF THE CONTINUING SAGA OF IRIS AND JAVIER

By Iris De La Cruz

How embarrassing! I wrote this memorial to my boyfriend Javier, complete with a poem straight from the heart, and what happens? That sucker turns up alive! So now I have to write this shit.

After I spilled my guts in past Newslines, I get a letter from upstate NY (home of all your basic criminal types) It was in Spanish and what it basically said was this guy's name was Javier and he was very much alive. I didn't believe it for a minute. In my devious little mind I figured it was just some jive con trying to get over.

I ended up asking him all kinds of personal questions (such as the exact size and location of various tattoos on my body, and his) and he wrote back a whole guidebook. I really didn't need to be reminded about the good sex. Especially since any sex I've had lately has been basically with myself.

So it was Javier, alive and well and doing what he's always done best, which is time. And nice person that I am, I continued writing to him. I really didn't think a whole lot about it since he wrote that he was sentenced to 3 to 6. I mean, I've got AIDS so I really don't be worrying about the future. I figured if I'm still alive when he gets out, I'll see him.

What I didn't count on was how much time he already did. He did the three years and is due to go up before the Board. Even as I write this, Javier is up in a halfway house in Harlem making all kinds of plans to complicate my life. And you know I had to run up and see him. Let me tell you, the man looks fine. He's big and muscular and hasn't been on the street.

Javier is trying to get a job and get his act together. And I'm still caught up in my insanity. And trying to talk him into being tested (that's part 3) But there is a little part of me that feels he was so much easier to deal with when he was dead.

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THE LAST (FINALLY) OF THE IRIS AND JAVIER TRILOGY
By Iris De La Cruz

My life has evolved into a soap opera from hell. I published a photo of my now ex, brain-dead boyfriend, Javier. And then we broke up, well, actually he just cut out on me. This is definitely ruining my image.

For those of you just tuning in; Javier was my man in the streets, another lifetime ago. I heard he died of AIDS in jail-land and published this whole heartfelt memorial to him in the Newslite. Anyway, I got a letter from jail from the scuzzball. It lives! We started communicating (which is something we never did when we were living together. It's real hard to have a conversation when your nose is scraping the floor from nodding.) We made plans to try to get back together when he made parole. The key word in that sentence is 'try. Ain't love grand? Anyway, I had my doubts that it would ever really work out between us, but it was great to fantasize nonetheless.

I started making all kinds of unreasonable (to him) demands on him. Like totally giving up all drugs, including the beer bottle that seemed to be a permanent part of his summer attire. (ai mami, una cervesa...hace caliente!) I wanted him to make Narcotics Anonymous meetings with me. They have Spanish meetings. I've busted my ass trying to maintain my sobriety and there ain't enough love in the whole wide world to make me jeopardize it.

Another thing that became a real issue was the virus. You have to understand that here's a man who shared works and had totally unsafe sex with me. I have AIDS. Maybe it never occurred to him that if I have AIDS, he has an excellent chance of being infected. So I put pressure on him to get tested and start some kind of early treatment. I gave him the whole AIDS education rap, complete with counseling. I told him a positive test was a lot different from AIDS. He definitely didn't want to hear it. His reply was that he felt fine and was big and strong, having gained all kinds of weight. The fact is, the man had just finished doing three years and had little else to do but concentrate on pumping up his body. You spend your time in jail working out so you'll look fine enough to get your shit off when you get out. If I had three years to work out, I'd look like the Hulk! With this virus, things are not always as they seem.

Anyway, Javier was accepted for work release. I spoke with his parole officer, hustled my ass off, and he was given weekend passes. Ostensibly to be with me. That was the last time I heard from Javier. I had waited a month, with no word from him, before calling his parole officer. I didn't know if the man was even still alive. Well I found out he definitely was alive and had been going out on pass. I never wanted to jam him with his PO, all he had to do was be man enough to call me and say he couldn't deal with me and AIDS. I would have covered for him anyway. He obviously chose to punk out and just avoided the whole issue. So he blew his passes 'till he goes to his parole board; if he passes the board.

I have no hatred for Javier. I guess every person must handle things at their own speed and in their own way. Eventually he'll have to get real and deal. It's obvious that we have grown in very different directions. He who remains stagnant rots; and he who rots, dies. There are still some very warm feelings in my heart for the time we spent together. And Javier, if you ever read this, if you ever decide to face the virus, I'll hook you up with some good people to ease your journey. I know it's hard. And por favor mihijo, please live as if you are infected and be good to yourself.

So now I'm interviewing for the position of new partner-in-crime. Must be male, drug-free and have a living, functional brain. Special attention will be paid to those replies that are both street-wise and literate, (yes, darling, you can have both) Belief in a higher power and any sort of activism are definitely plusses, as is being bi-lingual. Totally unacceptable are 'isms' and other bigotries (sexism, racism, etc.) All resumes should be sent to IRIS DE LA CRUZ c/o Newslite, along with photos. I'll personally conduct the interview. This is a volunteer position.

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KOOL AIDS By Iris De La Cruz

People are always talking about different treatments and therapies for HIV. Some follow traditional western medicine (such as AZT or DDI) while others take a more homeopathic route. Still others, like myself, try to maintain a balance between the two. Too bad that a free, natural form of therapy, easily available to everyone is sorely neglected. I'm talking about laughter.

Yeah, I hear you guys snickering in the background, saying to yourselves, De La Cruz is on one of her trips again. The virus has finally affected her brain. Just hear me out. Just under your breastbone, lies an organ known as the THYMUS GLAND. What the thymus gland does is produce a hormone that helps immature T-cells mature. And for those of you walking around hysterical over you T9cell counts (T-4s, T-8s) maybe this will help chill you out a little. T and B cells re produced in the bone marrow. They mature in the thymus (which is the same place that King Kong used to pound on his chest) Laughter stimulates the thymus. And it also allows you to breathe better (when you finally calm down) Besides, it feels damn good.

My own personal attitude towards this virus is that nothing is all that bad that SOME humor can't be found in it. My humor was sick before I got sick; it's insane now. Which is not to say that AIDS is not a serious disease, it's dead serious. But laying somewhere alongside all the pain and desperation, lies hope and humor. It's my intention to bring more emphasis on the latter.

O.K. people, here's some of my sick AIDS stuff...

AZT WEAR

I call this line of accessories and fashions AZT wear because I couldn't think of anything else. AIDSWEAR? How about wearing AIDS?

First of all, there has to be hair accessories. This is a big concern in my life, since I seem to be constantly shedding. Wigs tend to look like wigs, so my solution is to get an outrageous, obvious wig. Dolly Parton or Tin Turner will be very hot this fall in the HIV community. Also, the skinhead look is very chic! And all you need to complete this look is torn-up clothes and safety pins. Cheap chic!

Active wear is very important to the on-the-go* PWA. If you've lost great amounts of weight, (something most people would kill for) take advantage of our new found vogue look with latex (please don't wear your condoms on the outside) lurex and all the skinny little things blimps shun. And for all you fiends out there, active wear is not something you wear to visit your dope dealer.

We are currently working on a line of hospital gowns. Hospital evening gowns. Sequins are the thing to be wearing with lesions.

Also masks are very popular this season. Ours come in a wide array of lovely colors with fluorescents, very big with the disco queens out there. However, they are to be worn on the top of the head (ala yarmulka) with the ear hoops over the ears. What else? Where would you put the ear hoops. I guess you could tie two together to use as a bra. Other things on the drawing board are;

We are also working on a line of designer condoms. Camouflage is very popular with city dwellers this year. It's a jungle out there! We also have cactus condoms for people heavy into pain. And sparkle rubbers will be hot on Christopher Street.

Just in time for the spring season, we are presenting glow-in-the-dark Hickman catheters. It will be made out of the same stuff that tourists insist upon wearing. You'd think that tourists would try to remain as unobtrusive as possible.....

The slut look, with streetwalker wear and pretty-boy toys is the thing this year. Who says PWAs can't be slutty and sexy?

Which brings me to the best part... one more AIDS fantasy. I pick up some macho, sexist, racist, homophobic man. And I look great. A real super-slut. I'm flirting my ass off with this guy. And just when he's real hot' and about to make his move, I say "you wouldn't let something like AIDS come between us, would you?" Then I run like hell.

KEEP SMILIN'

*PWA person with AIDS

© 1989

KOOL AIDS
By Iris De La Cruz

I had to send out birth announcements today! I just got my blood work back from my doctor and I noticed I gave birth to a fresh new T4 cell! How exciting! I didn't even know I was pregnant. I didn't even get laid! So I have to come up with a name. I was figuring on Imelda. If I have any more, I'll call them Ivana, Leona and Donald. Harry is sick and Ferdinand is dead, so their names are out. I have to protect my brood, no hexes. Anyway, I sort of feel bad for these people, with all their earth shaking problems. Read the papers, their problems are so important that they are headlines. Not trifling, petty shit like AIDS. De La Cruz, stop being a bitch. The rich need our understanding and compassion.

More exciting news! My triglyceride (fat) levels have dropped in half, now they're only 700 and my cholesterol levels dropped. Normal tri levels are 20-190. I wasn't metabolizing fats. It was real reassuring knowing I probably wouldn't die of AIDS, but would drop dead on the weights at GMHC of a heart attack. So now I can go back to showing off with how much weight I can lift (which is easy when your only competition are sick men who usually weigh less than you in the first place. I don't show off like that at Jack La Lane's) But all my other blood work is within normal range.

When I tell my doctor it's the herbs and vitamins, he growls. Like I said last month, I'm off of the DDI. That may have had something to do with my body normalizing. Also, high fat and triglyceride levels can be an indicator of pancreatitis. I don't fuck with my internal organs. 'Never know when you're gonna need those suckers.

Oh what an exciting month it's been! We got a date hooked up for a dance. My Bi/hetero support group is so happy! The dance will be on June 8th at 9:00 PM at the Rutgers Church, 236 West 73rd. Street, 5th floor. All you closet heteros who've been avoiding socializing, it's time to party. And of course, our gay friends are invited. I'm on a campaign to disprove the old myth of what a PWA looks like. And acts like. My feeling is to laugh and have a good time, even with this virus. Also, I want a chance to show off my hot little summer clothes. Winter is such a drag! Speaking of hot stuff, I want to kick off a new idea in the Newslines; it's going to be called the hot PWA of the month. So, if you have any photos of yourself or your buddies to send them in with a paragraph or two about yourself. Please make sure you have at least minimal clothing on, (although, I'd be more than happy to accept nudes for my own personal use) because the Newslines doesn't need an obscenity suit. Let's show 'em that we all don't look like we vacationed in Biafra.

The term PWA is just so dry and clinical, don't you think? So, from now on, I'm gonna

refer to myself as a 'pewah'. Sort of pronounced with a french accent. Tres chic, verdad?

What would this column be without at least one sick AIDS joke? So here goes;

Joseph Junkie is blissfully shooting dope. He's busy trying to wipe up the blood and boot in his arm. Along comes his pal, Kool, a crackhead;

KOOL; hey Joe, still shootin' dope? Aren't you afraid you'll get AIDS?
JOSEPH JUNKIE; (unzipping his pants) naw, look, I'm wearing a condom!

WELL KEEP SMILING GUYS. MORE INSANITY NEXT MONTH.

© 1989

KOOL AIDS
By Iris De La Cruz

A KOOL AIDS KRISTMAS (or.....oh shit! De La Cruz left the Christ our of Christmas)

Aaah, Christmas! A time of birth and new beginnings. People actually smile at one another and the spirit of peace and good will permeated the land. (we get back to bitchiness after the New Years hang over.) Time for me to invest in a few bottles of Thunderbird for my pals doing subway duty. Twenty-four, seven..?

Doncha' just love it? And let's get real...I LOVE shopping and giving and getting presents (hint, hint) I'm just so tired of people saying that Christmas has gotten too commercialized. That's just an excuse for being cheap. Let's face it, diamonds last forever. I might not, but the damn diamonds will. And you can always pawn them for the real important things, like doctor bills and AZT. Things are bad; I don't even have the option of selling blood anymore. Yeah, I can hear you guys in the back ground muttering indignantly, 'well, I shot dope and I never had to resort to turning tricks or selling blood'. Get real. Santa definitely did not bring my fix down the chimney. And my habit knew nothing about holidays. Those of you out there who had to go on drug missions (or are still using) know what I'm talking about.

And the fact that I'm drug-free and still alive, with much love in my life is a miracle in and of itself. I can remember Christmas spent riding the subways trying to get warm and being sick to the point where I'd have to go in between the cars and puke. There'd be no money on the streets 'cause everyone else was with their families. And I'd be broke, sick and too ashamed to show my face. So for me, the holidays are definitely a time of miracles and a cause for celebration.

The only bad thing is that I get cold easy since dealing with AIDS. Sometimes I feel like my nipples are just going to shatter and fall right off. And for all you perverts getting turned on by that idea, let me tell you, the shit hurts. Shit. Maybe I shouldn't have mentioned pain. Now I got the rest of you guys into weird stuff stimulated. Talk about negatives, did you ever see egg lipids in the cold? Not a pretty sight. It kinda' looks like a cross between Crypto reaction and wall paper paste. Bon appetit!

Anyway, this column is brought to you courtesy of my Friday night support group. (y'all are welcome to attend. Call the Coalition) and the women in Life Force.

Also, I'm enclosing a poem sent to me by Garret. And for all you guys who have taken the time to write and tell my in graphic detail what you would like to do to various parts of my anatomy, there's a reason, other than time, why I haven't responded. I may joke with you guys, but maybe you need to learn some self-respect so you can respect women better. Don't forget, just like your own mother, someone out there refers to me as mom. And for all you guys out there, going through your own personal hell, either with this

virus or in jail, you're not alone. For whatever it's worth, you're in someone's prayers;
mine. I wish everyone out there much peace and love on this Christmas.

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THE TWELVE DAYS OF (HIV) CHRISTMAS

By Iris De La Cruz

On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me
A case of HIV

On the second day of Christmas, my true love gave to me
AZT (to deal with the HIV)

On the third day of Christmas, my true love gave to me
A bit of PCP*

On the fourth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me
Pentamidine (does it work on PCP)

On the fifth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me
Horrible PID*

On the sixth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me
A full hysterectomy (no more PID)

On the seventh day of Christmas, my true love gave to me
Fevers from CMV*

On the eighth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me
Gancyclovir (to work on the CMV)

On the ninth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me
A dose of genital herpes

On the tenth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me
Acyclovir (cause the herpes are killing me)

On the eleventh day of Christmas, my true love gave to me
A case of sustacal (cause the virus is wasting me)

On the twelfth day of Christmas that sucker finally died!!

*PCP pneumonia

*PID pelvic inflammatory disease

*CMV AIDS related sickness

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KOOL AIDS
By Iris De La Cruz

THE GREAT SERO- POSITIVE SEDER, or pigging out on Passover.

This is dedicated to Lou who was nice enough to leave some money to PWAs.

My mother has started a sort of tradition. She started making Passover seders for people with HIV. This started out a couple of years ago, after I was released from the hospital with and AIDS diagnosis. It was only supposed to be a one-shot deal because I was supposed to die, but it has since evolved into an annual event. Since I spent all my time perfecting my Camille death bed scene, I had no time to make any new friends (and my old friends, I didn't want them to see me). So my mom put up a sign at GMHC for PWAs who wanted a home cooked meal. I wasn't too overjoyed about that since I wasn't all that thrilled about eating at that point. And I would have to get dressed since my state-of-the-uniform had evolved into a raggedy house coat and sweat sox. Having strangers in the house would also mean I would have to be civil, which was a drag. Your family KNOWS just how bitchy you can be. I looked forward to this in much the same way as I'd look forward to dining on crushed glass.

Anyway, our guests came, unknown and unwanted (by me), and wonder of wonders, I had a good time. What made it even better, was the fact that I was still pretty sick, so I got out of doing dishes. What ended up happening was we all became friends and an annual tradition was born. I guess nobody thought I would ever live this long. Certainly not me.

So this Passover found me still alive. And healthy enough to do dishes. My mother just didn't want to hear, "oh mom, I can't do dishes. Dishwater has bacteria." We settled on disposable stuff. And then there was the question of who to invite. I had a lot more friends this year than I did when I was diagnosed. I couldn't invite everyone, so now there's a whole lot of people out there no longer speaking to me, but there's ALWAYS someone out there in my life who's not talking to me.

The guys that came before were also present this year, along with the assorted perverts that comprise my family and friends. My mom did her annual 'oh-my-God-where-are-we-gonna-fit-all-these-people-and-where-are-we-going-to-find-the-money-to-feed-them-all' trip. Then she did a great imitation of a speed freak trying to get all the food prepared. But the food itself was worth two weeks of her walking around exhausted. The women in my family all react to stress in much the same way. They turn into creeps.

I had already applied for some funds from the 'Lou Fund' to help pay for the dinner. And I would periodically go off in the PWAC office about not receiving it. Finally, the day before Passover, I got a check in the mail from the coalition and turned it over to my mom. The dope fiend in me thought immediately of all the spandex I could buy for the

money, since my mother was unaware that I had even applied for the grant. I guess I'll have to look slutty at a later date.

It was a real strange dinner. There were approximately 20 of my closest friends, almost all of whom are either gay or lesbians (what does that say about me?) and there was my mother, brother and a few token straight men that I invited for the sole purpose of flirting with. And there was my daughter who's a lesbian and was thrilled with my friends. Last, but not least were some of the women from work with my supervisor. So the group consisted of gay white men, blacks, latinos and lesbians. And me and my family. I was waiting for war to be declared. I thought, "I'm gonna have to seat these people very carefully or I'm gonna be peeling them off the ceiling"

But, wonder of wonders, they got along fine. After my work cronies left I hung out with my girlfriends and we took a series of photos that I refer to as 'lesbians from hell', and me and my mom. Anyway, we all had a great time and maybe people learned to leave their prejudices at the door and deal with on another as people.

It would have been better if I was sick. I had forgotten about all the pots, since we had enough food to feed every PWA in the country and they haven't started making disposable pots. So I guess if I stay alive, we'll have to do this every year. So listen up, you guys, on our 20th anniversary, we're gonna REALLY kick it!

Thank you, mom.

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JEWISH MOTHERS

By Iris De La Cruz

Jewish mothers, by law, must take a course in 'nudgerly'. Nudgerly can be loosely translated as supreme pain in the ass. My mother could be an instructor. I'm thirty five and I still hear about taking an umbrella and jacket and if I had enough to eat (I'm the world's only overweight PWA)

I was hospitalized for MAI* a couple of years ago and was very sick. The doctors were telling her that I wouldn't make it through the night, my temperature was 106 and I was delirious. The hospital staff tried doing things at their convenience. They were messing with the wrong one. I have seen my mother physically drag a nurse into my room to take care of me. Residents used to hide out in the medication room when they heard my mother was on the floor. And food was the last thing on my mind. So my mother came up armed with corned beef and ice cream and sat there by my bed until I consented to take a bite. It was easier to eat than hear her mouth. She also bugged me into walking, and, when I was released, into getting out of the house. Needless to say, I'm well enough now to the point where she feels she can bug me about housework, "but mom, I can't wash dishes, I've got AIDS" is no longer making it.

My mother has evolved into an AIDS militant in her old age. She sits on the Board of Family AIDS Services and feels very strongly about uniting PWAs with their families. So it came as no shock when she started going on a trip about me attending a lecture that Fran Herman was giving on AIDS and the family and how to tell your family about HIV.

My feelings about lectures is that I would rather chew on crushed glass or make love to a cactus. And doing those things would have been easier than dealing with my mom. I went to the lecture.

The lecture was held in the gay and lesbian center. An ACT-UP meeting was in progress at the same time, so the joint was jumpin'. There were people there with their families, gay men alone and with lovers, and families of PWAs. Everyone looked real nervous.

The panel consisted of Fran and two other people, all of whom are personally involved with AIDS, and are therapists dealing with HIV. They gave talks about what the AIDS Family Services is about and the problems facing people in telling their families. One of the issues raised was fear of rejection. I have heard cases of PWAs who have been totally ostracized by their families after disclosing, but most families have been supportive. Another issue was that many gay men were still in the closet as far as their families were concerned and now had to face disclosure on both issues. The other reasons for not telling were "my parents are in their eighties, it would kill them", "my family lives out of state", "we aren't close and I don't want any more aggravation in my life". People shared their own experiences dealing with this and it was interesting to hear the different perspectives. The family members almost unanimously agreed that they had the right to know and decide how they were going to handle the situation. And most of the PWAs thought that families should be told. Some, of course, didn't want to deal with it.

The group started warming up and began sharing personal experiences. There was a lot of tears as pains and fears were expressed. Some of the people really stand out in my mind. One was an older Hispanic woman who disclosed for the first time, her sero-status to anyone besides her immediately family. The tears rolled down her face as she talked, surrounded by loving family members who immediately began comforting her. My mother was so moved by her story that she ran across the room to give her a hug. I was real proud of my mom for that. Other people got in touch with their feelings, such as the newly diagnosed young man whose family didn't know he was gay, much less about the virus, and the family who spoke of their love and concern for the member who wasn't able to attend due to the virus. The group got in touch with a lot of feeling. The thing that impressed me the most was the unbelievable amount of love and compassion in the room. I made the statement that risk factors and personal differences were no longer relevant. We had to use whatever time we have fighting a common enemy, which is the virus, and opening up to one another.

The meeting ended with a lot of hugging and exchange of telephone numbers. People walked from the room knowing that they were not alone and support was available to them.

And I was glad I went.

*MAI AIDS related sickness

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KOOL AIDS
By Iris De La Cruz

By the time most of you read this, we will have had our infamous HIV dance. The People with AIDS Coalition and Body Positive have gotten together to do this. I'm real excited about it as it gives me a chance to get dressed and act slutty! And to think that only a couple of months ago, this whole thing was just an idea kicked around at my hetero/bi group! And a few months prior to that the group itself was just an idea kicked around in my deranged little mind! I have to express my thanks to Bill Case and Chris Babick and the rest of the Coalition for being so supportive.

Anyway, the group is going great and I'm real happy with it. I refer to it (in private) as my horny HIV group. It started out as a singles group, but since a lot of the members have gotten into relationships it's now a support group that sort of turned into a hang-out after the group. I've seen a lot of progress as far as the members go, some of them who couldn't deal with the virus at all are now cracking sick AIDS jokes. Some of the stuff you read in this column is stolen from my group members. Now they'll all read this and shut up around me. So, if you guys are reading this, I LOVE Y'ALL!!! There now, you've seen it in print and I don't have to keep repeating it.

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KOOL AIDS
By Iris De La Cruz

Well, we finally had our much-touted bi-hetero HIV dance. Never again. I should have taken the weather as an omen. It was pouring, ruining my slut make-up and making me look like one of those crazy women on Times Square that walk around with ratty dead minks around their necks in August. You know, the ones with Cleopatra eye-makeup and red lipstick that begins under their nose and ends somewhere on the chin. Actually, I've been in training with the Future Shopping Bags Ladies of America for quite a while now, just ask my group members if they've ever seen me without my obligatory bag of papers.

So I met the guy that volunteered to drive the van to pick up the DJ and the sound equipment in the South Bronx. You know we got caught up in the rush hour and had to hang out in a hot van for two hours. During these two hours, the driver kept up a nonstop conversation out of nervousness. Now usually I'm a very patient person and will listen to people until they just run out of steam. This guy had a heavy accent so I had to actually concentrate on what he was saying to be able to understand him. It's not like with English, where it can just space out.

Anyone who has ever driven a van knows how far apart the gears are and that there is a stick shift in the middle. Which was real good for me. The only problem was that every five minutes he would ask to hold my hand. Finally, he started saying that he was a healer and he would heal me if I held his hand. Yeah, right! After about the twentieth time, (and I couldn't alienate him 'cause I still needed him to drive) I lost it and said that if he didn't stop grabbing my hand, he'd find himself watching the road with his head bashed through the windshield.

Speaking of the road, you could hardly see it. The rain was so heavy, it was like driving through Niagara Falls! At this point all I'm thinking of is my mother's credit card that I used to rent this van. Thank God I had taken out extra collision insurance. One day I'm going to do all the things normal people do, like get a license, hold up my credit rating, and learn to dance. When I was drugging, having a car would have been stupid; if it didn't get stolen while I was off copping, I would have eventually sold it for drugs. The credit cards were a fiasco; I was the best dressed dope fiend on the lower east side. Until I sold the clothes, too. Such is life.

We ended up getting to the dance in one piece. The dance went well, except for a couple of hassles which was to be expected. I heard a lot of good stuff, like people were finally disclosing after years of being in the closet about their ser-status. People needed a place to be comfortable. And relax. There was a real need to meet other people who were dealing with HIV. I saw a lot of numbers being passed, people were hungry to meet and network. I've also gotten some feedback about budding romances that came out of the dance, so I'm pleased.

I finally got home, after cleaning up, at 4:45 AM. The rain was horrible and of course we kept getting lost. I couldn't see. At 5:30 AM I received a phone call from my driver

(who was supposed to return the van in the morning). He smashed the van but wasn't hurt. On my mothers credit card. Thank God for the collision insurance. But I was still responsible for the first two hundred dollars. So the PWAC ended up losing money on the deal. I think I'm gonna stick to having socials periodically. No vans, no drivers, no sound equipment and less stress. If people need to dance, I'll bring my boom box.

I know you're all waiting with baited breath about my little T-cell babies. It seems three of them cut out. I thought they died, so I sent out funeral announcements. I tried to put an announcement in the obit column in the NY Times, but they weren't hearing it. Which may have turned out for the best. The guys in the Coalition office told me to chill out, maybe they just left home. I was gonna put their little pictures on the back of milk containers (have you seen this CD4 cell?) but decided a wait and see attitude. It worked out. They returned home. Bringing 13 of their little friends with them. I'm in love and maybe that had something to do with that (more on that next month. Doncha just love gossip) or maybe my babies just needed a daddy.

Anyway children, time to do my group and hang out at GMHC. I'll leave you with my wit of the month. We were sitting around the Coalition office thinking of ways to raise money and one of my fellow sick-ettes came up with the neat idea of starting a retirement fund for PWAs. Think about it.

Here's a cute little condom joke to leave you with.

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH 365 USED CONDOMS?
ROLL THEM INTO A TIRE AND CALL IT A GOOD YEAR.

Keep smilin'

© 1989

IRIS AND PHIL

Iris De La Cruz is one of PWAC's stars. Just ask her. She has her own column in Newsline, runs her own support groups, raises hell in general. Iris is also one of my closest friends who I love very much. But she is not feeling too well these days. She has been stuck at NYU Hospital, now called Tisch, for more than a month. And she might be there a bit longer. Iris has spent most of her time in co-op care, that revolutionary concept in hospitalization that is more hotel-like than the main wings of the hospital. In co-op, you get to have your own room, with a care partner, and whenever you have to have therapy or see your doctor, you go to the 14th floor where the exam rooms are. The cafeteria is on 15 with sweeping views of midtown and the river. I was just there. Two weeks looking for the cause of my FUOS or fevers of unknown origin. Iris and I had a blast together. Here's one of our conversations... ..

PHIL ZWICKLER

PHIL: What are you doing here?

IRIS: Hanging out, being bored, organizing people to rebel... against strange medical shit and attitudes, empowering people...

PHIL: Any bad experiences in the hospital?

IRIS: Well, I'm not a good patient, I'm like the patient from hell. First of all I know more about AIDS medications than the nurses on the GYN/surgical floor 'cuz I deal with that every day.

PHIL: What is your latest medical problem?

IRIS: Pelvic inflammatory disease, which really should be classified as an opportunistic infection, or it's a tumor, but we won't know what it is 'til they're done playing games with my body. So I was over in the hospital, and they were giving me all my little meds in a cup, and certain meds you do with food or without food. You know what works better together and they would get upset that I wouldn't gulp down these medications. They would sit there until I did. This was an ongoing fight. Also, I would adjust my IV, flush it out and they would get upset about that and they would go back to my doctor, whom I love, and complain. He told them, "she knows what she's doing, leave her alone". And then there was the issue of the smoking. I smoke 2 ½ packs a day. It's barbaric, no smoking in the hospital. There's nail marks all over the wall because of that, so I lit incense to cover the smoke. They got upset about that, too, those uptight people. We could go on and on.

And there was the food. I was getting my food on paper plates. I was in isolation with paper plates. That's discriminatory and I wasn't going for it. So I made a scene at the nurse's station and the head nurse comes and says "well on your file it says TB". I haven't had active TB in three years! I'm on TB medicine, you know I have TB, but we could tongue kiss and you're not gonna get TB, I tell her. She says "well, I'll check with the doctor," which is like the catch-all phrase in the hospital. I know my body. So she checks with the doctor, "no, your TB's not active". No shit! So I got my plates which weighed about 400 pounds, you could throw these plates at the wall and they wouldn't break, I've tried it. Which also made me real popular. So I got my plates, but I had my own room and when they found out I didn't need paper plates they found out I didn't

need my own room either, so they put me in a room with an orthodox Jew. She was real sweet and I felt real sorry, so I stopped smoking in the room 'cuz she had to listen to me cursing and talking about AIDS, and she was real thrilled. But she was real nice about it, I wouldn't have been so nice.

I got out of the hospital and went to a clinic (which will remain nameless, but it's on the lower east side). I should have known better when I saw the doctors freeze dried blown hair and salon tan. But fuck it, I was in pain. The doctor used a speculum better suited for cows than women and started checking out just how much pain I could take before I finally bounced off the table. Even his breast exam hurt. Then there was another incident in another clinic where a doctor refused to examine me and had an intern do it instead. I swear, I never had so much trouble trying to find someone to look between my legs in my life!

I attend the PWA women's group; the last vestige of sanity in a demented world. Almost all the women in my group have some kind of GYN problem. But don't try to find any studies on AIDS and hormonal levels, 'cause they don't exist. So, we rely on each other for support and medical information. Our group leader is a nurse, so we lucked out in that respect.

Also there's the matter of 'nice girls don't get AIDS'. There are women from all walks of life in my group, straight, lesbian, black, white, latino, both in recovery and those that have never used drugs. We are not all sluts and dope fiends. Which brings me to another point. A good man/woman is hard to find, I mean, this disease doesn't make you the social hit of the season. Are there any men/women out there who are NOT into active drug use or scrounging that can deal with AIDS? Like Janis used to sing, "don't you know, I've been searching? He'd have to be into survival."

I was seeing one guy who wasn't HIV+ and I kept weaseling out of sex. Finally he said, "what's the matter, do you think I have AIDS?" I answered, "no, but I do." He refused to even consider it. I refused to consider him. Such is my non-existent love life. But, I'm an optimist. Things will get better. 'Cause I'm too much of a bitch and that's what's keeping me alive.

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IRIS
By Garrett

You make us forget our worries
With your biting sense of humor
But now we're all worried about you
'cause Iris, we've heard a rumor
they say that you're at NYU
we've heard that you've been sick
we just can't picture you. Iris
in a hospital gown (too tacky)
unless of course you're wearing one
that's been diagnosed by 'Mackie'.
And so our kookie columnist
Of the great 'KOOL AIDS WITH ICE'
While you're laid up ('scuse the term)
Please take our sound advice
Don't make the others laugh too much
They're already in stitches
Don't be hard on ('scuse the term) the nurses
Though some may be real bitches
If a doctor tells you "open wide"
Please don't create a scene
It won't mean what you're thinking
It'll be your mouth he'll mean
And the opening holes in the back
Of your cute little hospital gown
Remember that you're there to rest
Don't be tempted to turn it around
So, Iris, while you're in there
We'll be climbing the walls
'cause we're all hooked on Iris now
you've got us by the balls
we're all your sicko junkies
no, not on drugs or booze
not since we started getting high
on IRIS DE LA CRUZ

KOOL AIDS
By Iris De La Cruz

This column is a continuation of last month's column.

I had been in the hospital for five weeks and my stomach was looking more and more obscene in it's sheer size. The decision to do a hysterectomy had been made and the gynecologist that was supposed to perform the operation had me on antibiotics in a last ditch effort to see if I'd respond. When it became apparent that I wasn't responding and this guy wasn't giving any specific dates to operate, my primary care physician called me into his office. The decision to go ahead and have a hysterectomy was by no means an easy one for me to make. Visions of spending my life bearded and titless flittered through my mind. Also, my female organs were a PART OF ME!!! For all the pain and aggravation, I came into this world with them and I wanted to leave in much the same manner. And my body, between having AIDS and having spent my life as a street warrior already had various ugly little scars and stretch marks. Any plans to do nude modeling were dashed years ago, but this sort of put a cap on it.

So I was with my doctor in his office and he was livid, I had never ever seen him so upset and I'm quietly trying to remember who on staff I'd insulted this time. "Do you know what the expression 'jerked around'" means he asked. It seems the gynecologist, who also was a friend of my doctor's was procrastinating and real content to just let me hang around the hospital ad infinitum without ever doing the operation. After calling this guy all sorts of pussies and basically going off, my doctor promised to find someone qualified to do the operation. My initial reaction was one of feeling guilty for having put my doctor through all this. I tried to be very level-headed and comforting, saying it really didn't matter. I had to sneak out and run by Friday night HIV group so I really didn't have time to examine the ramifications of what all this really meant. I had brought this up in the group without really dealing with it, sort of as a political issue. I really don't like using my group for myself, I have a therapist and a great support system. The group is really for group members. Maybe I just have to get over this, but I have a problem when facilitators hog up groups all the time with their own personal shit. So I did the group and snuck back into the hospital. Afterwards I found myself alone in my room. Finally, I began to realize the ramifications of what was happening.

Approximately seven years ago, I wound up in Harlem Hospital being treated for Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)

It came out of nowhere. Basically, one day I was fine and the next day I was being admitted through the ER with fevers and unimaginable cramps. At first I thought the pain was due to constipation. That's not real far off since opiates are real constipating. And I had been taking methadone and shooting dope. My boyfriend would bring me up a couple of bags in the hospital and I ran it through the IV line. (I was considering leaving the line in when I left the hospital. No more hunting for veins) since I was receiving methadone in the hospital, they were aware of the fact that I was an addict. No one ever suggested HIV testing. This was seven years ago. The PID was treated, I recovered and

went about my business thinking it was a freak occurrence since I had no history of STDs or gynecological problems.

Alone at night (doesn't the shit always hit you at night?) feelings that I thought were resolved hit me like a building falling on me. I remember when I was newly diagnosed with AIDS I would ride the trains and have thoughts like, would these people still be riding with me if they knew I had AIDS? And I'd see couples and families and I'd get very depressed thinking that this part of my life was over. I'd feel so dirty. I felt I was the only woman in the world with this virus and was judged to be unclean every time I walked into a doctor's office. I went through a period of wanting my own utensils and being real uptight about sharing bathrooms. I felt there was a big scarlet letter A on my forehead and everyone who saw me knew I had AIDS and was therefore unclean and not worthy to share even the air. I wanted to die.

I worked so hard. I had already been drug-free when I was diagnosed and I busted my ass with my therapist dealing with all the negative emotions that came with having AIDS. And I had come so far. Far enough to where I was counseling other people dealing with it. And now this doctor was dancing around, willing to allow me to die because my body was putrid, my blood was tainted and filthy and carried death. And I had no anger towards this man! It was all directed inward at myself. I went into a hellified depression and refused to eat or go for my medications. I spoke to no one.

The staff at NYU coop care is amazing. My doctor who doesn't want to be mentioned found himself many times in the position of a therapist. Finally, after refusing medication for the umpteenth time, one of the nurses spoke to me. Everything came out. I knew, from experience, that hospital staff gossip. Every time I'd go for my meds I felt like staff all knew that this guy refused to operate because I was dirty. The nurse's name was Diane DiBernardo and she didn't take no shit. I probably recovered because she was there. She treated me as an equal with some medical knowledge and spent time kicking it with me like any other woman. Yo Diane, I owe you.

I also had a lot of support from my friends and family. Phil, our friendly Newsline editor, was with me all the way, as was my therapist and boyfriend. Love truly does heal.

Finally the chief resident operated himself. My ID doctor scrubbed up and assisted in the operation and the surgery went well. I'm back at work, went to Washington yesterday with ACT-UP for benefits for women with PID, and generally acting crazy again. The sad fact is that I should have been tested seven years ago for HIV and the infection (that I had been complaining about for almost two years prior to the hysterectomy) should have been addressed. Doctors should really examine the reasons why they entered the 'healing art' of medicine and maybe read the Hippocratic oath once in a while. And women shouldn't be getting sick and left to die because there is no research on women and HIV. Our women are dying untreated and without benefits because although sero-positive, PID is NOT considered an opportunistic infection by the CDC, so women are the caregivers, if we allow our women to die, we are also condemning society to the same fate.

My feeling is that I didn't have to develop AIDS and the hysterectomy was preventable. I still can't find out if the ovarian abscesses were due to AIDS or just 'women's problems'. And yeah, I'm angry. Blood is dropping from my eyes. But I guess that's why we have ACT-UP. The depression is gone. But the other day, I was with my friend Lydia and we talked about having babies. And it struck me that even if there's a cure for AIDS tomorrow, I could never have another baby. There is a part of me gone forever and I'm still in mourning for it.

I know this column wasn't exactly uplifting and I apologize to all the people who look to my writing to laugh and feel a little better in the midst of all this chaos. But sometimes it isn't all sweetness and light and some very real issues need be addressed. But not to worry, there's been some crazy shit going on and I promise you guys that next month we'll laugh together again.

CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE; thanx to Zoe Leonard for the photos of me in the summer and September Newslines. And to Phil Zwickler who put the September issue out (basically from a hospital bed). And to Paul who loves me and makes me feel like a woman. Even without a uterus.

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THE WORLD'S WORST PATIENT
By Iris De La Cruz

The world's worst patient
Takes no shit
And people say she's hostile.
Don't they know she's a soldier
In a war?
And she's fighting for her life.

She knows her medications
Reciting litanies
Of drug interactions
And new treatments
Others depend on her
Knowledge.
The PDR is her bible.

The world's worst patient
Hides syringes in her drawer.
She does vitamin B12 injections
And vitamin bottles
Crowd her night table.
She don't fuck with her health.

And on starched white sheets
Alone at night
Hearing the lullaby beep
Of distant monitors.

The world's worst patient
Cries alone.
She's scared.
But she's still alive.

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AIDS FANTASIES
By Iris De La Cruz

I have a lot of fantasies regarding the virus and people in my life. At the risk of losing friends and family, or being carted away to an insane asylum, I'm going to share some of them. If anyone has stuff to share, send it in. The more outrageous, the better.

1. My brother telling me that my illness, blood results and everything connected with AIDS was all an elaborate hoax, perpetrated to get back for the time I stuck egg yolks in his underwear.
2. Finding out that chocolate and nicotine increase the immune system.
3. Miraculously sero-converting to HIV negative and then going out and charging \$300 a head to reveal how I did it. (like some people are doing)
4. Having super unsafe sex with every man who ever made my life miserable. Call it a public service, it would save a lot of women untold grief.
5. Entering a jammed subway car in the middle of the morning rush hour and stating, "I have AIDS, can I sit down?" And then getting the whole subway car to myself.
6. My uncle (who is afraid to be in the same room as me) going into cardiac arrest. I'm the only one who knows CPR and can save him. I work tirelessly on him until the ambulance arrives. He revives to discover that I gave him mouth-to-mouth. And then falls down dead of another heart attack behind the news.
7. My doctor calling me and saying I have nine hundred million T4 cells and the acupuncture and vitamins are obviously working.

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MY EXPERIENCES WITH THE WOMEN OF LIFE FORCE

By Iris De La Cruz

You see them every morning without really noticing them. Like many other women in Brooklyn, they drop their kids off at various day care centers before going off to work. The only thing that sets them apart is that they are health educators and are out in neighborhoods that the media refers to as hopelessly dying. They're unique in the fact that they bring HIV prevention and condoms to these neighborhoods. These are the women of LIFE FORCE.

I became interested in Life Force after a recruiter came by my women's group trying to get women to be trained and go out in their communities as health educators. It was a radical concept and appealed to me at once.

I had been diagnosed for a little over a year when I decided to join Life Force. I remembered the seventies, when women started being responsible for their own health care. That was the beginning of all the self-help clinics that exist today as women's centers. It was a very exciting concept. And besides, being the neurotic, compulsive freak that I am, I make it a point to learn everything I could about this virus. The idea of even more information was a great turn-on.

Our training was supposed to last two weeks; it lasted over two months. By the time we were certified, we knew more than the trainers. I remember in our first class, we went around the room and introduced ourselves and stated our reasons for wanting to do HIV work. I knew from the interview that many of the women, (but not all) were sero-positive. But AIDS was conveniently never mentioned. Nobody was disclosing their sero-status. I have a big problem with people being made to feel ashamed of having a virus. Finally, my turn came up and I said, "my name is Iris De La Cruz, and I do HIV counseling because I have AIDS." The room was silent. But the women that followed me (who were infected) disclosed. Disclosure was a big issue. Many of the women had young children to protect and for a while nobody was allowed to reveal their sero-status. I almost quit behind that. Now the women have no problem with that and speak at conferences as PWAs. The growth I've seen has been amazing.

I did the trainings with my typical attitude that I knew all this stuff and it was beneath me. But it filled my time, and the stipend didn't interfere with my welfare benefits. The money was supposed to be used for lunch; I used it for cigarettes and spandex. And the fact that I knew more than almost all the women there helped as an ego boost. But the women were ravenous for information, and by the end of the training, they were socking it to the various 'AIDS professional' whenever they went out to speak.

Being a mega bitch, I made it a point to comb obscure medical journals for information that I could use to prove one instructor wrong. Her name was Holly, and she truly was a sweet, gentle woman who was sincerely committed to fighting HIV. Holly was always laid back and explained everything to us, even when I used class time to be a pain in the

ass. And being a registered nurse, she truly did have more information than me. Holly taught me more with her attitude than I could have ever learned in any text book.

I still had a sick need to always be in the class encyclopedia and resented anyone getting information to the class before I did. Lydia was one of these people I had a problem with. Lydia was amazingly pretty, and it was obvious that she had done her homework. I avoided her for fear of being compared to her. I was afraid she'd steal my thunder. But then I got to know Lydia and heard her story.

Lydia is a single mother of three sons. She became infected after her husband received a tainted blood transfusion. During this period she got pregnant and delivered Ameir, who was born HIV infected, her husband died, leaving Lydia alone to raise her three boys. When she discovered Ameir was infected, she went on a mission to get him the best possible treatment. She harassed the NIH to accept him as a patient and to this day, she flies down to the NIH with Ameir. The doctors told her when her son was born that he'd never reach his fifth birthday. Ameir is now six and thriving.

Dealing with pediatric HIV showed Lydia the paucity of services available for children, so she helped found ACTUAL, an advocacy organization to fight for the rights of those who really have no voice; our children.

I have seen Lydia exhausted from all of her running around and activist work. People assume that she's strong and can handle everything that comes up. And they're usually right. Lydia has never refused me a favor and has always been there whenever I needed her. I count on Lydia as one of my best friends. But if my boyfriend ever starts looking at her too much, I'll kick his ass. I'm not giving up this friendship.

I remember going out to a health station in Coney Island with a Life Force member named Ada. Coney Island resembles London after the blitzkrieg. With the amusements down by the beach, it looks like a pitiful overly made up whore, surviving on dreams of past beauty. Everyone considers Coney Island a hopeless wasteland. I'd walk down the street expecting a building loaded with crack heads to fall down on my head. (I've come so far from the time when I used to sleep in shooting galleries in abandoned buildings.) Ada is raising her grandkids there. I walked into the clinic and there is Ada (who must have shown up an hour earlier after dropping the kids off at school) setting up the coffee and cookies for the people waiting to see a doctor. I asked her who bought this stuff and she answered that she did, out of her own pocket because she thought it would make people more receptive to what she had to say. And she was right.

Ada is a middle-aged woman who looks like she'd be more in place singing gospel in church than giving out condoms. But people respond to the heavy maternalism and true faith she puts out. Ada had three grandchildren that she took under her wing when their mother died of AIDS. The baby died when she was thirteen months old after Ada took her home from the hospital; she wanted her to have a little time being loved and cared for in her short life. Ada truly has the faith of a child. Motherhood to me has always meant plopping a bottle in my daughter's mouth and wishing she'd stop teething so I could get

some sleep. I've gotten a little better, but I really can't imagine dealing with three sick children all at once. Ada has done that without ever complaining. Her two remaining grandchildren are five and nine and their faces glow with love.

Life Force now has twenty-six members. When we started there were sixteen. And like any other group of people, there have been times of great joy and of sorrow. We had lost a group member from the virus after she went off on a drug binge. While Life Force is not a support group, the women are very close and have really evolved into a family. Some of the women, myself included, are in recovery, and so far there has only been that one slip up. I know that for myself, the satisfaction I get from my work has a lot to do with keeping me sober.

Our executive director, Michele, has been faced with some hard decisions, which she handled admirably with courage. Since she is friends with some of the women outside of work, it can be hard for both her and the women to make and accept unpopular decisions. Fortunately, those situations are very rare. I, of course, lost no time in getting off on the wrong foot with Michele. She has amazingly long dread-locks down past her butt. I made a statement that maybe I should get extensions (yeah, right, on my three remaining hairs) like her. Girlfriend got highly upset and lost no time in informing me that that was HER hair. I didn't know anyone's hair could grow so long.

Also, Michele and my mom found they had a lot in common when Michele came up to visit me in the hospital. She handed me some flowers and proceeded to get tipsy with my mother. They spent the rest of the time giggling and playing with make-up. My mother is real impressed with Michele. She has great respect for any woman who will sit and drink with her.

Like I said before, we have had our share of tragedy. Carmen, a Life Force member, had lost her son to AIDS. While she was doing outreach in Bushwick, she found out her daughter was HIV+. Carmen was devastated. Now she and her daughter, Gigi are working together in Life Force.

Life Force was the brainchild of Barbara Cicatelli. Who formed Cicatelli Associates in the seventies to train drug counselors. The natural evolution of that was to get involved training HIV counselors. The idea of using community women to go out in their own neighborhoods for AIDS prevention was a revolutionary concept. Nobody believed that poor women were capable of being trained, much less working as health educators. Barbara did, and now Life Force is in the process of incorporating as a separate entity from Cicatelli.

We've grown into a family in the time we've been together. Like all families, we have had our share of tragedies. We lost one woman in the course of being together and we all shared in the many problems of raising kids. But Life Force is now a viable respected entity, and some truly strong self-empowered women are going out into the community bringing messages of hope and change. And, unlike so-called HIV professional, Life

Force isn't over at 5 PM. These are their neighborhoods, and the women have a real commitment to helping save them.

Like I said, I'm truly proud of Life Force. It has been a real learning experience to me. I've learned patience and humility and a multitude of other lessons. And most important, I've learned to love and care. In spite of myself.

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ODE TO THE SISTERHOOD

By Iris De La Cruz

Here's to all the women
The nameless, faceless souls
That died alone
Warriors
In combat
Forgotten
Beside their brothers

Here's to Linda
Dead
Who died ashamed of a virus
Trying to gain access
To a drug trial
That might have saved her life.

Here's to Migdalia
Who died
A prisoner of war
Trapped in a fourth floor walk-up
Cold, starving and crippled
Denied of benefits
For the cancer
That ate her womb.

And don't forget Marie
Who spoke no English
And was deemed healthy (and stupid, lazy)
By a callous, asshole social worker
Deaf to the poetry in her native Creole
Who spent her last days
Feeling hopeless and dirty
And alone.

Shaheen died on a stretcher
In a city hospital
From ovarian abscesses
The surgeon refused to operate
(tainted blood. No insurance)
so she drowned in her own pus.

Paula overdosed
While awaiting a bed
For herself and her baby

In a drug treatment facility
She was afraid
Her child would be left an orphan
Not to worry
The kid died, too.

And here's to myself
An aggressive bitch
Who tears at her hair
And shrieks in agony
Every time I lose a sister
I pray that our screams are heard
And our tears fall on your heads
Even from the grave.

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KOOL AIDS
By Iris De La Cruz

Well kiddies, a new year! This makes three years of dealing with AIDS. I need a new disease; this one is really starting to knock the shit out of me. How about diabetes? Is there any way I can trade the AIDS in for an insulin shot?

I have a few New Year's resolutions. Like to be nicer to certain people, especially all the well meaning assholes who don't know the difference between concern and pity. Yeah, I guess my goal is to show a bit more understanding to asymptomatics who were neurotic before being diagnosed and now can be found gobbling up every 'cure' that comes down the pike. (hopefully, that phase passes) And I'm real tired of hearing my sero-negative friends complain about how their hair won't stand straight up (even with mousse), when I'm sitting around trying to find enough hair to even comb. (more on this later). It's hard to get sympathetic about a pimple when I have to deal with people trying to keep lesions from rotting their faces. And last but not least, there are the ditzes who insist that they love this virus because it's part of them. Tell me this after you've stopped counting the deaths or have spent time with someone suffering from dementia. Let's get this straight; I HATE this virus, and it's the hatred and rage that keeps me going. Wimps get buried. It's so nice giving this column, I can bitch about everything. But there is some good news...I'm getting married in May. My fiance's name is Paul, and he's sero-positive, very supportive, and puts up with all my activist shit. Also, he's real cute and ten years younger than me (which already prompted a catty, fat fuck-head at GMHC to coyly ask if Paul was my son) wishful thinking. Anyway, this is going to be the world's first HIV wedding. The guests can throw AZT instead of rice. And we're going to be passing out those cute little gold coin condoms as wedding favors (with little bows) because wedding favors are just so tacky and I love my friends enough to want them to stay safe. I'm also trying to arrange my maids of honor out of my cross-dressing friends... the only problem seems to be finding dyed-to-match pumps in a size twelve. Maybe the theme color should be lavender? The wedding gown is a trip. I wanted to go for a white baby doll nightie and a veil (sort of virginal slut chic) but my mother had a shit fit when she heard it. Maybe we'll just dress Paul in white, since he could pull off the whole virgin trip a whole lot better than me.

It's so strange to be planning all this, because falling in love just wasn't on my agenda. When I was first diagnosed, I resigned myself to never having a relationship (who would ever want a woman with AIDS?) So I became everyone's best friend and counselor, sort of the world's only maiden HIV aunt. Always a bridesmaid and never a bride. And I found other ways to fulfill my life. I was happy. Until I started seeing couples together in the park, or on trains, and I realized that I no longer had that option. One never knows, do one?

Anyway, our first dates were a trip. Paul used to play with my pony tail. It's false. (I've lost a lot of hair with this virus, and that became a big issue) And I was afraid to tell him it was a fake. I figured I'd have to before we actually slept together because I didn't want to shock him if I came to bed with short hair. And this was a serious issue; I was

expecting to hear something like, “oh, that’s not your hair? Well, I only get turned on by women with long hair!”..and then he’d leave. So one day when he was sitting there playing with my braid, I asked him if he’d be real upset if one day the braid came off in his hand. Obviously he answered, no.

Also there was the whole body image issue. Be real careful what you ask for, ‘cause one day you might just get it. I always wanted to be skinny and able to eat whatever I wanted without fear of gaining weight. Well, it happened. And as a result of the weight loss there have been certain changes in my appearance. Let’s just say that I look better dressed than naked. So how does Paul deal with my trying to keep my body covered from head to toe? (you mean ankle length granny gowns AREN’T sexy??) He comes home with one of those skimpy little ribbon and lace numbers that are much better suited to wrap gifts than wrap a body. And then he dragged me out of bed to model it for him after I dived under the covers to hide. And wonder of wonders, he was even turned on.

The whole body image thing will probably take time to change, but I’m working on it. But what messes with me is that I can remember years ago (many years ago) reading in Seventeen Magazine that if you could hold a pencil under your breasts and it doesn’t fall, you need a bra. So what does it mean when you can hide a magic marker under the cheeks of your ass?

Keep smilin’.....it gets better.

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KOOL AIDS
By Iris De La Cruz

I'm sitting here waiting for the mega snow storm to hit, writing this nonsense and hacking my brains out. I can't believe the human body can produce so much phlegm. Everyone I know is suffering from either the flu or mega colds. I went off the AZT for a while and that's when this shit started happening. I don't care what anyone says, the whole time I was on AZT I never had a cold. My mom would get totaled with flu's and I'd be in the same apartment as her and not get a thing. I've heard the same thing from other people. Now, don't take this as any scientific proof that the shit can be used as cold prevention; this is just anecdotal. I can just picture people running to their doctors demanding AZT 'cause they don't want to deal with a cold.

When I first started getting sick, the first thing that went was my high energy level. This freaked me out 'cause I'm involved with a lot of stuff. So I came to believe I was dying. Then it occurred to me that people WITHOUT AIDS get flu's, and THEY feel like they're dying. But first I had to do my whole Camille death scene again and have depressing, profound conversations with anyone who would be willing to indulge me. Thank God for my therapist. Mostly everyone else couldn't deal or got so tired of these conversations that I could just see the puke building up in back of their eyes (as in, "shut up De La Cruz, if I hear anything else from you on death and dying, I'm gonna puke") but I have some good friends. Lydia is always there to listen, and Phil, our friendly Newsline editor, is one of the only people I know who is real enough to express his fears to me and allow me the space to talk. Even Paul, my boyfriend, whose response has always been, "don't worry, I'll protect you", has started talking to his own therapist about his fears of getting sick and dying. Before, his attitude has always been on of, "look at me, I'm healthy." And the man is muscle bound and was in deep denial about his own illness. Now he's at least talking, and to me that's good news.

People with this virus need to be allowed to speak freely about getting sick and dying without hearing platitudes and shit like, "you're doing this to yourself" or "it's in your head." And it's hard 'cause people are afraid and can't deal. Sometimes the very people that love you are too involved and can frustrate the shit out of you. The one thing everyone on this planet has in common is that we're ALL gonna die.

Enough of that shit. Meanwhile, I'm still alive and will continue fighting a good fight until they throw dirt on my face. I'm still losing weight and Sustacal looms on the horizon. I really feel that this can be corrected and have some really good people working with me on it. Anyway, I keep telling myself that this weight loss is due to hair loss. Maybe I just had some heavy, fat hair. How much does hair weigh? Can you lose fifty pounds of hair?

BITCHING DEPARTMENT

I'm really tired of people asking me for money on the street. The other day I went off on a train after this big, muscular male got in my face asking me for money. I was getting home from work and totally wiped out. But the asshole was persistent. Finally, I yelled, whipping out my handicapped pass, "look, motherfucker, I GOT AIDS!! And every day I drag my ass to work. What's wrong with you?" Not for nothing, I give money to the homeless when they look like they need it. But I'll be Goddamned if I'm gonna hand money out to some young, big strapping guy.

And I've seen them out there with \$150 sneakers and a raggedy coat. I need to wear a sign saying, 'suffering from violent AIDS dementia. Don't ask me for money, stay out of my face. Not responsible for my actions.'

You ever go into a public restroom and find a toilet paper dispenser that doles out those tiny squares of toilet paper? I get the runs periodically. Have you any idea what it's like trying to wipe your ass with long nails and that nonsense? Shit under your nails is a bitch to get out. Now I keep an emergency nail brush with me at all times. And that paper is just so thin. Personally, I need Bounty when my shit hits the fan. JOKE

GREETINGS AND SALUTATIONS DEPARTMENT

Much thanks to the guy who sent me the audio tape. I was real touched that you thought enough of this tacky little column to send it. I wanted to write you and personally thank you, but I live with my mother. I went insane tearing my papers up looking for the packet you mailed it in to write you, but I couldn't find it. And my mother periodically goes on search and destroy missions through my stuff, so she probably threw it out. For a while I thought I had gremlins. Anyway, you know who you are, so PLEASE write to me and I promise to get back to you.

Much, much love and thanks to the people in the Latino ACT UP caucus who have been totally supportive and really put their asses on the line for women and AIDS issues. And much shit to the Hispanic AIDS Forum for acting like a bunch of hysterical, dried up twits and firing my man, Joe France, for acting up at the Women and AIDS Conference. It seems HAF, which so far as I can see is only really good at getting funded, had a problem with people with AIDS speaking out. What happened was Joe was fired the day after Christmas and on New Years Eve the locks were changed, and he was given 2½ hours to clear out his stuff. AIDS organizations have to become a little more aware that PWA's have a much higher stake in this war than do-gooders and bureaucrats, and if being 'radical is what it takes, they'd better deal with it. We're not gonna die waiting for these fat motherfuckers to finish having their oh-so-nice fund-raisers and raking in the bucks while doing nothing. Questions that need to be answered; how many people with AIDS actually sit on the Hispanic AIDS Forum's Board and exactly what services are being provided, if any. I'd be real interested in hearing ANY person with AIDS who received ANY kind of real help from these guys. I'm getting fed up with all these funding vampires sucking up to the buck while our people who've gotten shafted by the very organizations set up (ostensibly) to help them. And Joe, for all the people you've helped, and for myself, MUCHOS GRACIAS. And to the HAF, nesecite conjoins.

Well, in spite of it all, to all you people dealing with correctional systems, hang in there. I'm rooting for ya. And for everyone else, keep smilin' and don't take no shorts.

Next month.....

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THE DELIRIUM CONTINUES...

KOOL AIDS

By Iris De La Cruz

Welcome to my delusions. I just got off DDI and I feel a lot better. My personal feelings about the DDI were that the dosage was too high and after I totally poisoned my body, they'd come up with some jive statement that half-dose is just as effective. Sounds familiar? Sounds like the ol'AZT follies? I ain't goin' for it. So me-n-AZT are going steady again.

My body and I have a deep, personal relationship (after many years of being at war) and the body lets me know when shit is wack. I've learned to listen to her. The body said the DDI was not what we needed. She refused to even negotiate a ½ dose. Hopefully, she'll calm down with the AZT since they got along well before. Then I can take her back to the bargaining table. But as it stands now, the body don't wanna hear shit about DDI. Isn't it weird that I've given up illicit drugs to do toxic drugs. My shit probably could light up a generator for twenty years! I have a problem with some of the recovering addicts I've met. They've spent years putting all kinds of strange stuff into their bodies (yo, man, I heard flea snot is a great high, gimme a hit of that We'd surely eliminate the flea problem. Just tell the fiends you could get high off of 'em. I heard people are running around licking toads 'cause they exude some kind of hallucinogenic chemical. Now, I've kissed a few toads in my life, but they were usually dates. Go figure people out.) Anyway, they get drug-free, get diagnosed, and turn hysterical over medications that may (or may not) help them. Shit, you could sprinkle toxic waste in their wheat grass juice and their bodies would just eat that up like it's been doing to all the other nonsense for all those years! Heaven protect me from reformed people.

More hysteria. I've come to the conclusion that there are some people who need to make worrying a fine art. Their lives are empty without something to obsess on. HIV is perfect for them because it provides them with a tailor-made reason to feed their hypochondria. T4 discussions take up a whole lot of their conversations. I'm gonna put a basket at the door of my support groups. This way, people can leave their T4's at the door and at the end of the group we'll equally distribute them. This way everyone gets their fair share! I now have 8 T4's! Hey, that's up from 6! Maybe it's time for a T party. I have this mental image of my 8 little black dots trailing after this big, fat mama dot, like ducklings. They all have cute little cartoon faces and personalities. The mama dot has to nurture them and protect them from the evil Pac Man HIV who wants to gobble them up. Well, I'm the big mama dot and I protect my CD4 babies. I've even given them names. They are: Tito, Blanca, Rufus, Sapphire, Charles and Diana, Whoopie (for my role model and) and Chang. There, everyone is represented.

I have a friend who for the past 3 years, has only one T4 cell. It's only one, but it's proven to be real strong! It zooms around with a big S on it's chest and a red cape! They look out for each other.

One of my many doctors (and there's way too many them, there's my infectious disease doc, GYN, dermatologists, etc.) said he was treating a guy for KS of the dentures. It took a minute for me to realize that this was his own sick AIDS humor. You know I appreciated it!

Speaking of which.....here's more of my twisted SICK AIDS SHIT:

Sadie and Hymie are having coffee at Sadie's house. Sadie's husband, Morris isn't present.

HYMIE; Nu, So where's Morris? So how come I never get to see him any more? Is he sick or something?

SADIE; Oy, Hymie. Such problems you wouldn't believe! Mine Morris has AIDS!

HYMIE: AIDS?!!! Oy gevalt! So where is he?

SADIE; He stays upstairs in his room.

HYMIE; And what do you feed him for breakfast?

SADIE; Matzoh

HYMIE; Yeah, and lunch?

SADIE; Matzoh. He likes matzoh.

HYMIE; And for dinner you cook? He can't eat matzoh every meal.

SADIE; For dinner it's matzoh, too. Such problems shouldn't happen to a dog! Matzoh is the only thing I can slide under the door.

This column is dedicated to all the modern miracles who are walking around without brains. And to the true miracles who can laugh at them and themselves. We will survive on our snickering.

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TO MY SINGLES GROUP
Especially Linda, Mark and Vivian

By Iris De La Cruz

The pain in your eyes
Is an old acquaintance of mine
We've spent an eternity together
Locked in a symbiotic embrace.

I want to make it go away
The lesions would disappear
With the touch of my lips
And my chi would illuminate
Your darkness.

I would hold you to my breast
As a mother holds her child
Taking the hurt onto myself
To release into the air
As a bubble
Soon to break.

I would give you my passion
Like hanging on to barbed wire
With fingertips cut to the bone
And blood blinding my eyes
With muscles screaming in pain
I still hold on.

And I would love you
Enough to show you
That which is strong and pure
Waiting for discovery
Inside your soul.
Until you realized
That you have no need to cry in solitude
Anymore.

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STEVEN
By Iris De La Cruz

Steven came to me after I got out of the hospital with tuberculosis. I was very sick, both mentally and physically, and 90 days in the hospital made me a mega bitch. I felt like a germ, unclean and full of self-pity. I waited, alone, in the dark, to die. My mother attended a group that Stevens mother attended and since he lived in the neighborhood, (and I certainly wasn't going out) Steven was talked into visiting me.

Steven would whirl into the house, full of gossip about his latest lover, telling me all kinds of outrageous AIDS jokes, and that I looked like shit. This was at a time where I sat around with my hair in a bun and no make-up. Taking a shower was a big thing for me. Steven always looked so good that I started trying to look more like a person (as opposed to a corpse) around him.

And he nudged me into going out with him so much that it had gotten to the point where it was easier going out with him than hearing his mouth. We went out, paying for one picture and sneaking into all the others at the Quad and he'd be steadily checking out boys' butts. Soon I was checking them out also.

Steve was my brother. He taught me to find humor in this virus; that even the most horrendous things can be funny. He got me back into music and we'd spend hours listening to, and exchanging tapes. He taught me to live and savor the moment. Steven partied up until a week before he died.

We used to go to the beach together. So I walked on the shore when I found out he had died. I just finished writing this poem for him, thinking we'd laugh about it together when he recovered... he never saw the poem. All the plants were dead, the landscape was brown and desolate. Looking closer, in the middle of all this death, were tiny buds peeking through all the dead leaves. I went home smiling, knowing I still carried and important part of Steve with me. And that was his love.

Steven, don't die
You came into my life
When I sat in darkness
Alone
Waiting to die.

You put up with my bitchiness
And my sarcasm
All the time making jokes
About my self-pity
And you took my hand
And led me into the light.

Steven breathe
You promised me
You'd turn straight
And we'd have little HIV babies together
You always had the dirtiest jokes
We were going to survive
On sick AIDS humor.

You still have my tapes
You can keep Bonnie Raitt
And Aretha
If you just get well
And hang out with me

Who else can show me
All the cruisin' areas in Brooklyn
Remember checking out
The asses
Of the boys
In Coney Island.

Stay with me Steven.

I'm scared
And I have things to tell you
You are a light in my heart
That glows
With my love for you
My brother
Who pissed me off
Callin' me "Iris with the virus"

Steven
Please, please don't die
I never told you
How much
I need you in my life.

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AIDS POLITICS: THE REALITY OF AIDS SERVICE GROUPS
DISCRIMINATING AGAINST PEOPLE WITH AIDS

By Iris De La Cruz

The pigeon that is harsh reality has just thrown more shit down on me. Nothing heavy duty or impossible to deal with, but the fact remains, when you're shit upon, you have to stop what you're doing and deal with the situation at hand. Which is cleansing yourself of the filth.

For the past couple of years, I have been doing AIDS counseling and outreach education. I'm also an Emergency Medical Technician, so I have SOME kind of understanding about medicine. My counseling is effective because I AM a person with AIDS and therefore it is in my own best interest to have up-to-date information and compassion for what my clients are feeling. I am surviving with the virus and I have a real good understanding of both the emotional and physical trials people go through. Maybe because I have experienced (and am STILL experiencing it) I am an activist because, not only am I advocating for the rights of PWA's, but I am fighting for my OWN life. The people closest to my heart are recovering addicts, women, and people of color. These are my people, although the bond of dealing with AIDS surpasses all other. I remember once I attended a workshop. It was all social workers and counselors. Nobody there knew I had the virus. We had to make a list of difficulties we had in dealing with our clients. Well, the lists these people came up with included all kinds of value judgments and misinformation. The clients were mistrustful, manipulative, always complaining, etc. Finally, when I was about ready to puke, I spoke up. I told them that I was both a recovering addict and a PWA, and I did the same type of work they did. If I hadn't revealed all this, they would have just thought I was a colleague. (I can act professional, if I have to.) And maybe the fault didn't always lay with the client, but sometimes the counselor's own attitude was a barrier. With myself, there is no 'us' and 'them', it is 'us'. They were real surprised that 'one of them' could be articulate and intelligent enough to be considered a peer. I hope I threw off some of their stereotypes with my presence.

When I was in a therapeutic community (drug addiction), I noticed that although they might have been good counselors, the staff that came there straight from college, with all these textbooks notions about addicts, weren't as good as staff who had personal experience with drug abuse. And the recovering staff seemed to instinctively know when a person was trying to get over, or had deeper issues that weren't being dealt with. They were also role models to the clients.

There are two sides to my counseling. One is very clinical, dealing with trying to help people find concrete solutions to problems. This involves objectivity and an emotionally uninvolved approach. The other part is emotional, in that I AM a woman with AIDS and I can relate to what you're saying and feeling and I can share with you how I've handled a similar situation. It works.

Back to the shit. I've sent out resumes to various so-called AIDS service organizations for work as a counselor. My resume is impeccable, even though I've put down some activist stuff I've done through the years. I've noticed that although people were impressed with my credentials and the way I've handled myself on the interview, as soon as I mentioned that I have AIDS, the attitude subtly changed and I would get looks like they were afraid I'd keel over at their desk or my tainted HIV-infected blood would start oozing out through my pores, even as I spoke, onto their clean, lily-white desks.

The fact is, I was diagnosed over two years ago with (doncha just love it?) full blown AIDS. I got that stuck on me because my opportunistic infection was tuberculosis. The fact that I was exposed to TB while on the job as an EMT and was already unknowingly immuno-compromised to begin with was of no importance. The diagnosis was AIDS. You're so called diagnosis is not written in stone. I have seen people go from death's door to being a-symptomatic or ARC. I have seen people jump back and forth from being a-symptomatic to ARC and then back again. The fact is, I haven't had any symptoms for the last two years. I work a steady job, do a lot of volunteer work, (sometimes put in 12 or 14 hour days) and still can work out and do 140 lb lifts on the weights. I never get colds. I take better care of myself and am probably a lot healthier than a lot of sero-negatives. But the powers that be won't hire me 'cause of their fears that I'll either get sick or drop dead on the job.

One of the places I had submitted a resume to was the Department of Health, a city agency. I went to the first interview (which lasted a couple of hours) and was called back for a second interview. It has been my experience that if they're not interested in you, the interview is kept short, and you're not called back a second time. I went to the second interview and was greeted by the supervisor holding the Newline in his hands, opened to my photo. I wasn't going to mention my sero status unless it came up because of the weird experiences I've had with trying to find employment with it. But I wasn't going to lie about it. I knew, when I saw the article that this job just went down the tubes. I told the supervisor my feelings about what usually happens when prospective employers find out I have AIDS. He made a big point of telling me that the department has had some PWA's working there and that they don't discriminate, yeah, but how many have they actually HIRED knowing of an AIDS diagnosis? AIDS is not HIV +. It kicks up a lot of hang-ups and fears of death and dying and sickness. It kicks up feelings and attitudes that people are REAL uncomfortable dealing with. And this is in people that should have a little more awareness.

So I didn't get the job. I got the famous 'we'll let you know', after another long interview. And sure enough, a week later, I received a form letter that stated that although I was qualified, they decided to hire someone else. There were over ten positions open. What happened, eleven people applied ?

I may not have a lawsuit (the DOH covers it's ass REAL well) But I'm checking out all my options. Everyone that knows my HIV work is properly mortified. They all thought I would have been perfect for the job. Mortification isn't gonna change the bullshit. Education and PWA's refusing to remain silent will, though. And as long as there are

SOME righteous people out there willing to take the fight down to the line, and publish articles like this, we've got a chance. And as long as I have this loud, abrasive voice of mine, I'm gonna use it. I may not be able to change the world, but if I can increase just one person's sensitivity and awareness, then I have eliminated some of the pigeon shit that rains on all of our heads.

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PAIN
By Iris De La Cruz

I RAGE
I HURT
I'M SCARED
I WANT TO SEE
MY DIRTY, RED, TAINTED
BLOOD
FLOW IN RIVULETS
DOWN MY ARMS
I WANT TO BATHE
MYSELF
IN THE BEAUTY OF BLOOD
I NEED TO GET RID OF
THIS FUCKING PAIN.

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HELP
By Iris De la Cruz

GIVE ME LOVE
GIVE ME LOVE
GIVE ME PEACE ON EARTH
GIVE ME LIFE
GIVE ME LIGHT
KEEP ME FREE FROM BIRTH
GIVE ME HOPE
HELP ME COPE
WITH THIS HEAVY LOAD
TRYING TO
TOUCH AND REACH YOU
WITH HEART AND SOUL.

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IT DOESN'T HURT
By Iris De La Cruz

It doesn't hurt until you stop
Then it all topples upon your mind
Dripping into the tiniest crevice
Until your soul is so filled with the pain
That any slight movement
Will send it reeling
Outside of you
Making your most trivial thought
Public property
To be ripped, stomped and laughed upon
Mercilessly
If you never stop you can't think
And you will never hurt again.

One glance can rip apart your life
Like another rips apart the carcass of the
Antelope he slaughtered
Only I don't think he slaughtered her
Out of love
Sitting in the dirt I cleaned from
My mind, I glanced down
Only to see your laughing eyes
Still teasing me.

I see this chameleon
In his dirty glass jar
Sitting upon a dirty piece of twig
Motionless
Surrounded by dead dry grass
Browned from the soil which gave it life
And or time which killed it
The lizard still does not move
And I begin to wonder if he is dead
I look into my dirty glass mirror
And I begin to wonder if I am dead.

My foot just stepped on a can
Spraying deodorant all around the room
I must admit it helps
Maybe now my thoughts won't stink as much.

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REMEMBER
By Iris De La Cruz

Remember
When we was the finest
Bitches on the stroll?
Salt and pepper
With tits held high and firm
And nipples hard enough
To tie up traffic
On Park Avenue?

What ever happened to that Jersey trick
With the big bucks
And the heart condition
That couldn't get it up
Shit girl
That fool didn't have no heart condition
Layin' up basin' for three days straight.

Ever see stanky Michelle?
Man, that no count slimy bitch
Be chargin' five bucks for a blow job
Not on my corner, she didn't.
I used to run her ass off Delancy
Child, you didn't have to cut her.
I didn't
The bitch grabbed my blade.

Remember
Lurch and the Pussy Posse?
That was the ugliest cop
I ever did see
And haulin' ass I platforms
Tryin' to outrun him
And kick off the shoes at the same time
Seein' the judge barefoot.

What about
Workin' La Louisaida
To be closer to the connection
And coppin' between tricks?
Or tryin' to talk a date
Into drivin' us
And waitin' till we got off
In black buildings

So cold
That we couldn't get a vein up.

I seen Flaco a while ago
That man is skinnier that ever
And everyone is walkin' round
With canes
Shit child, they been doin' that for years
Yeah, canes and guns and knives, too.

We had some good times
Right girlfriend?
Yeah, and some bad ones, too
Well, let's chill
Here comes the nurse
With the pentam.

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NEVER WAIT
OR HESITATE
GET IN GEAR BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE
YOU MAY NEVER GET ANOTHER CHANCE
'CAUSE YOUTHS A MASK
BUT IT DON'T LAST
LIVE IT LONG
AND LIVE IT FAST
GEORGIE WAS
A FRIEND OF MINE.

By Iris De La Cruz

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IN YOUR LIFE, YOU ARE GOING TO MEET A LOT OF PEOPLE.....
ONE OF THEM WILL BE YOUR MOTHER
By Iris De La Cruz

My poor baby
Born in the midst of turmoil
Doomed by your mother's life
There isn't much I'll give you
But worries and despair
Oh yeah, and also my love.

A world of pinned pupils
Intravenous universe
A junkie whore mother kicking
Every other week
Swearing, every other shot... her last
Don't worry child, your mother loves you.

I'll probably die before you're grown
But I'm making our a will
You'll get my works, eye make up and a Hershey bar
Also the job of telling all those men
That \$25 can only screw a corpse
But honey, she loved you.

There seems to be a lot of depth
Inside your infant eyes
Also a lot of hatred
But maybe it's just a mirror
Of what I feel inside
I love you
But that ain't shit.

© 1989

LA LOISAIDA
By Iris De La Cruz

Crossing the bridge
From Brooklyn to Manhattan
I see Canal Street
And a weight lifts off my chest
I'm home.

Alphabet soup
Home of the hopeless
With fire escapes
That lead to the stars
And dreams
Flickering like sparks
In the rubble.

Ai mi hija,
Do you remember
Walking from Fourteenth Street
To the park
Loaded with Acapuria and Moncilla
Y una cerveza fria?
For a picnic
That never was
The food was gone
By Tenth Street.

And the Satin Satins
On Avenue D
By the projects
In painted jeans
Swaying to
Salsa steps
Blasting from unknown windows.

The summers were so hot that
The air turned to mud
And you couldn't sleep
Your little girl skin
Glistening
Like a boxer's shorts
In the ring.

We'd get dressed
At three in the morning

We'd sneak into the pool
On Avenue C
Through the hole
That Tito cut in the fence
He used to be so fine
Before the Wild Irish claimed his soul.

We'd go to Delancy
With ten dollars
And get all kinds of earrings
That sparkled and glittered
And you'd never want to wear them
Our clothes always was stained
With melted piragua.

Mama
What about the roof-top barbecues
With Carlos and China
Using garbage pail lids with tin foil
To roast pernil
And shimmying down fire escapes
Through Carlos' window
To get the salsa.

Oh, baby
Why do things have to change?
I wish you were still five
And I, twenty two
With stars in our eyes
And friends on every block
Running around
Like crazy children in the night.

But every so often
Crossing the bridge
I hear faint strains of salsa
And laugh to myself
With the memory
Of your giggles.

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YOU WANT ME TO BE?
By Iris De La Cruz

You ask me what I am
What do you want me to be?

I tell you I'm a woman
With the passion of my sisters
Coursing through my veins
Mother of my child
Sweet seductress that likes the glimmer
In men's eyes
So you call me a slut.

I tell you I'm a man
And behave calm and rational
(for isn't that what men are supposed to do?)
I admire women's bodies
And can separate love from sex
So you call me a dyke.

You ask me if I'm Latina
And want me to change my name
To something more American.

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LA BLANCA LOCA EN LA PLAYA
By Iris De La Cruz

En la playa
Rescuing horseshoe crabs
On sludge beach
And reading Santaria signs.

Salsa steps on the dunes
Dancing with shadows
To music
No one else can hear.

Sketching in the swamps
With long, red whore nails
His kiss is the wind
Whispering in her ear,
No yora, mami
In a voice only she can hear.

People stare
At this woman talking to air
And she smiles
His tracks are finally gone.

Then he leaves
Across the water
To the beaches of San Juan
And I know he waits for me
His blanca loca.

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IT MAKES ME SAD
By Iris De La Cruz

When you leave me
As I know you will
I will have discovered a bit more about love
Even though we have never
Really shared love
And you say this is good
But it makes me sad.

When you leave me
As I know you will
I will be barefoot
Who have journeyed great distances
Exposed
Only to be rewarded in weariness
And pain
Who will develop hard callouses
That will protect them through
Future voyages.
And you say this is good
But it makes me sad.

Then when you have left me
As I knew you would
I will awaken every morning
As I have always
And I will look at the sun
And you say this is good
But it makes me sad.

Because
As I look at the sun
I can no longer see it
And as I awaken every morning
As I have done before
My mind greets me with the thought
Of another day
That I must exist
Alone
Without you
And please don't say this is good
For it makes me sad.

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HOW MUCH DO YOU LOVE ME
By Iris De La Cruz

How much do you love me?
Enough to let me flirt
And dance on the beach
To become a swamp bird
Searching in the muck
For a living goody?

Can you hear the song in the waves?
And the joyful despair
In my music
When words become superfluous
Will my silence satisfy you?

Will you smile at me
If pain erases my smile
And I turn my energy
Into my own survival?
When I can no longer
Make you laugh
When my beauty fades
Will I still see love in your eyes?
And when I can no longer walk
Will you be content
To sit with me?

And when the time comes
To say goodbye
Will you let me go
In peace and love
And let me continue my journey
Without you?

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YOU NEVER CAME
By Iris De La Cruz

You were supposed to save me
Protect me
From my demons in the night
With big sheltering arms
Keeping me safe
Against your heartbeat.

And you'd love me so much
That I wouldn't need the dope
The warmth in my veins
Would be from your eyes
I'd sleep safe
In your breath.

I waited for you
In desperate dreams
A nameless, faceless savior
To carry me out
Of the screaming wind
I've smelled you in the rain
But you never came.

I wanted you to teach me
To soar against my fears
And to cushion my falls
To show me love and forgiveness
My candle against the darkness
My shield against the pain.

So you never came
And made it alright
My solitary song gave me comfort
And salt tears
Grew familiar and sweet
Now I fly alone, above the pain
And still look for you
To share my flight.

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MEMORIALS

IRIS DE LA CRUZ
1953-1991

Iris commanded attention, always bursting into rooms, turning an outsider into a friend
With a blunt remark, confronting people who looked at her struggle with drugs and
prostitution and finally with AIDS- as shameful and telling them she was not ashamed.

She fought the stigma of AIDS, her body weakened but her spirit and humor never
waned. She was an inspiration to so many people that she was afraid her dying would
disappoint them.

Iris was loved and respected as an activist. She worked with Life Force, women
educating women, wrote a column for People With AIDS Newslines called 'KOOL-AIDS
with ICE'. It was a humorous assault on bourgeois pieties which flirted with the bizarre.
Her writings were filled with salty memories of street life and practical (if weird) advice
on living with the illness. She produced political and educational materials and became a
widely sought after public speaker. She started the first support group for positive
women and another for hetero-singles. She would only stand for so much romanticizing.
In one of her columns she wrote "there are the ditzes who insist that they love this virus
because its part of them. Tell me this after you've stopped counting the deaths or have
spent time with someone suffering from dementia. Lets get this straight; I hate this virus
and it's the hatred and rage that keeps me going. Wimps get buried."

Her life was hard and crazy, loud, funny, angry, drifting at times, but ultimately filled

with purpose. AIDS produced her finest moments.

It has been many years since Iris passed. I have been very involved with people with AIDS and I have found that they are going back in the closet. They are ashamed of a virus that they are carrying. What it means to me is that they will not be getting the medication and care they need and would rather die alone in the streets than go for help. Iris wrote these words to help people and its time to bring her words to life again and perhaps save some lives.

The new medication is not working on women as well as on men. I know this for a fact because I sit on the Board of Directors for the Iris House, the first center for women and children with AIDS in New York (named for Iris De La Cruz). We rented a large space in Harlem, but unfortunately we outgrew the space and had to buy a building. Somewhere along the way, the women have lost their spirit. They would never think of asking their men to use a condom for fear of getting a beating. So, they get AIDS and die of shame and guilt. They need to regain their strength and get angry. Yes, they need to get really angry and fight back. Anger is motivating and I think so many of the words of Iris De La Cruz will make them realize they are victims and should be angry.

INNOVATIVE HIV/AIDS CENTER NAMED FOR BKLYN WOMAN

By Deborah Hales

A center for women with HIV/AIDS, believed to be the first of its kind in the nation, has been named after a Sheepshead Bay woman.

The center, which is scheduled to open its temporary doors in Harlem this February, has been named the Iris House, in honor of Iris De La Cruz, a poet, educator and pioneering AIDS activist who died at the age of 37 from the disease.

"I don't know who suggested it first, but it seemed natural," said Ruth Messenger, the Manhattan Borough President about naming the center after De La Cruz. "She was very active in the AIDS world and an inspiration to all women."

According to Beverly Rotter, De La Cruz' mother, people in the AIDS world voted for the center to be named after her daughter, calling in their requests to Messinger. Ninety – five percent of them voted for De La Cruz, she said.

According to Messinger, "the center will provide services for women with HIV and AIDS in a city where they are a major population."

Supporters hope Iris House will become a model for similar centers nationwide, in other areas where AIDS is prevalent.

"It will be a place of hope and a source of compassionate and sensitive support for some of this city's neediest women and their children," said Betty Terrell-Cruz, of the New York Women's Foundation, one of the founders of Iris House.

The center will be located at El Cemi House, at 117th Street and 2nd Avenue, for at least three years, until enough funds can be raised to build a permanent facility.

Fundraising effort are already underway. A series of concerts, readings and craft fairs were held at 54th Street and Lexington Avenue, to raise money for the project. And with help from the Hunt Alternatives Fund, the Fund for the City of New York, and United Way of NYC, project organizers hope to reach their target sum of 5 million quickly. Iris House was conceived, developed and supported by a group of 300 women “infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.” The group met in Messinger’s office on a monthly basis over a period of almost three years. They set out to “address the stigma of the AIDS virus, to educate the public and shape public policies.”

THE WOMAN BEHIND THE NAME

Before discovering she was HIV positive, De La Cruz was employed as a health worker on an ambulance and had hopes of becoming a medic.

Once diagnosed, she abandoned her dream of health career and put all her energy into working with the AIDS community.

Described as a ‘child of the sixties’ by her mother, De La Cruz became an activist who fought for women’s rights. In an effort to bring about the decriminalization of prostitutes, De La Cruz founded Prostitutes of NY (PONY). She worked with Life Force, an AIDS outreach program which aims to teach women about the virus, and provide therapy and support groups for women with AIDS, and for single heterosexual people with AIDS.

In an attempt to bring heterosexual and bisexual people with AIDS together, De La Cruz held a big dance. “She wanted us to hug and touch each other,” said a friend who did not

wish to be named.

She spoke at hundreds of conferences, “screaming, hollering and talking” to people about her illness.

Actress Linda Lavin was present at one of the conferences at which De La Cruz spoke.

According to De La Cruz’s mother, Lavin was so impressed with De La Cruz’ speech that she invited her and a guest to see “Gypsy”, the Broadway show in which Lavin was starring.

Iris invited ME, Rotter, her mom, said proudly.

De La Cruz wrote a witty column called “KOOL AIDS” for People With AIDS Coalition Newslines, which let readers laugh about their sickness. The magazine received hundreds of letters from readers across the country.

“She taught (people) to laugh and live with AIDS, rather than die with AIDS”, said Rotter. “Iris lived more in the four years that she had AIDS than most people do in their whole life.”

Rotter remembers the night her daughter made the suggestion, “mom, let’s make a dinner for people with AIDS.” Soon, about 40 people were gathered in their three-room apartment.

“We had to rent the tables,” Rotter said. “It was wonderful. My house was always filled with people.”

According to Rotter, she, and the womens’s group she joined, now continue the tradition begun by her daughter. They hold an annual spring dinner for people with AIDS at St. John’s Church in Greenwich Village.

At a fundraiser held at St. Peter's Church in Manhattan to raise money for Iris House, a former jail inmate got up and spoke about the woman he knew only through her column. I was a drug addict and when I read Iris' column, I was so inspired. So when I got out of jail I went straight to work for AIDS. And I'll never go back on drugs again," he told the audience.

"That in itself is quite a tribute"

MEMORIALS

Iris,

As I sit here at work, my feelings are that I just want to start running, and continue to run, until I drop. I keep reflecting on moments we had together I can't help but think of how few people knew the real Iris. The Iris that was loving and caring, even though you tried very hard to hide that Iris.....Goodbye my friend, until we meet again.

Love, Lydia

Iris,

Sometimes this disease seems like such an uphill battle, and all the surrounding stuff (like facing death, insurance problems, disclosure, crummy attitudes, denial) that I just would like to hide for a while. But your column makes me feel ok again, and I realize humor is the strongest medicine. I'm sure you know this already but you are worth a thousand of those uptight, hypocritical scumbags that are running the system, and you know what? You helped me realize that I-junkie, ex-prostitute, ex-garbage picking, AIDS infected me- am worth the same as any upright Myers, Dinkins, or Cuomo- no matter what they call me.

Love, Susan

The most embarrassing moment of my life came through my involvement with PONY (prostitutes of New York). It was when the democratic convention was held in Manhattan. Conventioneers were enjoying the services of prostitutes while the police

were working double time to arrest them-the prostitutes, that is, not the conventioners. So we made a bunch of signs with slogans like, "stop arresting the prostitutes of New York," and planned to march through the streets. Only three of us showed up. Me, Iris De La Cruz, and Robert Chakassi, and we all looked particularly motley that day. There were lines of police barriers, and crowds of people all around the convention center, and the three of us marched embarrassingly by. Even the working girls gave us queer looks. We just couldn't pull it off.....

Annie Sprinkle

DE LA CRUZ, IRIS

PWA and AIDS activist

The Board, staff and volunteers of the PWA Coalition mourn the death of Iris De La Cruz and extend our deepest sympathy to her family and many friends. Iris was a major force with this organization and many like it in New York City. As a regular columnist in our magazine, NEWSLINE, Iris inspired thousands with her passionate, defiant, and often humorous descriptions of living with AIDS. She was an outspoken PWA advocate in the community and in the media, and was a regular speaker to AIDS/HIV education programs. Iris was an exemplary spirit of self-empowerment whom we will greatly miss, but her passion was infectious and will remain with us forever.

AIDS activist and educator IRIS DE LA CRUZ died on May 11 of AIDS-related complications. She was 37 years old. She is survived by her mother, Beverly Rotter, brother Randy and daughter Melissa.

In addition to being an outspoken and celebrated columnist for the People With AIDS Coalition's Newslines, Ms. De La Cruz was, ten years ago, a founding member of Prostitutes of New York (PONY), where she inaugurated and led support groups for men and women with HIV/AIDS in the sex industry. Vocal on women and AIDS issues, she was a speaker at the "Women's Action on AIDS" breakfast, co-sponsored by GMHC on World AIDS Day, 1990.

In her work, Iris De LA CRUZ was deeply committed to disease prevention through education. In memory of that commitment, PONY is starting a scholarship in her name for sex industry workers who are attending college.

A memorial service for Ms. De La Cruz will be held this week, taking place at the Judson Memorial Church. When plans are final, the date and time of the service will be recorded in the PONY Line.

GMHC's clients, volunteers, Board and staff mourn this loss. We extend our sympathy to Iris' family, friends and colleagues at the People With AIDS Coalition.

The death of Ms. De La Cruz follows by a week of fellow AIDS activist and PWAC colleague Phil Zwickler. This double blow is numbing. But we cannot afford the luxury of numbness. Individually, we must rededicate ourselves to battling the epidemic on all its fronts so that, in the near future, it rages on only in history books.

CROWD MOURNS 'ASPHALT ANGEL' AIDS ACTIVIST

Bill Bell

She once said her goal was to unite hookers, housewives and homosexuals, and yesterday Iris De La Cruz did- at her memorial service.

De La Cruz 37, who founded Prostitutes of NY (PONY) in 1980, died last Saturday of what her family said was AIDS.

A standing-room-only crowd in a chapel of the Judson Memorial Church off Washington Square Park, heard her praised as "an asphalt angel" and tireless champion of people with AIDS.

Several members of PONY which De La Cruz founded to campaign for the decriminalization of prostitutes, signed the guest register in the chapel.

De La Cruz, who was born in Brooklyn, called a former streetwalker turned AIDS activist.

She was best-known for her column, "KOOL-AIDS ON ICE", in the monthly People With AIDS Coalition Newslines.

There were a dozen eulogies, many stories that drew loud laughter, before Rabbi Sandy Bogin led the Kaddish prayer of mourning.

De La Cruz was cremated and her ashes placed in a small wooden box in the front of the Chapel. Bogin said burial plans were not complete.

SHAMEFUL? NO, A CHAMPION, HER MOURNERS SAY

By Craig Wolff (NY Times)

A woman's scared voice told of Iris De La Cruz, of the way she commanded attention, always bursting into rooms, turning an outsider into a friend with a blunt remark, confronting people who looked at her and her struggle-with drugs and prostitution and finally with AIDS-as shameful, and telling them she was not ashamed.

"A force," the woman said. "Inspiring."

This woman's voice, a mourner's voice was not scared because of how Ms. De La Cruz lived or even because of how she died. More than 100 people who filled a back room in a church in Greenwich Village for a memorial yesterday gave testimony to her fight against the stigma of AIDS, and how, as her body weakened, her humor and her spirit never waned.

This woman was scared by the very fact of Ms. De La Cruz dying.

"Iris was afraid she would disappoint people by dying," said Tamar Sokol, who, like many in the room, is HIV-positive. "She'd say, if I can't go on, then people will wonder how in the world they will go on."

Ms. Sokol then said that because of Ms. De La Cruz, everyone would manage to go on.

But she paused. She had no grand message. "The truth is, it is disappointing," she said.

Saturday morning, three and a half years after she learned she had the AIDS virus, Ms.

De La Cruz died at New York University Hospital. She was 37 years old, and her friends at the Judson Chapel Center said yesterday that her life was hard and crazy, loud, funny,

angry, drifting at times, but ultimately filled with purpose. “AIDS produced her finest moments”, said her brother, Randy Rotter.

Several years ago she helped found a support group for prostitutes. Three years ago, after she became infected with the AIDS virus, she started several groups for people like her. She became something of a celebrity, sounding out the message in the AIDS Coalition Newslines, that people with the disease did not have to disappear into a corner.

That seemed to be her message yesterday. An enlarged copy of a magazine cover, propped next to a box filled with Ms. De La Cruz’s ashes, showed her mugging for the camera. Her lips were pressed into a kiss, and she seemed to be challenging the world to take her for who she was.

Her mother, Beverly Rotter, said she had raised her daughter in “a middle class Jewish home” in the Canarsie section of Brooklyn, but then lost her to the drug culture of 20 years ago.

“But Iris would have been Iris no matter what,” Ms. Rotter said. “She was always for the underdog, blacks, prostitutes and then people with AIDS.

Ms. De La Cruz herself would only stand for so much romanticizing. In one of her last columns, read aloud yesterday, she wrote: “There are the ditzes who insist that they love this virus because it’s a part of them. Tell me this after you’ve stopped counting the deaths or have spent time with someone suffering from dementia. Let’s get this straight: I hate this virus, and it’s this hatred and rage that keeps me going. Wimps get buried.”

ABOUT OUR BELOVED IRIS DE LA CRUZ

The Women and AIDS Working Group of the Manhattan Borough President's office is creating a model support center for women who identify themselves as "infected and affected by HIV and AIDS." Designed by women, for women, this center is envisioned as a safe place where women can feel welcome and comfortable, where they can come for information, respite and support and where they may begin to alleviate the stigma, to educate, network, empower and shape public policies that affect women. The center will be called IRIS HOUSE in honor of IRIS DE LA CRUZ, a courageous pioneer in the fight for women affected by HIV. It will offer comprehensive health and social services, including a hotline, legal advocacy, a resource library, child care and a means for women to mobilize to improve the quality of their lives.

P.W.A. COALITION

31 WEST 26 STREET

NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10010

THE FOLLOWING IS MY ADAPTATION OF
IRIS DE LA CRUZ

Your physical is an eminent dream by harmonizing
Authentically in phrase
A yardstick to what only seems
Your spirit- a mirrored image gazes contrasts;
Pages already in print
A science of dreaming more pertinent
Life is Love, not Death
Sensuous as the new morning parted
From the dark beginning in rays of splendid
Knowledge
Radiant life bellows forth into the present world
Overcoming the fears of today
And the tomorrows yet to come.

W.A.G. Dallas, PA

GMHC

IRIS DE LA CRUZ

1953-1991

I found out Iris died from a piece of paper on the GMHC bulletin board. I just read her KOOL AIDS with ICE last week. I didn't think.

The first time I met her, I thought she was weird.

Later, I put on a staged reading, "Stories of Our Lives" by PWAs and somebody said I should include her, and I did.....

I have her on videotape, reading about Iris, out on the street, and loving a fallen sister. I am so glad I have it. But if there's any lesson from Iris, it is:

SCREAM, SCREAM, WHEN YOU'RE DYING!

Iris. Ice. I wanted your blessing before you left. I should have known.

Some moments are unspeakably rare.

Fortunately, their impact is forever.

JAMES TURCOTTE

The City of New York
Office of the President of the
Borough of Manhattan

Dear Friends,

I take this occasion to salute Madres everywhere as they meet the challenges of motherhood and nurturing with love, conviction and devotion. Madre has long distinguished itself as an organization whose advocacy has enhanced the lives of mothers and their children.

I pay homage to the memory of Iris De La Cruz, devoted mother, activist, educator and poet. Her spirit and her achievements are deservedly commemorated with the establishment of IRIS HOUSE, the first multi-service support center in the country for women living with HIV and AIDS. May her experiences, her activism and her poetry serve to motivate and inspire us all.

Sincerely

Ruth W. Messinger
Borough President

2 Mom,

I hope after reading this you can understand.
The illustration on the bottom isn't of the best quality as were my old ones. But now they smile — for real.
Isn't that the best quality?
I love you!

"your children are not your children,
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing
for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you, yet they belong
not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts.
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls.
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit,
not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them,
but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with
yesterday.
You are the bows from which your children
as living arrows are sent forth.

The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
and he bends you with his might that his arrows may
go swift and far.
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
for even as he loves the arrow that flies,
so he loves also the bow that is stable."

Kahlil Gibran

