

PETER LAUFER

rrague. Most of them are legitimate enterprise

12 ■ SF WEEKLY ■ MAY 1, 1991



ERIC SLOMANSON

Breaking barriers

IT'S A STRESSFUL time at the *Diseased Pariah News*. Not only is the staff of the San Francisco-based quarterly facing deadline pressure to complete issue number three, co-founder and co-editor Tom Shearer just died from AIDS.

The magazine, known as *DPN*, is a sobering humor magazine. "Of, by, and for people with HIV disease," reads the masthead statement of purpose. "We are a forum for infected people to share their thoughts, feelings, art, writing, and brownie recipes in an atmosphere free of teddy bears, magic rocks, and sero-negative guilt. We encourage infected people to submit material."

Inside is a bizarre potpourri of black humor and constructive advice.

DPN features contests: "Congratulations to Mike Cannon. Mike entered, and thereby won, the Guess Tommy's T-Cell Count contest. Also, thanks to Mike for guessing optimistically high."

There are health care innovations: "Having trouble holding those little Dixie cups and snaring the stool sample before it hits the water in the toilet bowl? Put a sheet of Saran Wrap loosely across the bowl, underneath the seat, to catch that pumpy."

DPN also includes sophomoric quasi-pornographic stories and verse, high-calorie cooking ideas to help keep weight on and serious resource material for people with AIDS.

The idea for *DPN* was Shearer's, who became convinced last year that there was a need for an HIV humor magazine. Co-editor and graphic artist Wulf Thorne agreed that the time was right and the first issue rolled off the presses last September, selling out its first printing of a couple of hundred and going into a second press run of over a thousand.

"He wanted to create a community for those who did not feel comfortable with existing support groups," says Thorne of his partner, who died

just a few weeks ago at 33.

The magazine has a broader appeal than the two thought it would. Subscription orders are coming in from across the country and not just from AIDS sufferers. Thorne says people who are HIV-negative read *DPN* because "they want to learn what others are experiencing. We take on serious subjects with humor and irony and that just transforms it."

Right now Thorne is looking for a new business partner to keep *DPN* going and for volunteer proofreaders and office staff. Or as the ad for help in the second issue puts it, "Your Diligent Editors could always use a few more bubble-butt surfbay slaves to help us fold, staple, stuff envelopes, lick stamps, and otherwise satisfy our depraved whims."

THE NEW YORK TIMES is stumbling around trying to recover from the disgust so many readers feel for the newspaper's profile of Patty Bowman, the woman accusing William Kennedy Smith of raping her. The *Times* is suffering on two counts. First for its competitive decision to print Bowman's name, a move sharply criticized by many rape counselors and journalism professionals. But even harsher criticism is aimed at the one-sided and innuendo-ridden nature of the profile. Not only was there no equivalent profile of Smith, but Bowman's character was assaulted repeatedly in the piece by unnamed sources and irrelevant information.

Late last week the *Times* responded to the prestige-damaging controversy with a page three box that apologized for nothing. Instead, under the headline "Editor's Note," the paper expresses "regret" if readers concluded from the article that the *Times* questioned Bowman's character.

In a silly attempt to explain away the *Times*' gleeful public announcement of Bowman's name in the embarrassing profile just the week before, the regret piece claims, "It

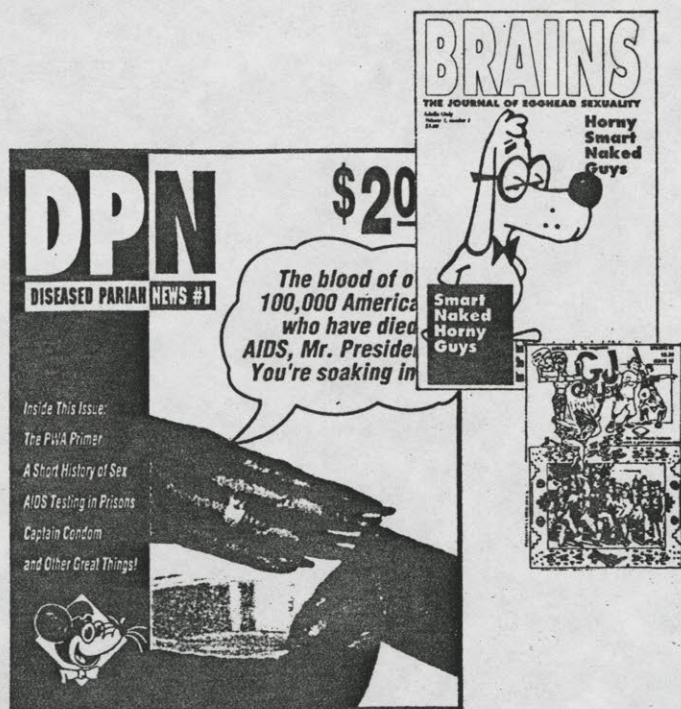
remains The *Times*'s practice to guard the identities of sex crime complainants so long as that is possible and conforms to fair journalistic standards." What makes that statement silly, and what makes it clear that the *Times* isn't sure what to do about the mess it's created, is that Bowman's name has suddenly disappeared from the *Times*' vocabulary. In this "Editor's Note" she is again referred to as "the woman," even though the offending profile from the week before had printed her name 12 times.

Another follow-up piece in the *Times* last week summarizes the debate the initial profile started and acknowledges that the *Times* decision to use Bowman's name was influenced by "competitive pressures."

The *Chronicle* — which reprinted the original *Times* profile — dealt with the problem in an editorial, saying that in the best of all possible worlds rape would not be a crime with a stigma. It also "regrets" using Bowman's name. "Our basic policy," concludes the *Chronicle* editorial, "will remain, as it has been for many years, not to name the victims in such cases." What the editorial fails to explain is why that policy was violated in the first place.

IMPRESSIVE WORK was done over the weekend by one of the Bay Area's Spanish-language broadcasters, radio station KIQI, *La Grande Diez Diez*. The station's fast-talking DJs pre-empted the usual music mix and instead did a grand job of raising money and supplies from listeners for victims of the recent earthquake in Costa Rica and Panama. **SF**

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'ZINE SCENE

'Homozine' Nation

BY SUSAN GERHARD

'ZINES ARE to publishing what vibrators are to the world of relationships: When you can't find the right connection, plug in and do it yourself. Many writers and publishers are doing just that. The upstart gay publications (referred to here as "homozines") found in free-thinking bookstores (like San Francisco's A Different Light) or mailed through personal networks across the country use a do-it-yourself spirit to express themselves and, in the process, spit in the face of both the gay and straight publishing worlds.

With punk attitudes, intellectual sex, or just plain humor, the 'zines rush in where advertising-driven entities fear to tread. Since 'zines are often produced on tattered-shoestring budgets by labor-of-love writers/editors/publishers/cut-and-paste artists, things like production values, deadlines and, of course, profits can slip through the cracks.

Editorial intent, however, comes across as strongly as the sentiments in an eighth-grade love note. The generally straightforward nature of the 'zines draws audiences in with sincerity rather than underhanded marketing tactics, cartoons and rough collage rather than subliminal seduction. There's no time for the sublime when you've got revolutions to start on your own Macintosh (or IBM Selectric).

In a survey of homozines mostly produced here in Fogtown (of which only a fraction are mentioned in this

article), I found more variation than commonality: some trash, some eloquence, and plenty of rebellion.

The best of the lot was far and away *DPN* (*Diseased Pariah News*), a 'zine that takes on the colossal task of creating "AIDS humor." It's a proposition that puzzles editors Tom Shearer and Beowulf Thorne as much any new reader, but somehow the writer-artist team assembles a collection of works that bite hard at institutions (hospitals, the government) and the AIDS-phobic while poking gentle fun at PWAs themselves. *DPN* indulges in neither sanctimonious anger nor mind-numbing "warm fuzzies."

In addition to Captain Condom's adventures in snotty nightclubs, the "Porn Potato's" inspired video reviews, and Shearer's wry prose, *DPN* offers plenty of informational pieces on services for PWAs, news, Biffy Mae's "Get Fat, Don't Die!" recipes, and tips on condoms. With the cover's Palmolive detergent parody — "The blood of over 100,000 Americans who have died of AIDS, Mr. President? You're soaking in it!" — this 'zine is one step ahead of its rage.

If any trend characterizes the homozine world, it's insider humor that turns unsavory stereotypes into sexy new lifestyles. *Brains*, "The Journal of Egghead Sexuality" (soon to come out with *IQ*, a sister publication on its backside), promises "horny, smart, naked guys" and delivers plenty of egg-chasing tips, including the "How To Tell If Your Trick Is Really Smart" quiz, a sex-in-the-library

photo-fiction essay, and "the personal is political" personals.

GirlJock, "for the athletic lesbian with a political consciousness," delivers neither heavy athletics nor political tirades, but self-effacing humor — like cartoon quips about the simultaneously indecisive and incestuous nature of women's softball teams. It's a magazine for women who like to get muddy, sweaty, and to bed early.

The real humor in both of these 'zines is not only the introduction of a new generation of stereotypes (the era of the butch, leather-clad dyke and the high-heeled drag queen has been on its way out for a long time), but the realization that the 'zine-makers can't quite live up to their own hyperbolic expectations. They're just "normal people." *Brains* admits the possibility of spelling errors and unashamedly offers a "bonus question" to its quiz — "Do you give head?" — then advises the reader to skip scoring the test and move ahead if the answer is yes. *GirlJock* includes plenty of stories by Sunah Cherwin, self-described unathletic "Girl-Jell(o)," and cartoons about not really making it as a jock. These 'zines are the publishing equivalent of a Queer Nation "mall action" — parading stereotypes so outrageously that the notion of stereotype itself dissolves.

And it's not just these "single-issue" 'zines that are transforming their chunk of the world. While these homozines on AIDS, athletics, and intellectuals careen through stereotypes with humor and anger, punk homozines (*J.D.s*, *Homocore*, *Bimbox*) trash attempts at "gay ideology" — the reliance of mainstream gay glossies on political correctness. Sex homozines (*Taste of Latex*, *Shut.Mag*, *My Comrade/Sister!*) present multiple variations on simpleminded photo-filled mainstream gay and straight porn. Other 'zines like *Fogtown Rag*, *Whispering Campaign*, *Frighten the Horses*, and *Homoture* fill odd gaps in written discourse with works that range from purposefully humble to aggressively highbrow.

Obviously, it's a world of many minds and many Macintosh computers, so if you don't like the browsing selection, make your own.

Susan Gerhard is an editor at the Bay Guardian. She has written on gay events and issues of sexuality.

lit.

'zine Scene/3
Conjure Man/4

Reviews:

Sailor's Holiday/9
How Could You?/9
Confessions of an Eco Warrior/10

Editor: Miriam Wolf
Design/Production:
Guardian Art Department
Sales Manager: Bethann Seide

WASHINGTON DIARIST

Relentless

I WAS TAKING SOME BOSTON Chicken pot pie to my friend Patrick the other night (Patrick has AIDS and wasn't feeling too well, whether it was a reaction to the hefty new round of antibiotics he'd been taking or the massive sinus infection he'd been hoping the antibiotics would counter or maybe—who knows?—a new opportunistic infection that was about to play havoc with his 30-year-old body or the old opportunistic infections—pneumocystis and cryptosporidiosis—that he was already taking twenty-seven pills a day to control, we—and his doctors—weren't completely sure) and I came across a publication I'd heard of but never actually read before. It's called *DPN*, short for *Diseased Pariah News*, and for the next couple of days, it more than lifted my mood; it gave me grounds for more hope than I'd yet allowed myself in the years of the plague.

"INSIDE THIS ISSUE: HOW TO TELL if Your Loved One is Dead," teases the cover-line. And the article lives up to its billing. The author, Editor Michael Botkin, has come across a new sensitive guide for caregivers of PWAs (people with AIDS), "written from a 'death-teddy' (i.e., 'let me share the spiritual charge of your death and/or terminal 'healing' by hugging you while you slowly expire') perspective." Among the signs in the pamphlet are: "increased sleeping during the day, difficult to arouse," "no breathing," "no heartbeat," "loss of control of bowel and bladder" and "no response to shaking or shouting." Botkin comments: "I have some misgivings about that last item, 'no response to shaking or shouting,' as it conjures up uncomfortable images of the slightly inept caregiver slapping a PWA corpse while yelling 'Yo, dude! Are you alive or what? Yo!'" The author suggests a few additions to the list: "*Raptors Devouring Corpse*. The presence of large scavenger birds (e.g., crows, vultures, bald eagles) nibbling on your ex-lover's body generally indicates death. In the future, when housekeeping for terminal HIVers, avoid leaving unscreened windows open. . . . *Abrupt Cessation of Sarcasm*. If your caregivee no longer makes nasty comments when you perform Louise Hay-style affirmations over him with your crystal, it may be that he's

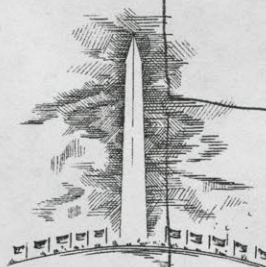
developed a more 'healing' attitude, or he may just have croaked."

MAYBE YOU HAVE TO HAVE HALF your friends in their 20s and 30s infected or sick or dead to find this hysterically funny, but, anyway, I did. I became a *DPN* bore for a couple of days, hooting with laughter at the latest turn of phrase I uncovered, sharing the jokes with my nonplussed straight colleagues, most of whom winced politely at the parody-ad for AIDS Barbies—"And she thought math class was tough!"—and the calorie-rich recipes for PWAs in the regular feature "Get Fat, Don't Die!" Then, for good measure, there's the fetching "Page Nine Boy" pinup: "Age: 28; Height: 6' 1"; Weight: 172 pounds; CD4 Count: 5; Infections: You name 'em!" Or the trend comparison chart—like the ones they have in desperate *Style* sections—of "New Clones" vs. "AIDS Clones": "New Clone: Easily Bored. AIDS Clone: Tires Easily. New Clone: Bald as a Fashion Statement. AIDS Clone: Bald from Radiation Therapy." Or you can browse the beginning of a piece of generally lively fiction: "I'm on the phone with the clinic. The counselor says, 'Well, you're positive.' Blood rushed up from my gut—my face hot. 'Swing low, sweet char-i-o-t.'"

GET IT? OH, WELL, TOO BAD. *DPN* is the latest and most fully formed product of a view of the world I first encountered a few years ago when reporting a story on the rifts between HIV-positive and HIV-negative gay men. It reflects the way positives—of all shapes and sizes—often view the virus not as a permanent affliction, or a prelude to dying, but as a herald to a new—and newly intense—way of living. This isn't mere rationalization. I remember particularly a positive friend of mine who a few years ago simply decided not to date negatives anymore. He didn't pretend he was glad he'd sero-converted. It was just that he'd gotten beyond the immediate shock of diagnosis and didn't have the time to deal with sero-negative guilt and misunderstanding and panic.

DPN GOES ONE STEP FURTHER. IT doesn't have the time to deal with sero-positive guilt and misunderstanding and panic. For a long time, AIDS discussions were all variants on what might best be called the Schmalz Syndrome, after *The New York Times* reporter Jeffrey Schmalz, who, diagnosed with AIDS, became a crusading journalist on the subject for the paper of record. Schmalz, following an

increasingly activist line, saw the issue of AIDS as a mixture of political scandal and personal tragedy: the government was doing nothing (or worse, was guilty of murder, genocide, etc.) and everyone was dying. His posthumous *cri de coeur*, "Whatever Happened to AIDS?," in *The New York Times Magazine* was a classic of the genre. President Clinton, ever eager to feel rather than think, loved it; the *Times* reveled in another spasm of minority goop (and has subsequently, as if to honor the memory of Schmalz, reported overwhelmingly doom-laden news about the epidemic); and those of us who knew and cared for Jeff, and who found the article, oddly, if understandably, off-key, kept appropriately quiet.



AFTER THE *TIMES*'S sentimentalism, *DPN* is a breath of morbidly brilliant air. The magazine exudes a sense that HIV is a virus, not a government conspiracy; that its

cure is a complex scientific problem, which inevitably takes time; and that the main task of people with HIV, in the meantime, is not simply to mope or protest or complain or scream, but to live. The magazine is as devoid of self-pity, as crackling with self-possessed energy, as PWAs and other terminally ill people often are. Above all, its tone is true. "How does Aunt Kaposi do it?" asks my favorite columnist (named for the lesions) about her comeback from a nasty bout of cryptosporidium, an intestine-exploding parasite (her tip for dealing with which is keeping a lot of books near the john). In a very un-Schmalzy sentence, she replies: "The answer, my dear pariahs, is the same for each and every one of you. Stigma with style, child. There is no time to hate."

STIGMA WITH STYLE. MAYBE ONLY a post-cryptosporidial homosexual could ironize his own death, but the spectacle is inspiring. If the culture of complaint is eventually overturned, if the issue of pain is ever to be wrested intelligently from the pining, wit-free left, it will surely begin with the sardonic voice of Aunt Kaposi, "shake and bake I.V. on the right arm, blood transfusion on the left . . . cackling away, putting dementia to good use beneath the gaze of the solemn hospital attendants watching me write on a yellow legal pad to all my beloved pariahs." May it be a long time before she finally rests in peace. And may her beloved pariahs get fatter.

ANDREW SULLIVAN

Dallas Times Herald

Monday, April 8, 1991

Quarterly AIDS magazine treats patients to humor

NEWSWEEK

SAN FRANCISCO — AIDS patient Tom Shearer and HIV-positive Beowulf Thorne are publishing an irreverent desktop quarterly called *Diseased Pariah News* that claims to be the world's only humor magazine about AIDS.

Thirty pages long, the San Francisco-based periodical swiftly sold out its initial printing of 200 copies, requiring a run of 1,100 more.

Issue No. 2, out last week, is selling well and has mail-order subscribers from as far away as Alabama.

The instant success suggests the magazine is tapping into something AIDS patients have missed badly amid the grim facts of their illness.

If there is comedy to be wrenched from the jaws of the AIDS scourge, Shearer and Thorne seem eager to have the first laugh.

Shearer, 32, said the magazine's flippant name comes from a cartoon he saw after an airline had refused a seat to an AIDS patient.

It showed a ticket clerk asking a customer, "And would you like the smoking, non-smoking or diseased pariah section?"

When he began work on the magazine a year ago, he recalled, all his HIV-negative friends were appalled, "but those who were HIV-positive thought: 'Wonderful!'"

Shearer's companion and copublisher Thorne, 26, said he sees the magazine as "being somewhere between *Spy* and *Good Housekeeping*."

Most of all, the two seem determined to cast off the martyr image that AIDS patients bear.

For Shearer, DPN's abrasive style sends a clear message to those who view infected people as "languishing saints" or "hug objects."

The magazine is not all laughs. Reality stalks the comic-strip adventures of "Captain Condom," a kind of gay Superman who distributes condoms to the needy.

"Strange," the captain muses over the death of yet another friend, "it seems a little less gut-wrenching every time. ... Am I losing my humanity as I lose my friends?"

Diseased Pariah News' humor is blacker than black

Continued from page 45

of that caped crusader, Captain Condom.

"I think the fact that she's probably getting federal money is obscene," Thorne said of Hale. "I imagine that we've probably done more to save people's lives, or at least to improve the quality of them with what little capital we have, than whatever she's putting out there in her 'family HIV clinic.'"

For DPN No. 5, predictably, Thorne emblazoned Hale's feedback on the "Not Sanitized for your Protection" paper strip that seals every copy of the 'zine. "Then I figured the best thing that what I could do was to immortalize her forever," he added. "So I'm going to base one of Captain Condom's future enemies on her. I'm going to call her Flat Woman and she'll come from Jurassic Junction or Cambrian Corners or something." In No. 6, Thorne promises, the crusading Captain will also beat up a thinly disguised Louise Hay, the guiltmongering New Age "wellness"

guru.

In No. 1, Shearer launched a contest asking readers to guess his T-cell count. In the next number, the winner was thanked "for guessing optimistically high." In fact, Shearer's T-cell count had dwindled to a lonely nine. That's enough for a baseball team, though, so he concocted another contest: Name that team! On April 9 of last year, before No. 3 came out, however, he died at age 32. "Dam! One of Our Editors is Dead!" was the headline over Thorne's wry and moving take on Shearer's death and cremation.

A note in No. 5 claims that the "cremains of your Dusty Deaditor have been ground up and mixed into the ink used in this issue." Hey, just kidding. Actually, Thorne and Shearer's mother split the ashes.

"Usually when we go to a small press or 'zine convention, we're the most ragingly moderate people there," Thorne said. "Occasionally, I'll take Tom in a box

with us, just to prove that we're not as boring as we look." (But, it's occurred to him, a box is also a boring place to keep cremains. What about those little snow globes the souvenir shops peddle? "When you shake it, it would just get murky and take hours to settle," he suggested, "a little landscape with some gray ashes raining down.")

Just before Shearer died, *Newsweek* ran a startlingly perceptive piece on *Diseased Pariah News*. Thorne's mother in Los Angeles, who had never seen DPN itself, did see the *Newsweek* piece. She called and "left this message: 'I hope this doesn't impact any future career decisions'," Thorne reported. "And I thought, What future? You don't get the point!" After "a really bad year last year," he thinks that "this one will be better." But his "AZT honeymoon" is over after four years, and his T-cell count has started a "hyperbolic dive."

Now Thorne is searching for "a kinder,

gentler nucleocide analog," but without success; they all make him sick. So it's double doses of AZT, which also make him sick.

Thorne's biggest concern has been enlisting someone to tote that DPN barge after he's gone. To his vast relief, Tom Ace, one of DPN's two other editors, has declared his determination to do just that.

"It'll change. But I'll be dead, I won't care," Thorne said. "Ten years from now, I'd like to see DPN with three living editors and half a dozen in boxes that they have to haul everywhere with them."▼

For a one-year, four-issue subscription to Diseased Pariah News, send \$10 (or \$3 for a sample issue) to DPN, c/o Men's Support Center, P.O. Box 30564, Oakland, CA 94604.

David C. Morrison is a staff correspondent for National Journal here in Washington.

DPN

DISEASED PARIAH NEWS

IS BURNING BEARS

Beowulf Thorne and Tom Shearer are the two people thus far who can be credited with starting the most outrageous backlash to having AIDS. Both of these PWAs unapologetically hate teddy bears and the sentiment that is associated with the stuffed poly-nonsense. When Tom Shearer died in April 1991, the funeral ceremony included a teddy bear-burning ritual. Borne on the wings of cynicism with an absolute distaste for the pontification of people who want to sympathize with PWAs, Thorne and Shearer came up with *Diseased Pariah News*. Both of them are from the San Francisco Bay Area (the only place a publication empire like *Forge of God Press* — or *Fist or Fart* — would dare be hatched).

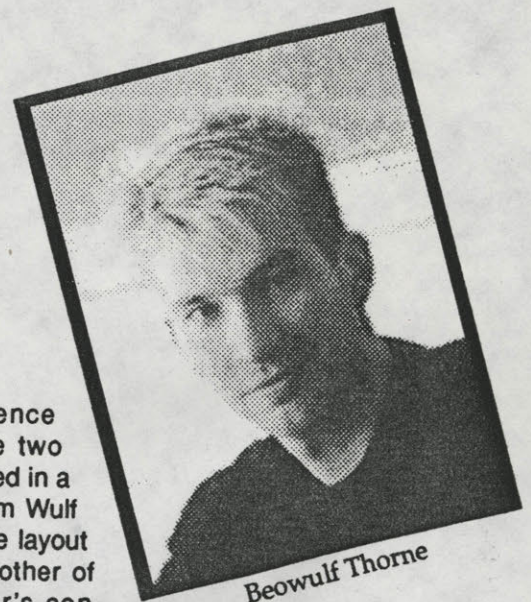
Diseased Pariah News became manifest following an on-going

correspondence between the two that culminated in a comment from Wulf Thorne on the layout design of another of Tom Shearer's confrontational 'zines called *GAWK*

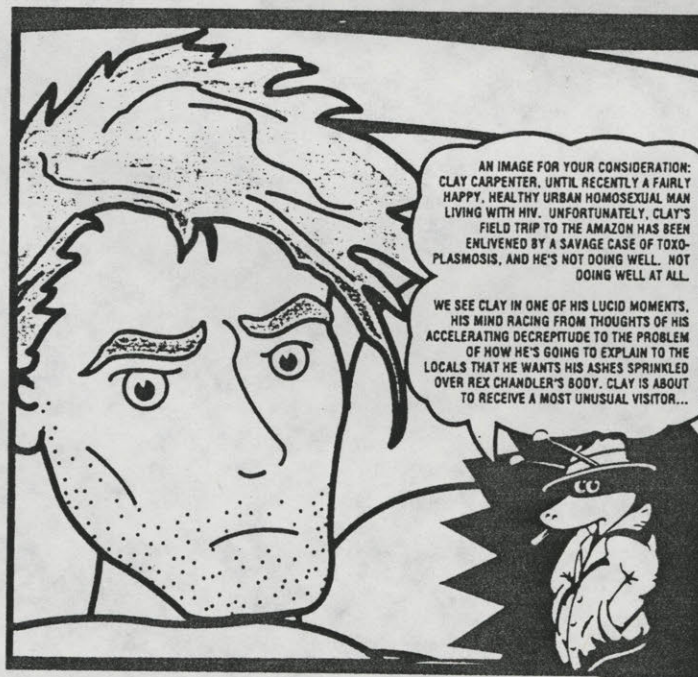
(the journal of the Gay Artists and Writers Kollektive). "What an ugly little newsletter," Thorne declared, offering ideas for its improvement. Next thing he knew, Thorne got the following issue of *GAWK* in the mail on disk and was dared to do something with its design. A partnership was fostered from there via more critical correspondence. The title of this mutual venture came from an *Advocate* magazine comic, in which an airline stewardess asks a passenger: "Would you like smoking, non-smoking or the diseased pariah section?" (This was during Northwest Airlines' controversial, and mistaken, declaration that they would not transport PWAs.) *Diseased Pariah News* became a grassroots phenomenon very quickly when it was finished. An initial run printing of 200 copies was gone in two weeks, then was increased to 1300, and then

"they went up pretty fast." Currently, *DPN* has a run of 1500 and Thorne says he doesn't want it to go beyond a 2000 ceiling. "I don't want it to be so common it'll be used as coasters." In an interview with the *Advocate*, Thorne related his personal philosophy behind *DPN*: "Life is full of awful experiences that you'll laugh about later, but if you don't have a future, you have to laugh now."

DPN's humorously confrontational take on living with AIDS has not gone unnoticed nation-



Beowulf Thorne



PWA Newsline

People With AIDS Coalition

July 1991

Published By and For People With AIDS and AIDS Related Conditions

Issue #67

BY BREE SCOTT-HARTLAND

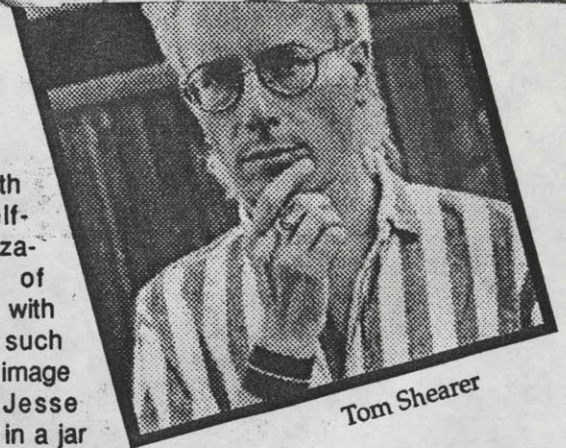
ally, even with its editor's desire to stay small and special. *Newsweek* also ran a story on the 'zine and its editors, who are working to dispel the martyr image of people with AIDS. The editors have often targeted the "gravely earnest response to the epidemic" that makes up songs of our tragic experiences, or the "exquisite catharsis of your affliction." This kind of humor and self-admiration in *DPN*, Thorne told *Newsline*, "reminds them about their own mortality. When you laugh about it, they freak out. It's not out of concern for PWAs, it's about their own sensibilities." Thorne and Shearer had taken possession and ownership of their condition and created the tool that would exemplify their experiences and form their own point of view, as sick as the squeamish might perceive it. During his last days, Shearer cast upon the waters his own experiences of losing weight rapidly and the debility of his Kaposi's sarcoma. If we're to believe the philosophy of Norman Cousins then we can laugh ourselves back to good health through this medium, or even into our graves. Tom Shearer was the "absolute mommy" of *DPN* and his recent passing has left it in the hands of Thorne (the "Mac wiz" who is responsible for the high-end graphics), Silicon Valley wizards like Tom Reilly, and other writers including a retired porn star.

For the most part, *DPN* is a gay-male-centric publication with sections and stories about gay men's experiences living with AIDS in their bodies and communities. As a devotee of condoms, Thorne created with Shearer a comic strip character called "Captain Condom" who coincidentally (perhaps) reflects very much the image of its creator. (Don't all our heroes?) There are also political slights against those who would inter-

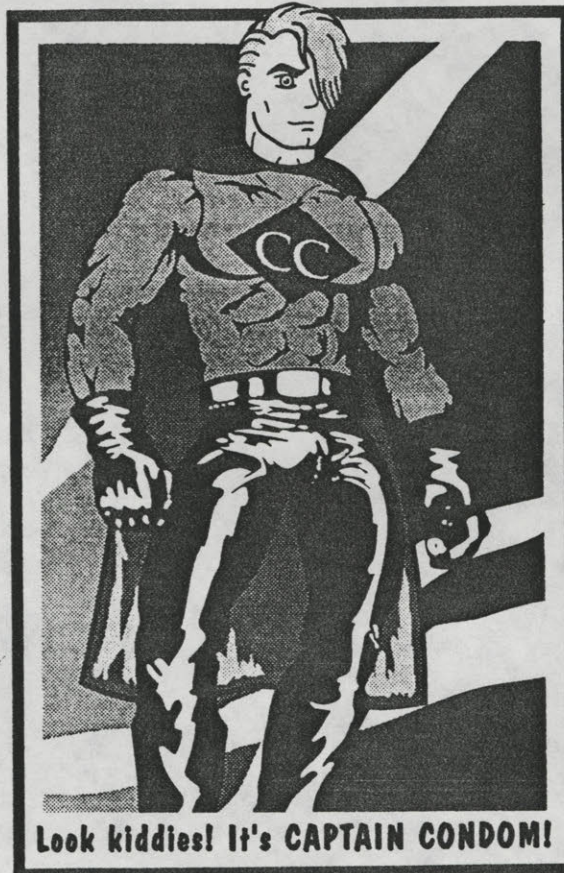
fere with the self-actualization of people with AIDS, such as the image of Jesse Helms in a jar of urine on the cover of *DPN* #2. Included in this issue are recipes ("Get Fat, Don't Die") for those of us with seemingly inevitable myopathy, and lots of safer sex advice as well as "baskets" for the lovelorn.

Right now, Thorne sees *DPN* as his hobby and doesn't want it to grow explosively out of control. "Who knows when I join the HIV retirement plan?" When *Newsline* spoke to Thorne from San Francisco about the importance of this model of self-empowerment for other people with AIDS, Thorne was reluctant to stand on any premise other than to say that, "*DPN* is self-actualizing and we grow from the reaction. It's still in the process of development and probably will be for a long time." Or maybe it won't, but it still stands as an example of an entirely PWA-controlled sensibility, without interference from government or the good intentions of uninfected pontificators.

(SAY YOU WANT IT! Subscriptions are \$7.00 (US) for 4 issues, or write for information to: Forge of God Press, PO Box 31431, San Francisco, CO, 94131)



Tom Shearer

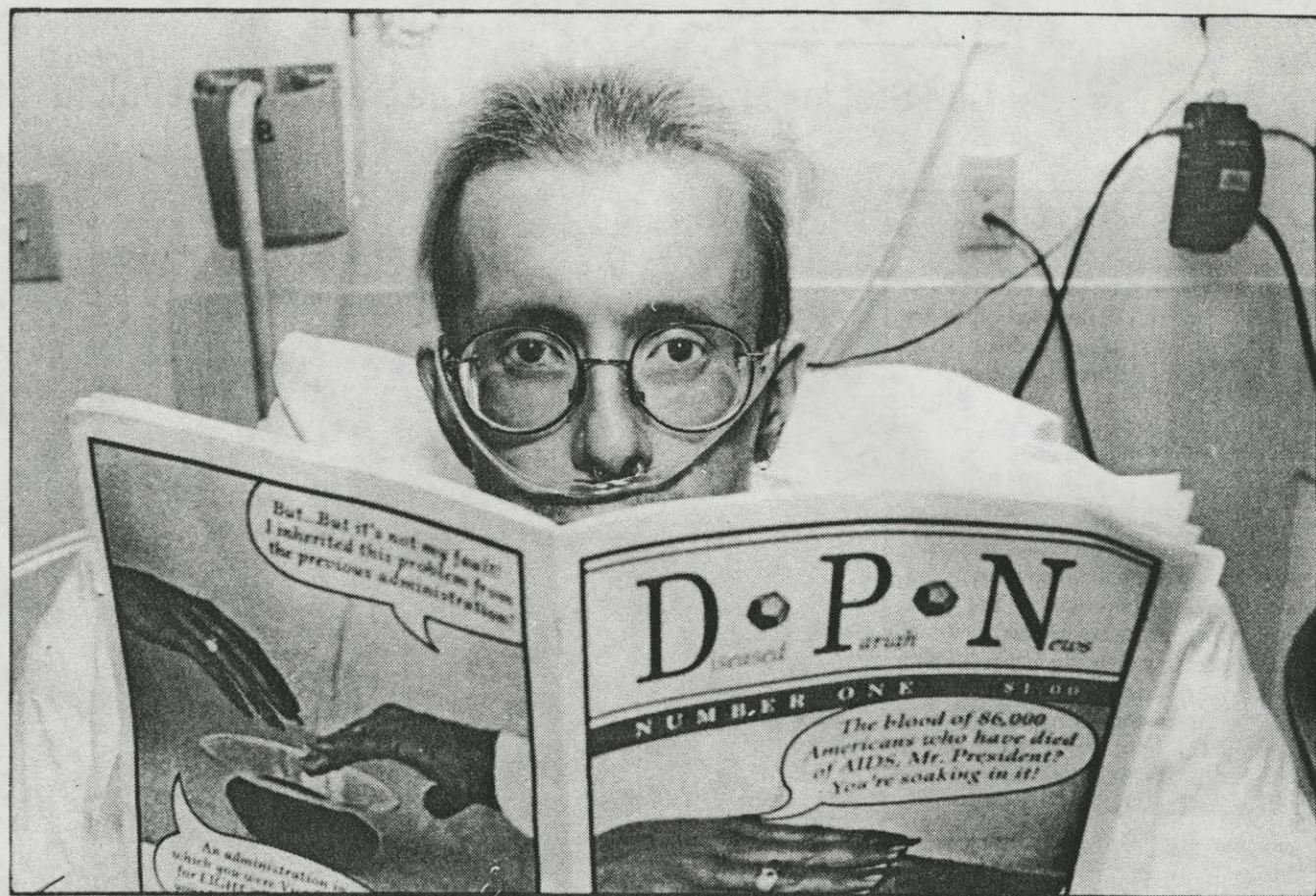


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"I want people to crave us, not use us as coasters."



Editor Tom Shearer in his element

"Our philosophy of laughing in the face of death and debility is bound to unsettle the squeamish."

This busy publishing maven practices what he preaches. Living on disability and benefit checks, he currently splits the time he's not in the hospital between tending to his body and his two publishing ventures, in which he serves as the "serene editor and voice of reason" of *DPN* and the editor and "absolute mommy" of the more broad-minded 'zine *GAWK*, the journal of the Gay Artists and Writers Kollektive. Lately, his body seems to be taking up more time; after rattling off a hefty list of physical afflictions, Shearer says he generally feels pretty good.

To ease the unwieldy burdens of publishing *DPN*, Shearer relies on Thorne and Rielly along with various contributing writers (one of whom is an unnamed retired gay porn star) to keep the operation running. Thorne—the "cranky editor and irresistible force" behind *DPN*, the Macin-

tosh graphics wiz responsible for the crisp high-end look of the 'zine, a cartoonist, and a writer with a definite thing for condoms—will inherit *DPN*'s editorial duties after Shearer's demise. It is an idea that Thorne has mixed feelings about. "I guess life isn't *all* funny," he laments.

Their joint publishing empire, Forge of God Press (the *Forge* can be replaced by either *Fist* or *Fart*, as the need arises), publishes *DPN*, *GAWK*, and Thorne's prolific stream of safe-sex propaganda out of a tiny room wallpapered with pinup boys and activist stickers in the front of Shearer's sunny Castro district flat. These ventures have been well-received in the gay and mainstream press. Even *Newsweek* recently profiled the editors, and an underground small press support foundation awarded them with a \$75 publishing grant.

While the first issue of *DPN* sold out its initial print run of 2,000, Xeroxed surreptitiously, there are no plans to up the quantity. "I want people to crave us, not use us as coasters on the coffee table," Shearer says.

The editor's audacity would seem to invite certain controversy, but negative response to *DPN* has been almost nonexistent. Offering no apologies, Shearer suggests that any detractors continue to keep their distance:

"Honey, I have a pretty good case of AIDS. I wrote this stuff, and I think it's funny."

At press time The ADVOCATE learned that Tom Shearer had just died of complications from AIDS. We chose to print this interview to remind the community of its inherent strength—even in the face of death.

MARC GELLER

A DIFFERENT LOOK AT AIDS

SULA

Sunday, May 26, 1991

P.A. native tries to find lighter side

RUTHANN RICHTER / STAFF

Even while his friend lay dying in the hospital, Wulf Thorne maintained his irreverent sense of humor about AIDS.

He could not bring himself to cry as his friend slipped away. Instead, he laughed in the face of the disease.

"If I squeeze your IV bag, do your eyes bug out?" he would ask Tom Shearer in his last days.

Others failed to appreciate the humor: "The nurses gave me looks of horror," he said.

It's with that same tragic irony that Thorne and Shearer approached their joint venture, a quarterly "humor" magazine about AIDS called "Diseased Pariah News."

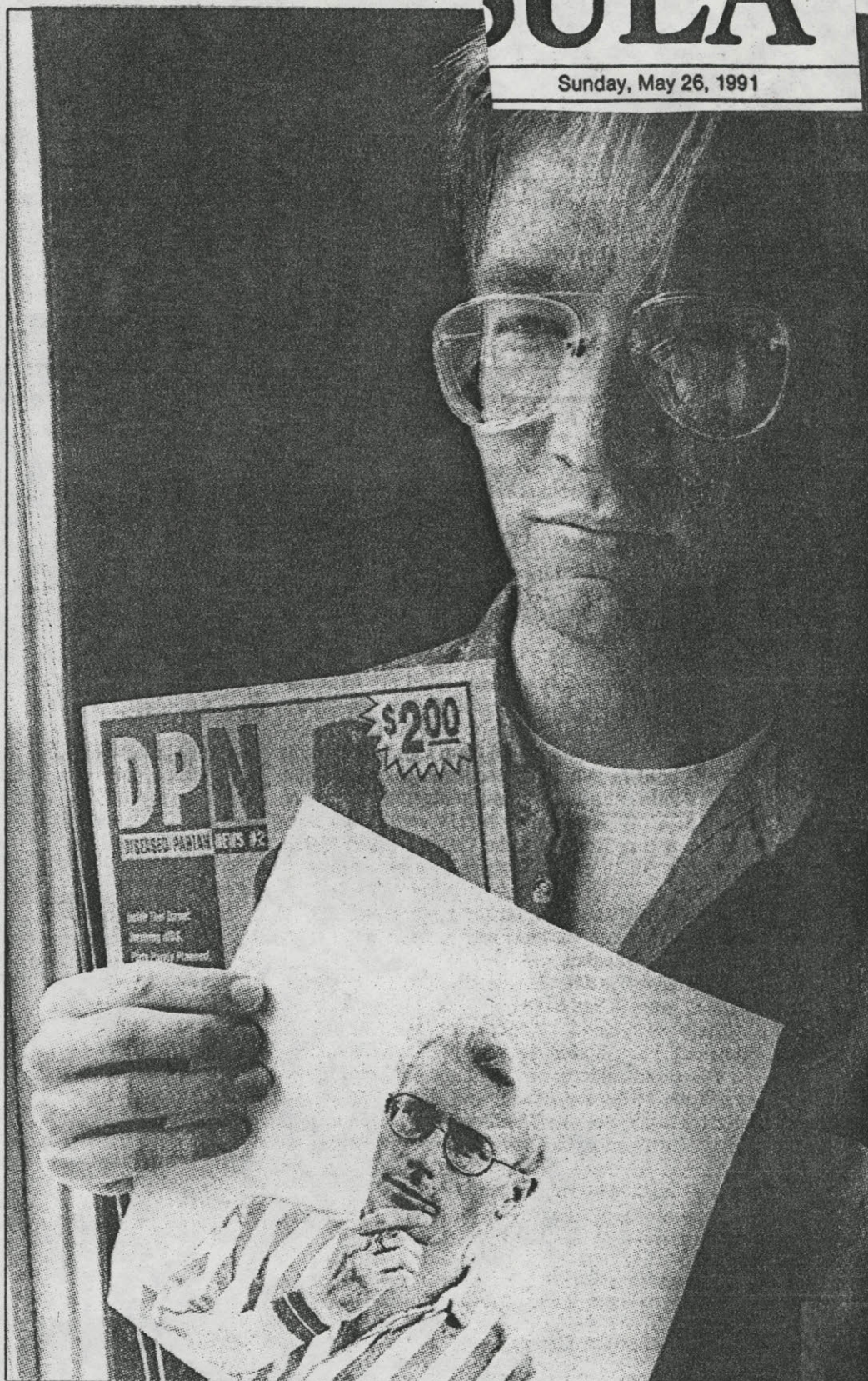
Shearer's death April 8 hasn't stopped publication. Thorne said he misses his friend, but the show must go on, if only to provide a continuing outlet for his own angst about the disease.

The magazine, begun about a year ago, is part informational, part prurient and part entertainment for those who have AIDS or who simply want a better understanding of what it's like to suffer from the terrible, terminal illness.

"It doesn't have 'ha ha' jokes. It's more ironic. Everything has a sense of irony," said Thorne, 26, a former Palo Altan.

The 32-page magazine can be deliberately provocative and very hard-edged, throwing darts at such figures as U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms and President Bush.

The cover of the first issue which came out in September shows a bejeweled hand resting on another hand in a manicur-



TIM BERGER / STAFF

Wulf Thorne is one of the originators of the "Diseased Pariah News," which he began last year with a friend, Tom Shearer, who died in April of AIDS. DPN may be the only magazine that pokes fun at AIDS.

Please see AIDS, B-3

AIDS

Continued from B-1

ist's soaking bowl.

"The blood of 86,000 Americans who have died of AIDS, Mr. President? You're soaking in it!" the caption reads.

"It's sort of mean-spirited, nasty and cranky," Thorne said of the magazine's general tone. "But it represents the feelings of alienation, anger and frustration of its readers."

He noted that the cover caption already is outdated; more than 100,000 Americans have died of AIDS. In Santa Clara County, 783 people have been diagnosed with the disease since 1983, and 525 have died. In San Mateo County, there have been 576 cases reported and 337 deaths.

The magazine does reflect the stark reality of AIDS, drawing upon some of the discomfiting personal experiences of its editors and contributors.

In its "Captain Condom" cartoon strip, one of the characters wakes up in the morning to throw up in the bathroom because of a drug side-effect, and then is harangued by one of his neighbors, who tells him he would be better off dead.

In another scene from the strip, one of the characters laments the loss of yet another buddy.

"Strange, it seems to get a little less gut-wrenching every time, but I don't know if that's a good thing or bad," he says. "Am I losing my humanity as I lose my friends?"

In San Francisco, the magazine has been well-received by the gay community, where it's admired for its courage and grit.

"It's met with extreme success, mainly because it's very well put together," said Darrell Alvarez at A Different Light book store. "Here at the store, it sells quickly."

"Around here, people find it pretty righteous that they've taken such a strong stand," Alvarez added. "I don't know what the reaction would be if you put it in a dentist's office, with more of a scale of people reading it."

The magazine grew out of a friendship between Shearer and Thorne, who had gotten to know

one another through a gay publication called GAWK, Thorne said.

Shearer, a former Silicon Valley technical writer, suggested the idea for the magazine, which Thorne heartily endorsed.

The idea came at an apocalyptic time: Thorne had recently received the positive results of his AIDS test and had decided to make some major life changes.

He quit the molecular biology program at the University of California at Santa Cruz and moved from Palo Alto to San Francisco to study something he loved — graphic arts. He became the magazine's resident artist.

The pair set up shop in the home they shared in San Francisco's Castro District and spun out their first issue in September, using a borrowed Xerox machine. The issue sold out in two weeks. It now has a circulation of 1,500.

Although Shearer's health was on the decline, he continued to editorialize for the magazine from his hospital bed at Kaiser Permanente Medical Center in San Francisco, dictating to a friend through a half-blind haze.

"AIDS certainly has its teeth in me, but I feel damn good and you can count on me for some while yet. I don't really expect things to get gruesome for at least a year," he wrote, promising to appear in the next issue as a naked centerfold.

His funeral preparations were like a scene out of the magazine. Thorne and several of Shearer's other close friends visited a cremation parlor, only to be struck by the rows and rows of funeral urns displayed there.

"We lost control," Thorne recalled. "We were laughing on the floor."

Thorne could not bring himself to cry over the loss of his friend, who was 32.

"I've made my peace with death," he said. "You have to. Tom's gone. I'll really miss him, but I can't help it, so you've got to deal."

"What else can you do? You can laugh or cry. And crying gives you wrinkles."

He said he knows some people will take offense at the magazine

Humor with a bite

Even the gentler humor in DPN can be caustic, as these excerpts from "Mister Manners' Courteous Responses to Stupid Questions and Comments" by K. Reeves demonstrate.

■ *You're so brave, I don't know how you do it.*

I don't. Bravery is when you disrupt your everyday schedule to save an infant from a burning building or a senior citizen from a mugger. Having AIDS is not brave ... it's IRRITATING!

■ *I feel guilty because I'm HIV negative.*

Alright, then hand over your savings passbook, negotiable bonds and any Certificates of Deposit that are due to mature SOON right over to me. Giving is a divine act which should ease your conscience.

■ *Look at this as a learning experience.*

I do. I've learned that insurance companies consider a cough in 1987 a pre-existing condition that will cancel my policies. Social Services requires my death certificate as evidence of AIDS before dispensing benefits and that doctors always want more blood.

and its approach, but he believes it's because of their own inability to confront their mortality.

"We don't want to think about death. We don't want to hear about it," he said. "When you talk about death and laugh in the face of it, it forces people to talk about their own mortality, which is something they're not conditioned to think about."

The magazine carries a disclaimer indicating it's not for everyone, as it contains blatant depictions of homosexual activity. The \$2 publication is available in some San Francisco bookstores or can be obtained by writing Forge-of-God Press, P.O. Box 31431, San Francisco, 94131.

Not a Laughing Matter?

Fanzine Editor Tom Shearer Prescribes AIDS Humor as Medicine

BY GLEN HELFAND

Tom Shearer has a standard '70s happy face tattooed on his shoulder. When he says "Have a nice day," he does it with a hearty sneer. As a person with AIDS, Shearer

finds his reasons for smiling have little to do with sunshine and light; in fact, some might wonder how he could smile at all. But even in a noticeably debilitated state, Shearer is never at a loss for an acerbic comment. His devilish sense of humor is his constant source of energy.

Last year the 33-year old San Francisco-based Shearer, a comely hybrid of a thinning modern primitive and a computer nerd from Colorado, decided to put his humor into action. After becoming too sick to work—and too sick of working in "San Ho" (his term of endearment for San Jose, Calif.) fixing circuit boards—Shearer found the time to enter the fertile, funky world of lesbian and gay fanzines.

"I figured, I'm not building a career for when I'm 40," says Shearer. "I might as well do something I want to do." Teaming up with former Silicon Valley cohorts Beowulf Thorne and Tom Rielly, Shearer launched *Diseased Pariah News* (DPN), what he sees as "a forum for infected people to share their thoughts, feelings, art, writing, and brownie recipes in an atmosphere free of teddy bears, magic rocks, and seronegative guilt."

Experiencing the roller coaster phenomenon of HIV from the driver's seat, Shearer, among other things, is not about to give up laughing. His favorite target is the gravely earnest response to the epidemic. A cynic to the bone, he is quickly perturbed by what he calls all that "s-e-e-rious" material published about AIDS, not to mention the care givers who subscribe to those at-

titudes. "I think there are lots of people out there who ought to be on lithium instead of volunteering to help PWAs."

New Age responses irk him even more. "I can't stand all that 'Let me hug you while you die/exquisite catharsis of your noble affliction' stuff or those show-tune celebrations of 'AIDS! AIDS! AIDS! What a wonderful, beautiful thing!' Ugh!" Though there are a few notable theater groups and stand-up comics dealing with AIDS through humor, Shearer is unimpressed: "They probably aren't doing jokes about explosive diarrhea."

Shearer's own fearless sense of humor goes beyond death's door with ideas for lots of yet-to-be-produced tie-in products like Get Used to It greeting cards for the sick and flame-singed Postcards From Hell death announcements. His most valiant and frighteningly generous idea, however, is to fill paperweights with his ashes as bonuses for the ten charter subscribers to DPN.

"Life is full of awful experiences that you'll laugh about later," says coeditor Thorne, "but if you don't have a future, you have to laugh now." Celebrating the idea that humor is always therapeutic, and sick humor even more so, DPN ups the ante with humor that is *literally* sick. As Shearer explains in the first issue, "Our philosophy of laughing in the face of death and debility is bound to unsettle the squeamish."

DPN provides Shearer with an open platform for his own inimitable take on suffering, self-pity, and physical torment. The self-mythologizing writing style of this "homo poet" sets the deliciously snide tone of the entire publication. In his editorial in the just-released second issue, Shearer laments, "I find myself once again drugged and in pain and much more than half blind. Luckily, I come from a long and dirty line of poor-white-trash sharecroppers who evolved to live on dirt and rocks if necessary." Clearly resourceful, he invites

the reader to join his healing process: "...if you hope and pray and say your little rosary beads every evening, I will purrrrrrrhaps be your centerfold boy next issue. Don't miss this once in a lifetime opportunity to examine the plains and contours of my stick-like and slightly tattooed form..."

Shearer's sensibility comes through loud and clear in articles that are genuinely amusing, not to mention useful. We read about Shearer's wacky hospital adventures—"sissified" male nurses, elimination bags, noisy and nosy neighbors—get high-caloric recipes in the "Get Fat, Don't Die!" section, and learn of lots of activities and games like Connect the KS Lesions ("Can you find the Liberty Bell in this picture?") or Tommy's T-Cell Count Contest that can make the bedridden feel like they're on a family road trip.

DPN is also healthfully pro-sex, as Shearer admits. "We like to think of it as a politically correct stroke magazine for positive people," he says. It may just live up to that promise, featuring porn reviews by Porn Potato, the "tragisexual" superhero of the "Captain Condom" comic strip, wads of safe-sex tips, and HIV-positive personal ads with such hook lines as "My new AIDS diagnosis hasn't affected my honker. Cute young buggerable post-tinkies should write me quick, before I die or something." Such light-heartedness allows DPN to serve as an aid in coming out about the "icky virus."

All, of course, is not fun and games. Shearer also uses DPN as his personal corrective to all that "hysterical garbage available from the mainstream media." Like many "ACT UP types," Shearer is livid over delays in federal drug approvals, Sen. Jesse Helms (whose face is bottled in piss on the cover of the current issue), and people who lack sexual awareness. "There are still lots of crazy attitudes out there, but we don't have them," he says. "Drinking a bottle of Coke after you rim someone does *not* constitute safe sex."

THE ADVOCATE

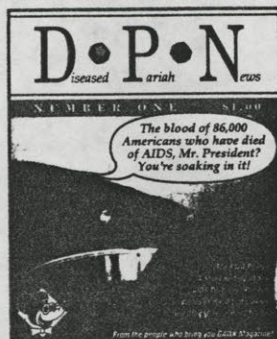
EMBER 20, 1990 • THE NATIONAL GAY AND LESBIAN NEWSMAGAZINE • ISSUE 564

ICKY VIRUS MAGAZINE

"A lot of people are fairly disenfranchised from your standard care-giving support groups," says Tom Shearer, editor of *Diseased Pariah News (DPN)*. "They aren't into religion or spirituality, and they don't like magic or huggy bears. So where can they get a sense of community and belonging?"

Well, for \$1.50 they can get it from the pages of *DPN*, the fanzine focused on the crazed and kooky world of people with AIDS. *DPN* combines off-the-wall social commentary by Shearer, crisp graphics by coeditor Beowulf Thorne, and "cranky, funny, insightful art and writing from infected people only" to "bring some much-needed levity to the experience of HIV infection."

Articles feature reports on AIDS in prison, high-calorie recipes, condom updates, and more highbrowed topics like video reviews for porn potatoes ("a porn potato is a couch potato in the raw"), Captain Condom



cartoons, and "Guess Tom's T-Cell Count."

"So what is this? A bunch of AIDS jokes?" Shearer asks in *DPN*'s premiere issue. "What's so damn funny about a pandemic devastating the world?" Find out for yourself. Quarterly subscriptions are available by writing *DPN*, P.O. Box 31431, San Francisco, CA 94131.

BEAR 13•23

BAY AREA REPORTER NOVEMBER 1, 1990

H I V W A T C H

Sick Humor

Diseased Pariah News (or *DPN*), the new HIVer humor magazine, had my support group rolling on the floor (and if you knew what my floors look like, you would understand what high praise this is).

DPN describes itself as "a forum for infected people to share their thoughts, feelings, art, writing and brownie recipes in an atmosphere free of teddy bears, magic rocks and seronegative guilt."

The first issue includes an eclectic mix of fiction, nasty humor ("I fisted Jesse Helms") and politics. A sexually explicit Captain Condom cartoon explores the internalized homophobia of "the pure club," a sex arena for HIV-negatives whose motto is "safe people, not safe sex." Presumably regular features include "High calorie cooking with Biffy Mae," "Condom Corner" and "The Porn Potato."

DPN is unabashedly nationalistic, political and anti-religious.

"We should warn you that our editorial policy does not include the concept that AIDS is a Wonderful Learning Opportunity and Spiritual Gift From Above," they caution. Those offended by this attitude, or by "sick" humor (e.g., "it's my party and I'll die if I want to") will probably not enjoy this publication.

I, however, cynical curmudgeon that I am, found it amusing (although I still haven't figured out why they refer to HIV as "the Danger Penis").

DPN, a quarterly (if more than the first issue is ever published), is available from Tom Shearer (producer of a similar underground mag, *GAWK*) for \$1.50 an issue (or \$5 a year) at PO Box 31431, SF, 94131. ▼

A NEW BY-AND-FOR PUBLICATION TO HIT THE STREETS

D.P.N. (*Diseased Pariah News*), an alternative quarterly magazine for people who are HIV+, will make its debut this fall.

Here are some quotes from the flyer: "We're tired of crying, blaming ourselves and being told not to discuss our durable powers of attorney over the dinner table...A lot of us feel if you're HIV+ and you have or may develop AIDS, you can either laugh or cry, but crying gives you uglier wrinkles...Get fat, don't die...*D.P.N.* will be a forum for people to share their own ways of dealing with the plague."

I liked what I saw in the prospectus and look forward to seeing the premier issue. Five bucks gets you four issues. Send to *D.P.N.*, Box 31431, San Francisco, CA 94131.

ANOTHER KENNEDY SCANDAL What Happened in Palm Beach?

Newsweek



JOHN HARDING

Dispelling the martyr image: Shearer and Thorne

debilitating bacterial infection, the latest in his long bout with AIDS. He says the magazine's flippant name comes from a cartoon he saw after an airline had refused a seat to an AIDS patient. It showed a ticket clerk asking a customer, "And would you like the smoking, nonsmoking or diseased pariah section?" When he began work on the magazine a year ago, he recalls, all his HIV-negative friends were appalled, "but those who were HIV-positive thought: 'Wonderful!'"

No teddy bears: Shearer's companion and copublisher Thorne, a 26-year-old graphic artist who is himself HIV-positive, says he sees the magazine as "being somewhere between Spy and Good Housekeeping." Most of all, the two seem determined to cast off the martyr image that AIDS patients bear. For Shearer, DPN's abrasive style sends a clear message to those who view infected people as "languishing saints" or "hug objects." Declares the opening statement: "Our editorial policy does not in-

clude the concept that AIDS is a Wonderful Learning Opportunity . . . We are just a couple-o-guys who ran into a Danger Penis and caught something we don't like very much. And we HATE teddy bears."

Even so, DPN is not all laughs. Reality stalks the comic-strip adventures of "Captain Condom," a kind of gay Superman who distributes condoms to the needy. "Strange," the captain muses over the death of yet another friend, "it seems a little less gut-wrenching every time . . . Am I losing my humanity as I lose my friends?"

Thorne says he will continue to publish the magazine whatever the outcome of his partner's illness. Writing from his hospital bed, Shearer himself seems undaunted: "I realized today that I am going to live to be 33, and 34 is not out of the question. 35? Who knows? When I was 27, I thought I'd be dead by now, and I sure ain't daid yet, buckaroo!" Shearer turned 33 last week.

DAVID GELMAN with
ANTHONY DUGNAN-CABRERA in San Francisco

L I F E S T Y L E HEALTH

AIDS: Grin and Bear It

A new humor magazine

So what is this? A bunch of AIDS jokes? What's so damn funny about a pandemic devastating the world? Well, we have it and sometimes we find it amusing.

With that death-defiant credo, Tom Shearer and Beowulf Thorne launched Diseased Pariah News, an irreverent desktop quarterly that claims to be the world's first and only humor magazine about AIDS. Just 30 pages long, the San Francisco-based periodical swiftly sold out its initial printing of 200 copies, requiring a run of 1,100 more. Issue number two, out last week, is selling well and has mail-order subscribers from as far off as Alabama. The instant success suggests the magazine is tapping into something AIDS patients have missed badly amid the grim facts of their illness.

If there is comedy to be wrunged from the jaws of the AIDS scourge, Shearer and Thorne seem eager to have the first laugh. The start-up issue carried a potluck mix of features that includes a worldly-wise advice column and an outrageous giveaway promo ("Hey kids! Want to win fabulous prizes? Just guess Tommy's December T-cell count"). Issue two has more of the same, but one headline captures the magazine's grinning-at-the-gallows tone: DARN, it reads, OUR CENTERFOLD IS SICK!

Shearer, a "retired" technical writer, is in fact hospitalized at the moment with a

The Point

DPN: not sanitized for your protection

by David C. Morrison

Every November on the Day of the Dead, Mexicans flock to their cemeteries to eat, drink, and defiantly make merry on the graves of their loved ones. Not a bad tradition.

As the AIDS disaster drags the Gay community into a second Decade of the Dead, however, there's no shortage of graves, but making merry is just hard to do. On the other hand, one can spend only so much time and energy counting T-cells, moping over the obits, and thinking up telling anecdotes to recount at memorial services. Thank God, then, for *Diseased Pariah News* (DPN), the rag that's "more than just an HIV humor magazine."

There's black humor — Gary Larson's "Far Side" cartoons, say. And then there's the mind-puckeringly bitter, French-roasted stuff — such as this quarterly 'zine, desktop-published in the Bay Area. The latest issue, No. 5, bears a romantic cover portrait of America's most notorious self-loathing Gay bigot and its most shrilly accusatory "innocent victim," both dead of AIDS complications, with the banner coverline: "Together for Eternity: Roy Cohn & Kimberly Bergalis."

The "Centerfold Boy" feature in the same issue has the standard nudie shots. But the model is HIV-positive, and the standard "interview" is a far screaming cry from those bland, upbeat Blueboy



The latest issue of DPN and a few bits of DPN paraphernalia.

bios: "What OI's [opportunistic infections] do you most look forward to? 'Toxoplasmosis and TB; very nostalgic.' What do you want to be when you grow up? 'Alive.'"

"While civility is appreciated even within the harshest of medical offices," the reader is advised in a primer on examining room etiquette, "cheerfulness and levity can be disconcerting to the physician. According to many patients, 200 mgs of AZT can do much to curtail these counterproductive attitudes."

No. 5 also boasts one of those flimsy "soundsheet" records, with two DPN tunes: "They're Called Diseased Pariahs!" backed with "Pus (The Septic Dragon)." That cheery ditty kicks off so: "Pus the septic dragon/lived health care free/all covered with awesome cysts/of a pox called Kaposi's."

"You can either laugh or cry about these things," Beowulf Thorne, DPN's sole surviving founder, commented during a recent interview in San Francisco. "And I say that crying gives you uglier wrinkles."

A self-confessed "failed molecular biology student," the 27-year-old tested positive in 1988 while laboring on an undergraduate degree at the University of California at Santa Cruz.

"I had my moment of gestalt in the basement lab of the science building," Thorne recalled. "I was preparing some specimens. You take fruit fly eyes and then you smash them and do an electro-freeze to separate out the proteins. And I was thinking, What am I doing here!"

Taking a leave of absence, he enrolled at the Academy of Art College in San Francisco to consummate a long-running love affair with graphic design. (He now supports himself as a freelance graphic artist, and it shows; when it comes to self-published 'zines, the 30-page DPN,

produced in Thorne's Palo Alto flat, is far and away the best looking of a generally scruffy lot.)

Around this time, Thorne also embarked upon a collaboration with a friend, Tom Shearer, a technical writer who was turning out a Gay arts 'zine, *GAWK: A Fagazine of the Yarts*. Shearer idly tossed out an idea he'd been toying with — an HIV humor magazine called *Diseased Pariah News*. Thorne jumped in with both feet and has been running with that idea ever since.

The name comes from one of *The Advocate's* "It's a Gay Life" cartoons. Ripping Delta Airlines's refusal to fly someone with HIV, cartoonist Donelan showed a disconcerted fellow at a check-in counter being asked, "Would you like smoking, nonsmoking or diseased pariah section?" He latched onto the phrase, Shearer reported in DPN No. 1, "to much dismayed fluttering from [my] friends. At this time, remember, the only acceptable role for an infected person was Languishing Saint and Hug Object."

That first issue finally appeared in late 1990.

"We are a forum for infected people to share their thoughts, feelings, art, writing, and brownie recipes in an atmosphere free of teddy bears, magic rocks, and seronegative guilt," the statement of purpose in that and all subsequent DPNs reads. (A how-to photo feature on torching teddy bears in DPN No. 3 explains that "Louise Hay literature makes the best kindling.")

Many regular DPN features bowed their debut in No. 1, its omnipresent mascot, a grinning rodent, for one. An "Oncomouse" is a strain of lab rat guaranteed to develop organic tumors within two years. In other words, "they're nature's pariahs," DPN explains. "They cost \$75 apiece, and are the perfect pet for someone who needs to pity something."

And then there is the food section —

called "Get Fat, Don't Die!" — which has featured taste-tests of nutritional supplements ("Our entirely objective opinion is: they stink"), instructions for marijuana treats to combat chemo-nausea, eating tips for pariahs cursed with oral thrush, and such high-calorie recipes as Gretchen Mae's Fat Man's Delight.

Centerfolds are another perennial, though they don't always pan out. "Dam! Our Centerfold is Sick!" DPN dolefully reported in No. 2. Thorne manfully stepped into the breach with some none-too-revealing personal shots. He has been approached by two HIV-positives, one who contracted the virus sexually and the other via clotting agent transfusions, who want to pose nude for No. 6 as Guilty Victim and Innocent Victim.

And then there's the ever-popular "Further Adventures of Captain Condom," the computer-generated cartoon chronicles of a safer-sex superhero, which Thorne originated for an AIDS project at Santa Cruz. (Captain Condom's sidekick, for reasons that remain obscure, is a three-foot slug.)

Thorne and Shearer ran off 200 copies of No. 1, laboriously photocopied at Stanford University and hand-stapled. Those sold out within a week. So they quickly churned out another 1,100 copies. DPN's current press run is 3,000 — 1,000 for bookstores, another 1,200 for back issues, and 800 for paid subscribers.

"We have this problem with attrition of our subscriber base," Thorne grouched. After getting only a 70 percent response rate to renewal notices mailed out with issue No. 4, he figured out that the earlier folks had subscribed, the less likely they were to have renewed. So, he concludes, not unreasonably, they had died.

"The least they could have done is will their estate to us," he joked. "We were thinking that DPN should have an official policy against safer sex so that we could ensure that we always have a subscriber

base."

Some subscribers didn't re-up, doubtless, because they found the whole thing in dubious taste.

"When I've been at conferences and things representing DPN, and even at the [Gay Pride] parade, people will come up and say that they don't think it's very funny," Thorne said. "And I'll ask them if they're HIV positive and they kind of clam up, because they aren't. It always seems to be the seronegative ones who are judging us harshly. I've had a couple of people, HIVers, say that it wasn't for them, but it provided help for other people. Because we aren't very nice," he added, laying a nasty little twist on the word. "There are nice people out there."

When Thorne recently sent a speculative mailing to AIDS groups around the country, he got a particularly starchy response from Carol A. Hale, executive director of the Permian Basin AIDS Coalition in Odessa, Texas.

"We believe that a publications such as yours is not the appropriate vehicle for teaching HIV prevention," Hale wrote. "Rather it encourages a free wheeling life style which helped bring this disease to the epidemic proportions we are now facing."

Unabashedly, DPN is Gay sex-positive. "One of our goals is to eroticize the person with HIV," it has proclaimed. And so DPN runs photos of buck-naked studbunnies and a page of randy personals called the "Meat Market." It also has been printing a running series called "How I Got AIDS," the memoirs of pomstar Scott O'Hara, as well reviews of X-rated male films by "Porn Potato" (a.k.a. Thorne). But DPN is militantly safer-sex positive, too, as witnessed by Aunt Kaposi's advice column, a resource guide to HIV-related services, a "Condom Corner" chock full o' fun facts about latex and lubricants and, of course, the educational escapades

Continued on page 47

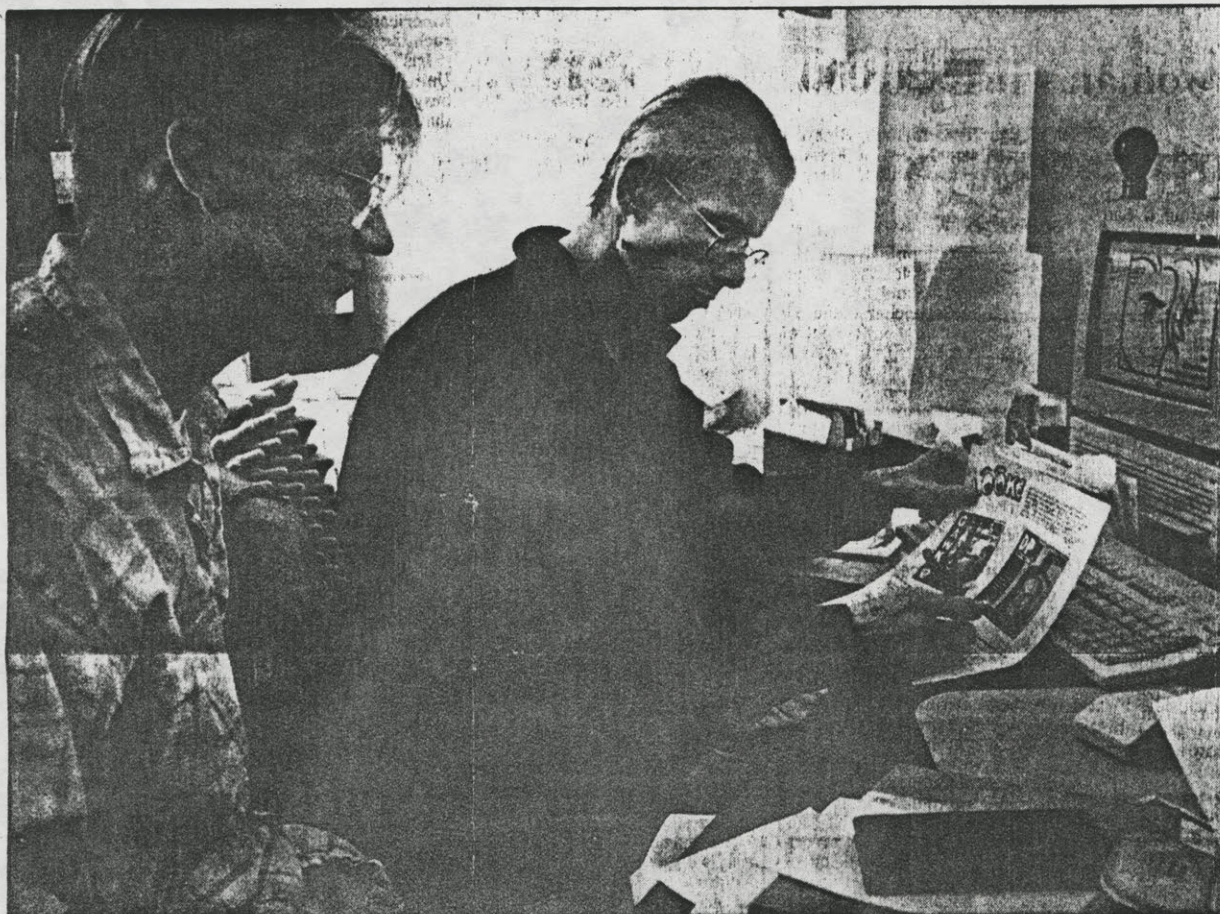
They consider that an injustice. They consider that discrimination. And now, Lisac and a group of gay faculty and staff members are fighting to change that.

Lisac, for one, said it's time that Stanford took a

See GAYS, Page 6B

Andrew Lisac wants Stanford to take a bold step

'Pariahs' thumb noses at death



Tom Shearer, right, a former computer technician, and his friend Beowulf Thorne publish their 2,000-circulation magazine for people with AIDS out of Shearer's San Francisco home.

Gary Parker
— Mercury News

*San Jose Mercury News
March 17, 1991
1st page of section B*

**AIDS is
no reason
to stop
laughing**

By David Bank
Mercury News Staff Writer

A new magazine by and for people infected with the AIDS virus has staked out a clear editorial position on an increasingly divisive issue among those dealing with the epidemic: teddy bears.

"We hate teddy bears," said Tom Shearer, who is listed as "Your Serene Editor" in the masthead of "Diseased Pariah News." "We call them death teddies."

Shearer, a technician and writer

at high-tech firms in Palo Alto, Cupertino and San Jose before he "retired" last year, and his partner, graphic artist Beowulf Thorne, say "Diseased Pariah" is the first and only humor magazine about AIDS.

"Don't you dare tell me not to laugh when I'm dying," is how they sum up the magazine's editorial policy.

With more than 100,000 people in the United States already dead from AIDS, the magazine provides

an intensely personal window on the macabre and twisted experiences common in "AIDS culture."

"I am probably going to die of AIDS relatively soon, but relative is a relative concept," Shearer wrote in the editorial for the upcoming second issue. Shearer, 32, was told he had about three years to live when he learned he was suffering from acquired immune deficiency syndrome seven years ago.

The first 32-page issue, produced

on a Macintosh personal computer and illicitly photocopied at friends' offices, included recipes, resources, advice columns, reflections and comics. After exhausting five printings, Shearer and Thorne have increased the press run to 2,000 for the second issue.

"It always sells out," said Ray Reich of A Different Light bookstore in San Francisco.

Warning: The magazine is not for everybody, with its reproduced

See PARIAS, Page 3B

Irish rise against nortravals as drunks



Magazine tells 'pariahs' AIDS has its funny side

PARIAH, from Page 1B

photographs and drawings of naked men and frank discussions of sex acts and bodily functions.

Shearer, who sports a tattooed happy face on his bony right shoulder, dictated the editorial from a hospital bed at Kaiser-Permanente in San Francisco.

Now back home in his sunny apartment near Castro Street in the heart of San Francisco's gay community, he runs his modest publishing empire in pajama bottoms and red socks from a bed cluttered with papers and with medication to treat his AIDS-related complications. He's letting his bleached-blond hair grow out, revealing his natural, thinning brown roots.

The magazine offered prizes to the reader who most closely guessed Shearer's latest T-cell count, a measure of a type of white blood cell critical to the immune system. For non-infected people, T-cell counts typically range from 500 to 1,800. The contest winner guessed 65. Shearer's actual T-cell count: nine. Shearer's response was to give pet names to each T-cell.

"I'm going to start a baseball team," said Shearer, whose soft voice lends credibility to his irreverence. "Who knows? Pretty soon it will be a bridge club, then a shuffleboard team."

Shearer was raised in Colorado, played bass in a rock band, drove his 1963 Mercury Comet west to Silicon Valley "to make big bucks in the electronics industry" and for 10 years was a "toiling drone."

"I spent a lot of time getting drunk in gay bars," he said, "which is basically responsible for my current situation."

Along the way, he learned about desk-top publishing and spent many late nights surreptitiously photocopying a gay literary magazine on his employers' office machines.

The name of the new magazine comes from the tag line of a political cartoon that satirized a one-time airline policy of refusing to board travelers with AIDS. "Would you like smoking, non-smoking or the diseased pariah section?" the ticket agent asked in the cartoon.

The idea languished until last year, when Shearer teamed up with Thorne, an old Palo Alto friend, who had become a wizard at using the Macintosh for graphics. Thorne himself had recently received the results of his HIV antibody test: positive.

"I told one friend who said, 'Oh good, now I can bring an erasable marker and connect the dots between your Kaposi's sarcoma le-

sions when you get them," said Thorne, 26, who dropped his molecular biology studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz to pursue his dream of being an artist. "That was the appropriate response."

That sense of humor shocked many of their other friends, however, and at first they were afraid the magazine would fail because it offended nearly everyone.

"For a long time, the whole attitude (toward AIDS) was breast-beating, horrible, oh no, oh no," Shearer said.

"Then there's the Diseased Pariah school, which is more gonzo and over-the-top," he continued. "I think it's fun we've founded a new type of literature."

For Shearer and Thorne, humor is an end in itself, not part of some new laugh therapy or power-of-positive-thinking theory.

"A lot of this is I'll-look-back-on-this-and-laugh-someday type of humor," Thorne said. "Well, if you won't be able to look back on it, you can still look back on it now."

Transit n

STREETWISE, from Page 1B

ment in which the people hold the ruling power either directly or through elected representatives; rule by the ruled."

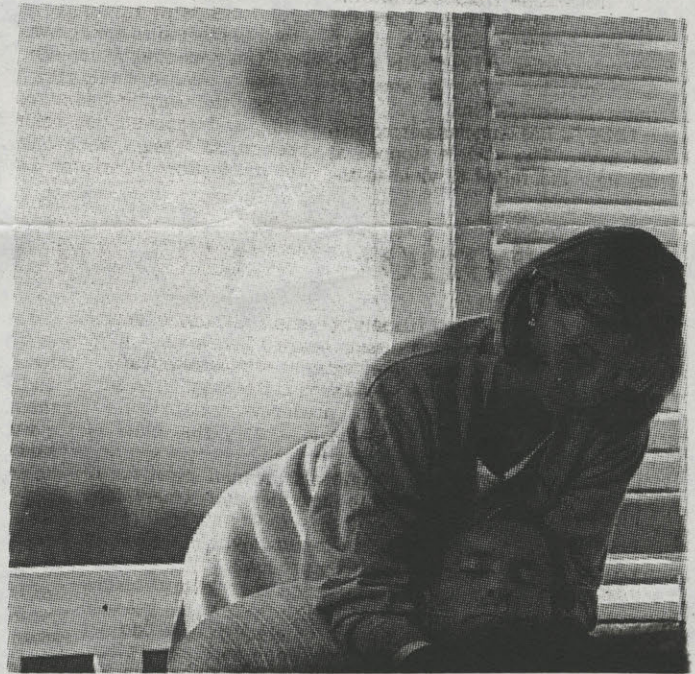
As I read that, it says either/or. Not both. And certainly nothing about the Save Peninsula Area Rail Commuter Citizens' Committee, not to be confused with the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board Right of Way Acquisition Subcommittee, not to be confused with the San Jose Station/Tamien CalTrain Extension Project Joint Policy Board.

You want to know why it took nine years to plan light rail for downtown San Jose? Why it has taken 22 to figure out how to bring BART into Santa Clara County?

It's democracy gone mad: The insufferable combination of politicians who can't make a decision and an informed public that takes them up on their offer for input.

Just ask San Jose City Councilman Jim Beall. The man collects transportation committees like Cher does tattoos. He's on 20 transportation-related commissions

Do you want a s or just a specia





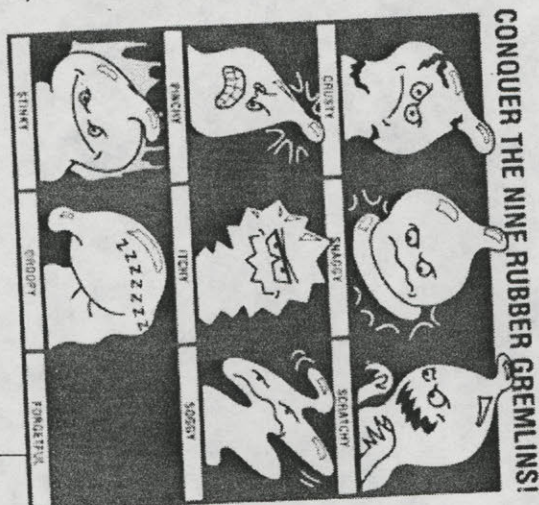
Beowulf Thorne, editor. \$7/year (4 issues; \$10/Canada; \$18/International) from DPN, P.O. Box 31431, San Francisco, CA 94131; 510/891-0455.

"Diseased Pariah News is a quarterly publication of, by, and for people with HIV disease. We are a forum for infected people to share their thoughts, feelings, art, writing, and brownie recipes in an atmosphere free of teddy bears, magic rocks and seronegative guilt." It's also one of the most beautifully produced zines around. DPN dishes up copious amounts of black humor, safe-sex info, and very personal features on "How I Got AIDS" and being busted at ACT-UP rallies. Whether you're gay, straight or bi, this is a zine you shouldn't miss.

Now, let's get real here, folks. Dental dams were originally designed for oral surgery, not oral sex. The latex is thick and clunky, and our fearless bubble-butt surfboy slaves have complained of rubber

burn and tongue fatigue. Never fear, gentle readers, help is at hand. Simply take a rubber, preferably thin and lube-free (try Gold Coin, Saxon Ultra Thin, Crown, or Beyond) and snip off the tip with a pair of scissors. Then cut through one side of the rolled condom and unroll. Voila, a sheet of latex much thinner than any industrial dam! Still tastes like thousand year old balloons? Try smearing a little Astroglide on it. The high glycerin content will cancel out that fatal flavor.

Can one be spiritual at the memorial service of an atheist and not appear hypocritical? We at DPN answer a yeary YES. Take all of the teddy bears that your loved one ever received and burn them! Let the smoke from those good wishes float heavenward, or at least into the next-door neighbor's window. Louise Hay literature makes the best kindling, but in the absence of that, charcoal lighter fluid works in a jiffy. (Beware: burning teddies can give off noxious fumes.)



InsideTheCity

Bittersweet Laughs

News for Diseased Pariahs

"I got back my half of Tommy's ashes the other day, and I'll be damned if it doesn't look just like the stuff you bread shrimp with before deep frying."

—Beowulf Thorne after the death of Tom Shearer, his companion and co-founder of *Diseased Pariah News*, April 1991.

Since its emergence during the early 1980s, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrom (AIDS) has claimed the lives of more than 100,000 people, and experts project tens of thousands more will contract the deadly virus by the turn of the century. In the face of a plague reminiscent of the pandemics that scourged medieval Europe, what else can you do but laugh?

That is the socially-defiant attitude of Beowulf Thorne, co-founder and editor of

Diseased Pariah News, the world's first humor magazine about AIDS. "You can either laugh or cry," Thorne says bittersweetly, "but crying gives you crow's feet."

Thorne isn't the only one laughing. The quarterly publication quickly sold out the initial 200 copies of its premiere issue in 1990. Since then both the first and second issues have gone into reprint, and with the fifth issue out just last month, the periodical now enjoys worldwide circulation.

What could possibly be funny about AIDS? How about an advice column titled "Ask Aunt Kaposi," or a cooking series called "Get Fat, Don't Die" (which includes ev-



everything from recipes saturated in fats to a food supplement taste-test). During DPN co-founder Tom Shearer's hospitalization last year, the magazine held the irreverent "Guess Tommy's T-Cell Competition." If there is humor to be found amid the AIDS epidemic, Thorne and his crew of contributing editors are determined to find it.

After Shearer's death last April, Thorne, who is himself HIV positive, took the helm of the magazine. But the 27 year-old graphic artist says his partner's spirit is still very much present. "There is even talk of having Tommy's ashes mixed in with the ink for the upcoming issue," he says with a smile. "The only problem is it may gum-up the presses a little bit."

—Rob Six

[CULTURE]

Ain't Nobody's
Business

By Jon Nalley

pariah (puh-RYE-uh; also PEAR-ee-uh) n. [Tamil *paraiyan*, drummer *parai*, drum; pariahs were hereditary drumbeaters] 1. A member of one of the lowest social classes of India. 2. Any person despised or rejected by others. 3. Any "guilty" victim of HIV.

With articles like "The Hostess With the Toxoplasmostest," "Porn Potato" and "Ask Aunt Kaposi: Advice for the Loveworn," the San Francisco-based *Diseased Pariah News* (DPN) has made its defiant mark as the most tasteless zine this side of *Bim-Box*. Yet thousands of eager HIV-positive readers—here and abroad—await each irregular issue (five have been published to date). A mordant and morbid HIV humor magazine, DPN solicits material from HIV-infected people, including QW writers Michael Callen and David B. Feinberg, that is off-beat, irreverent and often outrageous!

QW spoke with Cranky Editor and Irresistible Force Beowulf ("Biffy") Thorne, "the sole surviving founder of DPN," to get the scoop on what makes this magazine so popular for those of us looking for love while a lot of our fellow faggots look on us as "damaged goods." Beowulf put out the current "first anniversary" issue no. 5, which features Roy Cohn and Kimberly Bergalis "Together for Eternity" on the cover, with Humpy Editor and International Liaison Tommy Ace and Sleazy Editor and Protector of the Streets Mikey Botkin. "Don't let our colophon fool you," the editor's letter begins. "The primary reason for any publication is to get our editors laid...." And then, beneath the photographs of Thorne, Ace and Botkin, this alert: "The remains of Dusty Deaditor [Tom Shearer] (formerly the Serene Editor) have been ground up and mixed into the ink used in this issue."

(It is testimony to the integrity of DPN's sense of irony that there is no reason not to take this message seriously.)

Beowulf, who attributes his Dorian Grey-like longevity to the preservatives in the Twinkies he eats, lives by the motto "If you can't be rich, be published." Having hooked up with now-deceased Shearer, Beowulf told QW that the idea for the zine's name came from a cartoon in the *Advocate* (in the aftermath of Delta Airlines' refusing to fly people with AIDS) that depicted a guy at the ticket counter asking if the customer would like to sit in the smoking, non-smoking or pariah section.

Beowulf shrugs off criticism of DPN, claiming that most of it comes from people who are HIV-negative. "I've gone to health conferences, and people have told me it's the most horrible thing in the world."

When he asked people their sero-status, they would slink off.

Its bevy of tasty-looking HIV beef-cake in each issue (such as issue no. 5's centerfold, Matt Chappel) notwithstanding, Beowulf states "We aren't exclusively for homo-boys here at DPN....I'd really like to hear from girl pariahs."

DPN's first-anniversary issue confirms its outre sensibility and style. The infamous cover couple are the winners of

the new Golden Pariah Awards, accolades for people with HIV who are traitors to the community—Cohn won the Golden Pariah and Bergalis the second-place Silver Sniveller award; the awards originated from the editors' musing on a *Lancet* report that a truck-driver was infected with HIV while bashing some fags. The zine's operations are as out-of-bounds as its content: The paper and photocopier time for the first issue were pilfered from a major university at taxpayer expense; its scanner time and image-setter galleys are stolen; its software is mooched; and the zine's film is developed outside laboratory regulations.

If all that weren't enough, there's also a socially redeeming aspect to this feisty rag. Included are recipes ("Get Fat! Don't Die!") to alleviate such HIV-related ailments as diarrhea, nausea, weight loss and thrush; a resource column and Meat Market ("Leftist Mensch," "Back Door Boys" and "Come Nibble on the Crumbs Left Over From a Bacterial Banquet" are three recent personals); not to mention articles about making stool samples easy and "Examining Room Etiquette." (To wear B.U.M. "equipment" and inverted G-string tank tops is not only to snigger at fate but to trivialize the work of the medical establishment.)

DPN is run as a dictatorship. "I've learned from Queer Nation and ACT UP," said Beowulf. "There's no consensus here. However, I can be swayed by the learned advice of the other editors." Much of how an issue turns out, the dictator adds, is determined by the readers. "It's funny, but we really aren't deluged with a lot of stuff....Each issue will have a different flavor depending on what was submitted." Beowulf is largely responsible for the mechanical aspects of the zine—the layout, photoediting, drawing, etc. Under his direction, DPN has assumed a genuinely sex-positive stance, something that had caused tension between him and founding editor Shearer. Originally, the two had worked together at GAWK, a leftist San Francisco-based lesbian and gay arts journal.

As for the eagerly anticipated issue no. 6, Beowulf reports that "We're going to be doing a photoshoot with an 'innocent victim' and a 'guilty victim.' The guilty victim is a male bisexual, and the innocent victim is a hemophiliac (who asked if he could do the shoot in a loincloth!)." Beowulf explains that readers had complained about the lack of sex and violence in DPN's Captain Condom cartoon. "There'll be lots of sex and violence [in issue no. 6]," he promises. In addition to the usual dystopic treasures (including endmarks that are HIV viral capsids), it'll have another installment in the perpetual saga of "How I Got AIDS."

Available at 25 bookstores worldwide, the supply runs from five copies at Berlin's Prinz Eisenherz to hundreds of copies ordered by the A Different Light chain. To subscribe to DPN, write a check for \$10 to FOG Press, c/o Men's Support Center, PO Box 30564, Oakland, CA 94604.

Jon Nalley is a contributing writer at QW.

