



**Evergreen
AIDS
Foundation**

Summer/Fall - 2004

Aware

A PUBLICATION OF EVERGREEN AIDS FOUNDATION

Bellingham to Bangkok

Lynn McKinster

It was clear from the time I stepped off the plane at midnight on some day in some time zone far away from Pacific Standard Time that I was very far from home. The oppressive heat and nearly liquid air, even at that time of night, affirmed my pre-travel dread of the summer heat of Southeast Asia. However, that knowledge did not dissuade me from making this Trip of a Lifetime to attend the 15th International AIDS Conference in Bangkok, Thailand. The sleep deprivation that is a normal part of travel for me allowed me somehow to float through customs and immigrations without falling down or embarrassing myself. I even found my living quarters without too much trouble.

I had a couple of days to get settled into my new time zone and used them to avail myself of a couple of city tours, as well as riding the new Skytrain as I

made my way to the IMPACT Convention Center, the headquarters for the AIDS Conference. The Conference officially started Sunday evening, July 11, 2004. By the time the late arriving

The IAC (International AIDS Conference) began in Atlanta in 1985, attended by a few hundred people, mainly by doctors and researchers on the trail of treatment and preven-

tion. The tenor of each conference, now scheduled for every other year, has shifted with the passage of time, and this year the theme of *Access for All* underscored the many aspects of life that are touched by the virus and the countless people who are involved in coping with the profound medical, social, economic and moral dilemmas presented by a disease unlike any other encountered by humans to date. Now, along with the doctors

and researchers, there are numerous pharmaceutical companies, non-governmental organizations, (NGOs), performing myriad tasks at all levels

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Morning plenary session at the International AIDS Conference in Cambodia.

registrations were counted, there were over 19,500 delegates from all around the globe. This was the largest such conference ever held, and its numbers grow from year to year.



**15th Annual Northwest Artists United Against AIDS
Benefit Art Auction**

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

See page 11 for details

International AIDS Conference continued from page one

of involvement in many countries around the world, social workers, care givers, representatives of donors, HIV+ people, young people, government leaders, bureaucrats from many branches of many ministries, and a very few people like me, with no acronym to give me credence, a *regular human*, who was there because of a long-term and passionate interest in the virus.

The printed program of events for the Conference weighs in at just over three pounds. It covered debates, symposiums, sessions with from one to five scheduled speakers; a huge roster of NGO exhibitions; a large area set aside for posters brought from all kinds of organizations and individuals around the world, each of which had been allotted a specific day to display their information. Hundreds of posters were displayed and removed daily to give others a chance to be heard and seen. The volume of information available was truly overwhelming, and though I had studied the program beforehand in an effort to whittle down my choices, it was very hard in the moment to decide, several times a day, which of many

offerings I would attend, because that meant there were equally interesting others I must miss.

A number of politicians and high-profile officials appeared throughout the week, which must be a cause for congratulations to the planning committee. I understand the Conference has tried for some time to get well-known names to appear and speak at some of the international conferences in order to draw world attention to AIDS, news of which in the States has grown alarmingly quiet.

The Opening Ceremony on Sunday evening, July 11, featured the Thailand Prime Minister, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and Miss Universe. The purpose of the appearance of Miss Universe at such a gathering remains a mystery, and even she said in her short speech that she didn't know why she had been invited to speak. Richard Gere made a cameo appearance there, and though he had no

AIDS



Poster from XV International AIDS Conference.

spoken lines, journalists availed themselves of numerous photo ops.

As a cynical but interested observer, I thoroughly enjoyed Kofi Annan's

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Inside *Aware* — Marcy Mjelde

The image of the very familiar Gerber baby face was the poster that moved Lynn McKinster daily at the 15th International AIDS Conference she recently attended in Bangkok. I spent a few hours with Lynn recently hearing her tales of the city and the incredible people she met and heard speak at the conference, including UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the opening ceremony and the legendary Nelson Mandela at the closing ceremony.

The conference is attended by government officials, physicians, researchers, drug company reps, HIV+ individuals, and non-governmental organizations from around the world. And a very few people like Lynn.

Lynn just up and took herself to Thailand because she cares. I find that pretty amazing — not many of us would spend our hard earned dollars and vacation days attending a conference. Lynn is that kind of person.

We're very fortunate in that Bellingham is home to lots of such caring folks. On Saturday, August 14 the first annual Community AIDS Service Organization "Lost Treasures" sale was the place to find many of them.

It felt wonderful to be together on the sidewalk in front

of Boundary Bay with Ireland Perry, House Manager for the Sean Humphrey House and Timothy Costello, Executive Director of the Slum Doctor Programme, united in service to a shared cause.

We had people from all three non-profits there to help raise funds for our agencies. The atmosphere of camaraderie was inspiring to me, not just among the staff and many volunteers (led by Rick Alcantara, Jeniece Frydenlund and Dominique Zervas-Foley), but also from the community members who stopped at our info tables to ask about our work and offer their support.

The folks at Boundary Bay went above and beyond to make the event a success. They donated the warehouse and beer garden for our use, provided music and food service, even made us coffee and muffins at 7am on Saturday morning. Janet and her staff are wonderful examples of Bellingham's caring community.

AIDS is unforgiving; this we have seen over and over in the lives - and deaths - of people living with HIV/AIDS. Two of our friends were lost this summer to the disease, Mitch Sydnam and David Jorgenson. Both will be greatly missed. ♥

David Jorgensen made the most of his 32 years

By Lynn Thompson *Copyright 2004, Seattle Times Company. Used with Permission*

Under David Jorgensen's care, the formerly unloved rental house across from Big Lake, in Skagit County, became the center of a vibrant garden and an equally lively social scene featuring outdoor barbecues, water-skiing and a life shared with family and friends.

Mr. Jorgensen died June 4 in Everett at age 32 of complications from AIDS. He contracted HIV in Seattle as a 15-year-old who had run away from his rural Skagit County home after being taunted at high school for being gay.

When he was diagnosed with the virus a year later, doctors said he might live two years. That he lived for 17, family said, is a testament to his resolve to make the most of what time he had.

"He was taken advantage of at such a young age, he could have been depressed or bitter," said his cousin, Heather Burton of Woodinville. "But he stayed really positive. Wherever David was, that's where the party was. He was always upbeat."

Mr. Jorgensen, who was born in Edmonds, tried going back to high school in Everett but he dropped out to become a hairdresser. His cousin said he

"made friends like crazy" at beauty school and gave some other students the confidence to be themselves, in part because he was unapologetic about who he was.

"He was always completely himself," said Burton. "He said, 'I'm me. Take it or leave it.'"

Throughout his life, Mr. Jorgensen was an immaculate dresser with top-of-the-line clothes and stylish haircuts, said his aunt, Sherry Wamba. Mr. Jorgensen worked as a bartender at the Buzz Inn in Lynnwood and later in Sedro-Woolley, Skagit County. It was in Lynnwood where he met his partner of seven years, Troy Tellvik.

"There was a magnetism, a strength of spirit that drew people to him," said Tellvik.

He said Mr. Jorgensen would never let him sit at home; he always wanted to be out with people, having fun. Seven years ago, Mr. Jorgensen moved to the rental house on Big Lake to be near his sister, her three daughters and his mother, all of whom live within a few doors. Wearing a trademark Hawaiian shirt, he hosted barbecues, took nieces and friends out on his and Tellvik's 22-foot boat and began plant-

ing a garden that today obscures the house's front porch.

"To see him in his garden was a joy," said his sister, Kim Holmgren. "You'd never believe it was the same place."

Mr. Jorgensen was admitted last week to Providence Everett Medical Center, where doctors discovered cancer in his bone marrow. A virus attacking his heart did not respond to antibiotics, Wamba said. He died early Friday.

In going through his papers, his aunt said she found a note that said, "I'm at peace with myself. I'm at peace with being gay. I'm at peace."

Besides his partner and sister, Mr. Jorgensen is survived by his parents, Klare Graham of Big Lake and David L. Jorgensen of Minnesota; brother-in-law Brian Holmgren of Big Lake; nieces Shelby, Kendall and Payton Holmgren; and grandparents Ed and Lee Milkowski.

A memorial service was held at Evergreen Funeral Home, 4504 Broadway, Everett. The family asked that memorial contributions be made to the Evergreen AIDS Foundation, 1509 Cornwall Ave., Bellingham, 98225. ♥



Mitch Sydnam

By Michelle Dever

Mitch Sydnam had been a part of Evergreen AIDS Foundation for many years; as an advocate, a board member, a mental health therapist and beloved friend to many. He was intimately familiar with the ebb and flow of the AIDS epidemic and has helped many friends through the final stages of their lives.

However, none of us were ready for the day in October when he called me on the telephone to ask for services as a client, stating he had just been diagnosed with Stage 4 Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. The next day, he walked through our doors limping and with the assistance of a cane, his head freshly shaven from the shunt that they had just put in his head for treatment, and tears in his eyes. And yet, I had never seen a man so alive!

Mitch was a proud man who was very specific about my role as his case manager. Even though he understood that his memory was greatly impaired, he continued to coordinate services for himself with the help of his partner, Ward Wicklund. Mitch was surrounded by people who loved him, sometimes making it difficult to get our work done! But I never minded because in the 9 months that we worked together, he taught me more about living and appreciating life and the people whom we love than I could have ever imagined. Thank you Mitch, you will be missed.

In his dying process, Mitch expressed to me that it was important that people know that he was dying of AIDS and that the cancer that had taken over his body was directly because of his lower immune system. He did not want people to think that the fight against AIDS was over or that it was no longer a life threatening illness with the HIV medications. That is why he was participating in the new documentary film currently under production. Local filmmaker Wilson Large spent several hours with Mitch and other clients for the project, to be completed in time to enter in the Whatcom Film Association's documentary contest. Watch for our film, and a chance to meet this wonderful man and hear his story.

OUTNESS

By Ed Wilhoite

It is included in our litany of confronted issues: stigma and isolation. Always attached at the hip. So important, so pervasive is the issue that for two years straight it was the focus of World AIDS Day, one year's attention so obviously not enough. Underneath stigma and isolation, of course, fear usually lurks, rational and relentless. It sticks to our fingers, unshakeable (but not as welcome, say, as crazy love, which also sticks). Goddamn HIV. (That, a line from a song by Mary Gauthier).

Coming from my sophisticate Chicago world (an isolation of its own sort, but one we seem to frown on less, and even aspire to), this pervading fear was a surprise to me. In my circle of friends, and its larger social and cultural context, it was OK to be just about anything (even conservative, if it were the right kind of rightness), and we were naturally so. Acceptance, mainly, was not a contrivance [some things so deeply imbedded in us are not naturally removed yet, so we must still rely on the structures of acceptance, knowing (hoping) that substance will follow form]. I should not have been surprised. Like it or not, and wrong for sure, HIV is still a mark. And so I profoundly admire those of us who proclaim (loudly or quietly) a status that too often imposes significant personal and professional consequences. As throughout our hurtful human history, we owe so much to these proclaimers. They make

a way — for all of us to be less fearful, more familiar, less hurtful. By sitting at a lunch counter. By burning a bra. By holding hands with a partner. By saying among strangers and our friends, “That joke's not funny.” By telling our big and little truths. Thus, we take back the night.

This is the power of outness, because we all have something to be out about (revelation begets revelation, and so on). I don't mean to say this glibly, knowing from experience how hard it can be (from all that we must bear) to pull some bits of ourselves to light. It is the better prize, though. Recently I saw a report on conductive education, an intense therapy for children suffering from extreme motor disorders like cerebral palsy. It is a radically hopeful treatment that refuses to abandon children to their disability. The report showed these kinds, from very early ages, undertaking 5, 6, 7 hours of work 5 days a week for years to accomplish what we regard as the simplest of movements (one little boy striving mightily for months to lift his heel off the ground, to move a fraction of an inch). Powerless becomes powerful. This is a challenge to each of us: What small thing, then, have I to proclaim? Gracias a la vida.

And aside from trying to lead a visibly truthful life, I would suggest that there is something more we can do. Be a soft spot for someone to land, about something. ♥

Calendar of Events

Call Evergreen @ (360) 671-0703 or (800) 249-2437 for info

Ongoing Programs

SUPPORT GROUP INFO

Our ongoing drop-in support group meets at Interfaith Community Health Center, 220 Unity Street, on Tuesdays at 1:00 p.m. The group is facilitated by Lisa DeMilio, a licensed mental health counselor. A light snack will be provided.

Our Women's Circle of Friends

Meets the third Wednesday of every month, 10:30 to noon, at EAF offices. This “by women, for women” group will have two experienced peer facilitators with clinical support.

Special Events

15TH ANNUAL NORTHWEST ARTISTS UNITED AGAINST AIDS BENEFIT AUCTION

Friday, September 17, 6pm

2401 Cornwall Avenue \$35 per person, includes hors d'oeuvres, wine and music by Sunrise Strings.

EVERGREEN AIDS FOUNDATION & THE NIGHTLIGHT LOUNGE PRESENT: HUSH HUSH — Art auction after-party

Friday, September 17, 9pm- 2am

This year's event features a live act and 2 djs, cash bar, all for \$10, free to auction guests. The new Nightlight Lounge (211 E. Chestnut — opening September 7) is hosting this private party for EAF. You gotta go check out Bellingham's newest club...

DINING OUT

In October you can have dinner at a fabulous restaurant while helping raise dollars in support of our new programs. Our staff, board members and volunteers will be your waiter/waitress at area restaurants — all gratuities will be donated to the cause. Watch your local papers for info on where to find us. Contact Darren for more details and please come let us serve you!

ART LOVER'S TRIP TO SEATTLE

Saturday, November 13 — Leaving Bellingham at 5:30pm — Call for details

Swanky affair! Climb aboard our chartered bus for wine and hors d'oeuvres en route to Seattle artist Steve Jensen's incredible loft apartment on Capitol Hill. Steve has hundreds of works of art - many for sale - and he has opened his home to our group for this fundraiser. More wine, more food, great music, great art — and we'll drive you home! Reservation only; please contact Marcy to claim your seat on the bus.

ALSO COMING UP:

WORLD AIDS DAY — Wednesday, December 1st

SEATTLE WOMEN'S CHORUS HOLIDAY CONCERT - Friday, December 3rd

SEATTLE MEN'S CHORUS CONCERT — Saturday, March 26th, 2005

4th OF JULY CRUISE!

By Craig Curtis

*Don't tell me not to fly • I've simply got to
If someone takes a spill • It's me and not you
Don't bring around a cloud • Don't rain on my parade!*

What could be more fabulous than Barbra Streisand singing on the prow of a ship? Why, Evergreen AIDS Foundation's annual Independence Day Harbor Cruise, of course! What a scene! What a sight! Fireworks about the bay, and all for just \$40.00 per! A most spectacular evening with spectacular friends in tow, even though the ship's captain warned us of our summertime footwear being a tad treacherous for the high seas (one assumes he meant our sandals or deck shoes, not to mention the fact that the average age aboard was a fragile 78). So we grabbed the rails, and headed sternward, only after a brief stop at the no-host bar.

Merrily, Chuck and I were all dressed in colors befitting the occasion, and not surprised at the fact that we were not alone in our red, white and blue ensembles. Glittery stars and stripes bedecked the boat, and the complimentary coffee and desserts (provided by Starbucks, La Vie en Rose) were mah-velous, dahlings, providing you're not on some nasty summertime diet. *No carbs?! Sometimes one must stop worrying about bathing suit figures and just go for it!*

We pulled away from the Fairhaven docks at precisely 9PM, as scheduled, just in time to take in the sunset as could only be seen from the vantage point of the water, which, as according to plan, was just as gentle as the July breeze. It was absolutely smashing, though chilly. Merrily had on a mohair serape (what the hell is the hair of the Mo, anyway?), and I had on a navy *catmere* cardigan, courtesy of feline Bessie Mae, who always manages to lie on



*Volunteer Carmen Strawn, Community Programs Manager
Darren Davis and Treasurer Shane Crowder on board ship.*

clean clothes as they are laid out, so we beat the cool, damp air in cleverly devised costumes.

The employees were amazingly charming, welcoming us aboard with a cheery "happy holiday" as we embarked. It was obviously going to be a swell evening for the money.

I had several fascinating conversations with fellow shipmates. One extended chat was in relation to the scribe biz (I always seem to fall into these talks; writers sniff each other out). Retired after 36 years with the Associated Press, this fascinating gent told me such interesting stories of his years on the wire, and it was revealed that the business is not so different now (I am forever railing the *Bellingham Weekly* over editorial issues) than then. We both agreed we love it, regardless. Paul Niemi was onboard (he of recent local success in *The Mikado*) and I had to congratulate him on his fine notices in the press. Nicest guy, considering his celebrity status among Bellingham theatre-goers.

I talked with Darren Davis, Community Programs Manager, about the amazingly diverse crowd. "Well, this year we didn't call it the Evergreen AIDS Foundation cruise, just the Evergreen Harbor Cruise. This is one of the best events of its kind we've ever had." The fireworks from the water were a marvel, to say the least; everyone *ooohing* and *aaahing* aloud. Much of the stern was packed with a wisecracking crowd, and the moans were a bit over the top, but everyone was having a corking good time.

Sure looking forward to another day of Independence! Though next year, I'll bypass the bar, and head straight to the deck. The liquor and my HIV meds are proving a lethal mix, and my life is beginning to resemble a Jacqueline Susann novel—unless I want to stand in an alley squealing "*Neely O'Hara*," amidst the garbage cans, I think I better get a grip and sober up. With AIDS, one has to consider life changes, even when they are not exactly the sort one wants to make. Somehow, one martini is not enough, and the entire pitcher is too many (I despise *pimento* packed olives, anyway). So, as Susan Hayward says: *I want to live!*

I expect to see you all shipside next year, dahling! Put it in your datebook—in pen! ♥



Unidentified guests enjoying the view from the bow of the Victoria Star.

Time to Talk in Church about HIV and AIDS

Corean Bakke and her daughter-in-law Andrea Bakke, co-founders of Bakken Books, recently published *Time to Talk in Church About HIV and AIDS*, a Bible study discussion guide. (see www.bakkenbooks.com for info) Corean says in the foreword, “Andrea and I designed this book to be a Bible study discussion guide. The lessons draw parallels between leprosy and HIV and AIDS, between a much feared, ancient disease and a modern counterpart. The goal is not to locate right answers — there are no right or wrong answers for many of the questions — but to study and discuss... Each lesson offers opportunity for sharing personal experiences, dialogue, listening and learning.”

My first response to the book was positive - as in, it's about time to talk in church about HIV/AIDS! The Christian approach of studying an issue with the Bible providing guidance is not my method of learning, but has proven successful in broaching difficult topics within the Christian community and I was happy that Corean and Andrea had undertaken the task of creating this study guide. Lots of work went into the project - meetings with HIV/AIDS docs and medical care givers, research and a practice study group where the lessons provided stimulating and insightful discussion and learning for the attendees.

After reading a bit, the comparison of HIV/AIDS to leprosy bothered me. Especially the first scripture, from Leviticus where the leper is instructed by God via Moses to go around shouting “I'm unclean! I'm unclean!” I guess I just couldn't picture any of our clients (friends) being subjected to such humiliation; the comparison didn't work for me. Furthermore it seemed highly insulting to the dignity of people with HIV/AIDS.

So here we are, 2004 in Bellingham, such a tiny spot in the world. Surely our experience here can't be used as a measure of this global crisis — our comprehension of life for people with HIV/AIDS in Africa, in India, in any third world country — must be inadequate to the reality of their suffering.

I googled HIV/AIDS and leprosy and one of the sites that came up was a www.justiceafrica.org paper entitled *HIV/AIDS in Comparative Perspective*. The paper reads: “There is no precise parallel for HIV/AIDS. There is no disease and no social ill that matches its combination of components. However, there is much that can be learned from a comparative summary of historical experiences in combating other diseases and overcoming other social or political ills. This allows us to learn lessons and see what may be applied to the case of HIV/AIDS.”

The paper goes on to discuss the

parallels between the AIDS pandemic and the eradication of smallpox, the elimination of cholera, the campaign against polio, the containment of leprosy and the struggle against famine and poverty in India. With regard to leprosy, it is the negative social attitudes towards lepers and the highly-stigmatized and feared nature of the disease that remain the major challenge in combating its (admittedly, very slow) spread. “Even after decades of patient public education, negative attitudes towards leprosy and rejection and ostracisation of leprosy sufferers remains widespread.”

Doesn't that sound like what people with HIV/AIDS have dealt with over the years? I mean, “stigma and discrimination” has been the World AIDS Day theme for two years running.

Bakke's study guide seeks to change the negative attitude towards people with HIV/AIDS within the church. Using a story familiar to Christians and the format of a Bible study guide is a positive way to effect change.

A few chapters after the “unclean” scripture, the guide tells the story of Jesus dining at the home of a leper, and asks the student to thoughtfully consider “sharing a common cup” at home or the communion table with a person living with HIV/AIDS, as Jesus did with the Simon.

And so we learn; however we can. ♥

EAF receives WECU and Pride Foundation Grants

Evergreen AIDS Foundation (EAF) recently received a \$1,000 grant from Whatcom Educational Credit Union and a \$500 grant from Pride Foundation to sponsor “The Face of AIDS in Whatcom County”, a film depicting the lives of several EAF clients as they deal with HIV/AIDS. EAF hopes to utilize the film for outreach and education throughout the county, including

special showings during the week of World AIDS Day in December.

We are also hopeful the film will be accepted in the Whatcom Film Association's upcoming documentary competition. With the September 7 deadline for entry fast approaching, filmmaker Wilson Large is spending his evenings in his editing room at Camcord at Large, working to get ready for submission.

Wilson can't wait for people to see his film. “It's going to be very emotional and educational for people to be able to look into these lives” he says. Wilson has donated many hours towards the film; EAF is grateful for his generosity as well as the financial support of Whatcom Educational Credit Union and Pride Foundation. ♥

Agency Staff Update

Deborah Westergreen



Janet Ballard

At the end of June this year, Evergreen AIDS Foundation (EAF) bid a fond farewell to our Case Manager and Women's Program Coordinator, *Janet Ballard*. We would like her to know how much we appreciate her tireless efforts as an advocate to local women and their families infected and affected by the disease. EAF wishes her all the best of success and satisfaction in her new position as Case Manager for Snohomish Health District in Everett. ♥



Wendy Weitz

Letting go with one hand, and taking hold with the other, EAF is pleased to welcome new Case Manager and Women's Program Coordinator, *Wendy Weitz*. She is a long-time resident of Whatcom County, and a professional in the field of human services for more than nine years, with a strong background in mental health issues. Since her arrival at the beginning of July, her sense of focus and dedication have shown Ms. Weitz to be an excellent addition to the team; there is no doubt that she will accomplish much for her clients in all future efforts. ♥



Jeniece Frydenlund
and volunteer Gary Cocca

Jeniece Frydenlund, a 2004 graduate of Western Washington University, with a B.S. in Community Health, has been interning at EAF's office since June of this year. The staff would like to thank her for all of the hard work involved around our fundraising and community events. While assisting us in everything from data entry to baking cookies to putting up posters, Ms. Frydenlund says that she was pleasantly surprised to learn how much Evergreen AIDS Foundation does for the local population, and she herself has attained valuable knowledge to help target future training in her career goals as she leaves us this August. ♥



Ann Hayes

EAF has also been fortunate with the services of *Ann Hayes*, a recruit from Worksource and Whatcom Career Center. Recently of St. Louis, Missouri, Ms. Hayes has ten-plus years experience as a home health caregiver. She is currently enrolled at Whatcom Community College to complete a degree as a licensed medical assistant. We have valued her efficiency, professionalism and refined manners. Evergreen AIDS Foundation recognizes that Ms. Hayes maintains a cheerful disposition and gracious decorum no matter how mundane the task. We wish the best of all that life has to offer her and her lovely family, as she heads back to school in September. ♥

“Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming, “WOW! What a ride!” —Anonymous

International AIDS Conference continued from page two

speech, and I very much appreciated that he spoke quietly and compellingly about the plight of women, particularly in Africa and the importance of addressing that plight. Besides which, he is a very believable speaker, and I found myself wanting to accept what he said at face value; however, he's a politician, so I could not.

Another compelling speaker was the Thai Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra. He spoke passionately of his desire, and the desire of his government, to deal with the AIDS epidemic in Thailand and was not bashful in congratulating his country in the lower infection rates among the sex workers as a result of a tremendous push to encourage them to insist that their customers use condoms. As about 95% of the sex workers now follow this policy, the infection rates have indeed dropped significantly in recent years. He then went on to say he was all in favor of harm reduction (i.e., clean needles) for drug users. At this point, my Thai neighbor in the balcony began nudging me urgently with his elbow, and pointing to the stage where the Prime Minister held forth, whispered to me fiercely, *Lies, all lies, he kill, he kill*. Indeed, though I have been unable to get hard dates and figures, apparently the Prime Minister has either authorized or overlooked the murder of several thousand drug users in Thailand in recent months. One story told me they were all drug pushers, as though that made everything all right.

One of the very few bumbles of the Conference occurred that evening, which is amazing, considering the number of events, people, and equipment that had to be dealt with constantly. One of the newer groups of

invited participants at the Conference is people who are HIV+. The activists among them have lobbied long and hard to have a voice in creating and defining various roles and programs



Lynn McKinster in Thailand.

in the global fight against AIDS. One of the speakers at the Opening Conference was Paisan Suwannawong of the Thai Drug Users Network. He was placed last on the program, after Miss Universe and after a moving musical program presented by a group of AIDS orphans from both Thailand and Kenya. Many people left after the children exited the stage, believing that to be the logical end to a long evening; unfortunately, they may never have been aware there were other speakers in the wings, and of the thousands present during most of the Ceremony, only a few hundred remained when Paisan came onto the stage. This was perceived as "an appalling compromise of integrity and violation of the dignity of people with HIV and drug users." (Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS statement) To make some amends, Paisan, a passionate and energetic former drug user, spoke much earlier in the program at the Closing Ceremony, and a couple of scheduled speakers either withdrew or shortened their planned

speeches to allow him ample time to talk. He was warmly received, which may have eased some sense of the affront, but the Opening Ceremony was a scheduling kerfuffle that is difficult to explain away as accidental.

Each morning began with a plenary session at 8:30 in the Convention Arena, attended by thousands of delegates. This was my favorite part of the Conference, because each day focused on a specific topic for *access* and the speakers were consistently very good. There was a speaker from one of each of the five *tracks* (Basic Science; Clinical Research, Treatment and Care; Epidemiology and Prevention; Social and Economic Issues; and Policy and Program Implementation), and each was allowed 15 minutes to present their talk,

though most went over their limit. An event scheduled for 90 minutes usually lasted nearly 120, but the information and quality of the speakers made it worth staying to the end each day. Each day of the Conference focused on specific areas of "access," and each plenary session stressed that area, setting the tone for the balance of the day's sessions. The speakers on each day were always well versed in their track and in the day's area of focus. The agenda for the week ran as follows:

Day 1: Access to Resources: Commitment and Accountability

Day 2: Scaling up Access to Treatment

Day 3: Ensuring Access for Youth and Women

Day 4: Expanding Options and Access for Prevention

Day 5: Overcoming Challenges through Empowerment and Action

Now that I have had a little time to think about what I heard and learned at the Conference, there are several themes that recurred constantly, in

the hallways and in the session halls. One was the scaling up of treatment: one of the "access" issues is the urgency of making treatment available in all parts of the world. As one listens to various concerns, one cannot but be awed and appalled at the complexity of providing testing, treatment, support to people in places so remote most of us don't even know they exist. The virus is there, however, and many people are concerned with various levels of difficulties that must be overcome to achieve this goal.

"Fund the Fund" was a slogan heard throughout the week, a cry demanding that the several countries, including the United States, fund the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Earlier promises were made, and several countries, including the United States, are now dragging their financial feet in an apparent effort to get their own agendas met at the expense of fulfilling promises given earlier. Of course, without the financial backing of the Global Fund and other organizations that will assist on a smaller scale, few of the access-for-treatment programs can be implemented, and certainly not on the scale called for by the numbers of people living with the virus today. Of concern also was the efficacy of the Global Fund itself, and some folk, more knowledgeable than I, raised issues of accountability and organization that remained unanswered by the end of the Conference. I suspect hot and heavy discussion of these concerns is ongoing.

"3x5" was another slogan bandied about. This refers to a WHO pledge to provide 3 million people with antiretroviral therapy by 2005. The WHO, of course, needs funding and a lot of people to make any kind of inroads on that pledge.

One heard much of the condition of women, and an accepted fact is that women in Sub Saharan Africa are becoming infected at a much faster pace than the men. This relates (among other things) to cultural behaviors and expectations of both men and women in many of the countries being discussed, and one theme that found a little air time was that men must learn new behaviors, which do not include proving one's manhood by beating up

one's mate. Of the 25,000,000 PLWAs in that region today, nearly 2,000,000 are children and 13,100,000 are women. *Women's rights*, an issue many of us in this country grew up hearing about and perhaps even marching for, means something totally different in other parts of the world. For American women in 1920, it meant the right to vote; for American women today, it means things like equal work for equal pay. For the women in Sub Saharan Africa, it means the right to say *No* if you believe your husband has been unfaithful, at least until he has been tested and found negative. It means insisting that one's partner use a condom or that one be allowed to use a female condom (were such a thing available in those areas). It means protecting oneself against a killing disease without the penalty of being beaten unconscious and raped in the moment. Millions of women don't have these rights, and many passionate and eloquent voices brought their plight into the open during the week.

Young people were invited to this Conference, because HIV infection is claiming many of their numbers globally, and rates of infection among youth are increasing in all parts of the globe. The young people at this Conference didn't have much to say, yet, as a group, but when they are convinced they will be taken seriously (which held many silent during this week), perhaps they will be more vocal about

have been very hard hit by HIV infections in the last decade have proven that pervasive education programs, lots of TV and radio time, education at all levels of schools, can indeed make a difference. Uganda, Thailand and Brazil were heralded as success stories in this arena. All of them have undertaken massive programs to get the word out to all levels of people, in addition to providing condoms and clean needles, and in fact, infection rates among certain populations are falling in those countries.

There is no argument that in fact abstinence is the best way to be safe; however, in the real world, this clearly isn't getting across to very many people. So the problem becomes how do you deal in the *real world* without getting bogged down in moral and ethical issues that often blind some people to the fact that this disease is beyond trite platitudes and cute slogans. As someone pointed out when President Museveni of Uganda urged abstinence as the most preferable practice, it is pleasant for him that he can make that choice; however, many women in the world and in his country do not have that ability and until that reality is addressed, infection rates everywhere will continue to rise.

Stigma was another issue that got some hearing, though perhaps not enough. Even in places where treatment and follow-up care are available,

The ABC method of HIV-prevention was discussed with varying levels of seriousness.

A = Abstinence;

B = Be faithful (if you can't be abstinent); and

C = use Condoms if you can't be faithful.

ways to reach young people with messages of prevention and treatment.

There was more talk about prevention than may have been prevalent in recent conferences. There seems to be a general agreement that treatment must be streamlined and made available to all; however, prevention messages and education cannot be allowed to lapse. A few countries that

many people choose not to come in for testing because if word gets out that they tested positive, they face losing their jobs, becoming social pariahs, both in their families and in their community, and there is little incentive to find out the bad news, only to find oneself completely alone to deal with it. In many parts of the world,

Continued on page ten

such voluntary ignorance not only allows the untested person to continue to spread the virus, should he be positive, but virtually assures an early,

46664 was my prison number. For over 18 years I was imprisoned on Robben Island, I was known as just a number. Millions of people today infected with HIV are just that — a number.

possibly preventable death.

One very heartening thing about the Conference was the number of HIV+ people willing to stand up at podiums around the convention center and talk candidly about their perceptions and experiences once they have disclosed their test results. Another very heartening thing is to see some before-and-after shots, as one young man shared, of what he looked like before and after the treatments began. In the *before* photo, he was clearly emaciated and near death. But he stood before us 18 months or so after beginning (and continuing) treatment, a strong, healthy, vibrant young man with enough energy to stand up and speak for his fellows and encourage them to be tested and deal with the results, which could be positive in a very good sense. It was also compelling evidence of the value of the treatment and of the simple economic advantage to all to have people removed from sick beds and returned to the work force.

A word new to me but very familiar by the end of the Conference is *microbicides*, substances now being researched and developed, that women can apply before sex and that will protect them against sexually transmitted infections such as HIV, and some can also be used as a form of contraceptive. Once developed, they could be used in the form of film, sponge, gel, cream or diaphragm; they could be applied daily, weekly or monthly, depending on preference. All of this is extremely heartening as one way women can claim some control over their bodies and how their bodies are used; what is not encouraging is that the researchers do not expect these products to be available for at least five years, though estimates are that nearly a dozen microbicides have al-

ready entered human testing.

One of the Conference highlights, of course, was the appearance at the Closing Ceremony of Nelson Mandela.

Slender and frail, just two days before his 86th birthday, he was nevertheless a presence, and the entire arena leapt to its collective feet for an ovation that lasted many minutes when he appeared on stage. The day before, he hosted a concert to mark his worldwide HIV/AIDS campaign named after his Robben Island prisoner number, 46664. *46664 was my prison number. For over 18 years I was imprisoned on Robben Island, I was known as just a number. Millions of people today infected with HIV are just that — a number.* He contracted tuberculosis while in prison, and receiving the necessary treatment, was cured. He went on to say, *We are all here because of our commitment to fighting AIDS. But we cannot win the battle against AIDS if we do not also fight TB. TB is too often a death sentence for people with AIDS. He does not fall in the category of "politician,"* having no axe to grind, no votes to garner. Instead, he is an example of what one man can do by being who he truly is, and for that I found him immensely refreshing and inspiring.

I lugged home several pounds of publications and a packet of business cards exchanged with other delegates. I can see that for quite

some time, I will be very busy on the computer, checking out websites; and in my armchair, reading about conditions and activities in all parts of the world. Already, I'm in contact with some of the people I met, surprising me, frankly, as I didn't really think any of us would even initiate contact, much less continue after more than one exchange. I'm happy to be proved wrong. Each contact, each website, inspires me to remain involved in this work, even if it simply means accosting my coworkers and forcing information on them that they would just as soon not have. The complacency of the American people can stand a little stirring up on this issue. Though it was seldom mentioned at the Conference, infection rates are indeed beginning to climb again in this country. Because many Americans do have access to treatment, the number of AIDS deaths here has leveled out. This means, apparently, there are no sound bites to be found in the relaxation of education efforts and the increase in infection rates. ♥



the Nightlight and
Evergreen AIDS Foundation
p r e s e n t
'Hush, Hush'

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15th ANNUAL ART AUCTION

**Northwest Artists United Against AIDS
Benefit Auction**

**Friday, Sept. 17, 6:00 pm
2401 Cornwall Avenue, Bellingham**

Tickets - \$35.

*Includes wine, hors d'oeuvres and
After Party until 2am
with DJ and cash bar
at Nightlight Lounge
211 E. Chestnut*

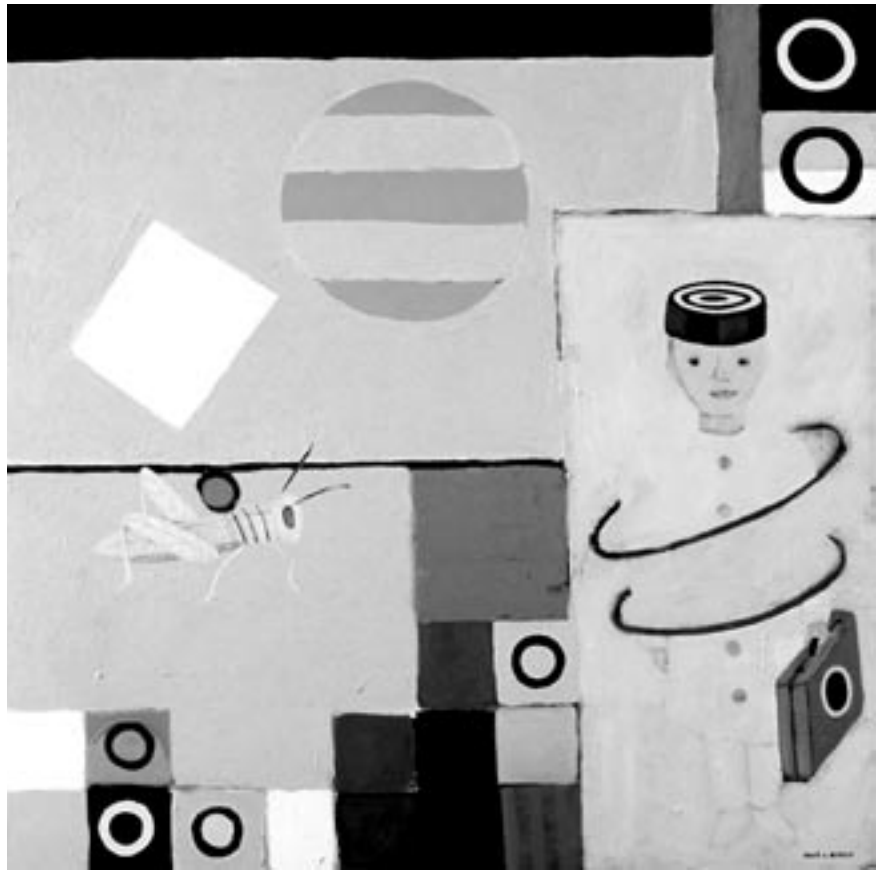
This year's benefit auction will be held at 2401 Cornwall Avenue in Bellingham, chaired once again by Troy Comfort. The gala begins at 6:00 pm with silent auctions, lots of delicious food, wine and music by Sunrise Strings. After the bidding closes, we'll have a DJ and cash bar at the new Nightlight Lounge where you can dance until 2am. This event, hosted by art auction committee member Ty McBride of Paris Texas, will be \$10 at the door, or free to auction guests.

Donating art this year are well-known Northwest artists Dale Gottlieb, Thomas Wood, Christopher Morrison, Lanny Little, Clayton James and many others. The signature piece is by Bellingham artist Jane Burns, and will be featured in the live auction. In addition to the incredible art this auction always presents, additional items will be available this year, including travel packages, fine wines and a few surprises, all sure to make the benefit auction a great time for a great cause.

The gallery preview of donated works will be for one night only — Wednesday, September 15 at the 2401 Cornwall Avenue location. This special preview will be from 6-9 p.m., and is still free and open to the public.

We are grateful to the local restaurants that donate food for the event and to our corporate sponsors, who help underwrite the cost of the auction. Their generous support and yours allow us to provide quality services to more than 150 people living with HIV/AIDS in our area.

If you haven't been to the auction before or haven't been in awhile — this is the year to come. The space is beautiful, the food and wine will be plentiful and delicious, and the art, as always — not to be missed. ♥



"Ghosting Series #2" by Jane Burns

Special Thanks to Our 2004 Art Auction Sponsors

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Special Thanks

To Rod Burton of Roderick C. Burton - Art & Design
(360) 671-0156 for all his support, guidance and
volunteer time in the creation of this newsletter.
Thank you Rod, from all of us at EAF.

Purpose

The purpose of Evergreen AIDS Foundation is
to ensure services for any person in Northwest
Washington who is either infected or affected by
HIV/AIDS. Services may include, but are not limited
to: case management, in-home chore and practical
care services, information and referral, emotional
and social support, community outreach and edu-
cation, resource library, transportation assistance,
food and meals, emergency financial assistance,
and loss and bereavement resources.

Support

Evergreen AIDS Foundation relies on a number
of funding sources to provide our professional and
volunteer services in Whatcom, Skagit, Island and
San Juan Counties. All financial contributions made
by individuals and corporations are fully tax-deductible
to the extent permitted by law.

Staff

Darren Davis, Community Programs Manager - darren@evergreenaids.org

Michelle Dever, Case Manager - michelle@evergreenaids.org

Marcy Mjelde, Development Director - marcym@evergreenaids.org

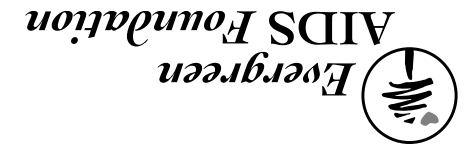
Mel Taylor, Case Manager - mtaylor@evergreenaids.org

Wendy Weitz, Case Manager - wendy@evergreenaids.org

Deborah Westergreen, Support Services Administrator - deborah@evergreenaids.org

R. Edward Wilhoite Jr., Executive Director - edwilhoite@evergreenaids.org

Craig Wunder, Friend to Friend Coordinator - craigw@evergreenaids.org



Evergreen
AIDS Foundation

Aware is the newsletter of the Evergreen AIDS
Foundation. If you have a story, article, or an-
nouncement related to HIV/AIDS, you may
submit it for inclusion in the newsletter when
deemed appropriate. EAF is a non-profit,
non-discriminatory services organization that
provides information and referral services to ev-
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orientation, disability or religious affiliation.
*The opinions expressed in the newsletter are
not necessarily those of the Board of Directors
of EAF.*

Location

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