

MAIL BONDING

letters to the editors



GOOD PLAN I look forward to receiving ELLE every month, and I am often inclined to write in gratitude for your excellent publication, which I read cover to cover. After a particularly difficult week spent questioning (again) the decision I made to leave my husband last year, I was relieved and reinvigorated by Gil Schwartz's article ["The Not-So-Perfect Wife," October]. My divorce is pending, and sometimes I yearn for the comfort of the familiar and consider reconciliation. Schwartz points out the recent backlash against the feminist inroads that have helped bring me where I am today (a lawyer clerking for a federal judge, and a mother). Sadly, my decision to pursue my career was instrumental in the demise of my marriage. I love my husband, but I won't stifle my dreams and ambitions for anyone. I am very grateful for Schwartz's encouraging words.

Heidi Wiehl, Sacramento

POWER BOOK I was extremely impressed with your September fashion spread, specifically the articles "The Shape of Things" and "Poetic Devices." The settings, context, and angles were all brilliant. This issue only reaffirmed my already strong belief in ELLE as the leading magazine for American women's fashion. Keep it coming!

Samantha Leffel, Chicago

TRUE DREW I was so thrilled to see Drew Barrymore on the cover of the October issue of ELLE. She is a legitimate star who most of the women of my generation grew up watching, beginning with her first big role in *E.T.* She has always brought humility and vulnerability to the screen, qualities that many of the female stars of our day seem to lack. Thank you for featuring an actress we can all relate to!

Courtney Goldsmith, Stowe, VT

MEDICAL HISTORY I was delighted to read your review of D. T. Max's book *The Family That Couldn't Sleep* in the October issue. As somebody who lost my mother to Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease five years ago, as well as a medical professional working with a wide variety of neurodegenerative diseases, I appreciate any attempts to educate the public about this rare and devastating disease. However, I need to point out an error in the review. Although Alzheimer's, Lou Gehrig's, and Parkinson's diseases are, like Creutzfeldt-Jakob and fatal familial insomnia, neurodegenerative in nature, they are not caused by prions. Prion diseases are far more rare and misunderstood than other neurodegenerative diseases, which makes those of us who have experienced the nightmare of a prion illness feel even more alienated and alone in our struggle to survive the aftermath of our personal tragedy.

Sandy Skrinjaric, Seattle

PLAYING FAVORITES I was beyond excited when I saw Nicole Richie and Rachel Zoe featured in the October issue of ELLE ["The Elements of Style"]. Richie looks so stunning and confident in her photo, and Zoe is both talented and professional. Thank you so much for featuring two of my favorite It Girls in my favorite fashion magazine.

Megan Doumani, Phoenix

THE FIGHTER Last fall, I met with Gretchen Reynolds, a self-described science writer working on an article about AIDS that would explore unanswered questions about HIV, introduce experts raising those questions, and share some of the real story on the death of my daughter, Eliza Jane.

Instead, I am the sole focus of "The Believer" [September], a sensationalistic article that abstains from intelligent examination of AIDS science and portrays me as an immature and negligent mother whose adherence to an ideology resulted in the death of her child.

Below please find some of the many errors and omissions in "The Believer."

Reynolds claims, "In all probability, Eliza Jane became infected with HIV during gestation, labor, or breastfeeding." My daughter's autopsy report does not disclose HIV status, and the coroner's office has yet to produce laboratory evidence of a positive HIV or viral load test, despite multiple requests by our attorneys.

Reynolds tells readers that AIDS occurs when CD4+T lymphocyte cells are depleted, without revealing that my daughter's total lymphocyte count at the time of her death was well above normal, healthy levels and five times higher than the baseline used by the World Health Organization to diagnose AIDS in children.

She also fails to reveal that the pronouncement Eliza Jane died of AIDS pneumonia is contradicted by physical evidence found at her autopsy. To skirt

this inconsistency, Reynolds changes the medical definition of pneumonia from “inflammation of the lungs caused by disease” to an incorrect interpretation, “swelling of the lungs,” and falsely attributes this mistake to me. The point Reynolds mangles with her invented quote is crucial: The state of my daughter’s lungs ruled out pneumonia of any kind, as the autopsy found “no inflammation of the lungs.”

Reynolds compounds this error by omitting a correct reference to swelling actually found at autopsy: All my daughter’s vital organs were swollen with circulatory fluids, a hallmark of toxic reaction consistent with independent conclusions that an allergic response to an antibiotic caused Eliza Jane’s sudden death.

In perhaps her most malicious departure from reality, Reynolds claims Eliza Jane endured “a day of nausea, vomiting, and wheezing” before she died, a description of events not supported by medical records, 911 transcripts, or EMT or hospital reports and corrected during a republication fact check.

Leading readers even further from the facts, Reynolds describes my daughter as having an “inflamed brain” and “sores in her mouth suggestive of herpes” when the autopsy report makes no mention of brain inflammation or sores of any kind in her mouth.

While careless with the facts, Reynolds carefully omits that the coroner assigned to resolve my daughter’s case, Dr. James K. Ribe, has been excoriated by state and federal courts for changing autopsy results to conform to prosecutors’ allegations and for testifying to conclusions inconsistent with physical evidence. Instead, she writes that, “a number of pathologists have examined both the original autopsy and the alternative version. All have publicly concluded that the original was correct.” In fact, the “alternative version” was published in a peer-reviewed medical journal with an editorial board that includes a dozen MDs and 10 PhD scientists.

Reynolds also leaves out the life-altering experience that inspired my examination of AIDS science: I tested HIV positive, indeterminate, and negative at the same lab on different days. Instead, she says I “began looking into HIV deniers...at the suggestion of a friend.”

Undeterred by facts, Reynolds spins us into a family steeped in dysfunction, disease, and denial. A two-month pre-coital relationship with my husband is reduced to “they met, dated once or twice, had sex.” My two-day problem with a root canal turns into a 12-month battle with “an excruciating mouth abscess.” My husband’s four-day trip to New York is stretched to “long periods away from home in New York and elsewhere.” My years of research and study become “faith” in “antimainstream medicine.”

The only faith involved in my story is the one I held in journalist ethics before reading “The Believer.”

Christine Maggiore, justiceforej.com

From the editors: As reported by *The Los Angeles Times* on September 16, 2006, the L.A. district attorney’s office closed its criminal investigation into Maggiore with regard to the death of her daughter, Eliza Jane Scovill. The *Times* also noted that Maggiore has filed a claim for damages against the county of Los Angeles. Maurice A. Verity, the neuropathologist hired by the L.A. Department of the Coroner, does confirm “the presence of HIV core protein in the brain sections confirming a diagnosis of HIV encephalitis” in Eliza Jane. Lesions were noted on her lips. The conclusion of the autopsy, signed by Ribe and the associate deputy medical director, Chanikarn Changsri, was “the cause of death is pneumocystis carinii pneumonia due to Acquired Immuno-deficiency Syndrome.” Ms. Maggiore disputes the validity of that autopsy.

STATE YOUR CASE I am writing to congratulate your magazine and your

reporter Gretchen Reynolds on the recent excellent feature article about Ms. Christine Maggiore and her views on HIV [“The Believer,” September]. Bringing such issues to the attention of the public will help your wide readership be better informed of the dangers inherent in applying irrational pseudoscientific thinking when it comes to HIV.

As you no doubt are aware, there is overwhelming scientific evidence and consensus that HIV causes what is known as AIDS. Although there remains a tiny core of “scientists” who dispute this fact, shallow digging will reveal that many of these “scientists” come from nonbiological or nonmedical fields with no relevant experience.

Active HIV/AIDS deniers like Christine Maggiore do not only make choices that have a terrible personal impact, but they have also persuaded many other mothers to make the same mistakes. Once again, may I commend you for your decision to feature the Christine Maggiore story, and I hope you have the courage of your convictions when it comes to resisting the backlash that will doubtlessly follow from the small but vocal group of HIV denialists.

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