



## Positive Profile

People who are taking the negative out of being positive

by Dale Pierce ~ Practice Manager



This installment of Positive Profiles, as always, talks about a person living the most positive life with their HIV diagnosis. Usually, we honor our patient's privacy and keep their name private, but this person you may already know: my friend and business partner, Olympic Gold Medal diver and activist, Gregory Louganis.

In 1988, several months before the Olympic games in Seoul, Louganis had himself tested for the HIV virus. Greg's test was positive, and at the time he even considered giving up on his Olympic hopes. Thankfully, for all of us, Greg went on with training, sought sound medical advice, started medication and went on to win two gold medals, despite his infamous dive during trials, when he hit his head on the board.

After that moment in Seoul, Greg came to the realization that he could no longer hide his lifestyle or his disease from the public that so adored him. Like many of us, Greg's struggles

with HIV were not just those that were medical. He has openly admitted that he felt alone, had a feeling of "who will want to be with me" — fears that many of us face. Greg rebuilt his confidence after leaving an abusive relationship and got himself out in the public eye in other ways, including acting.

He publicly acknowledged his sexuality for the first time at the 1994 Gay Games in New York City. Greg went into great detail about all his struggles in his *New York Times* best-selling autobiography, "Breaking the Surface," released in 1995. Since then, Greg has used his celebrity, passion and determination to achieve so many great things in many fields.

Greg feels that dogs are man's best friend. Since his "retirement" from diving in 1988, although he is still active in training and coaching and diving, Greg focused on a new passion: dog training and agility. Greg has written books on the subject, traveled around the country with his dogs competing and now he is embarking (no pun intended) on a new canine passion.

When I met with Greg in 2008, we immediately struck a friendship that I am so thankful for in my life. Greg came to Charlotte to deliver the keynote speech at AIDS Walk Charlotte and together he and I produced "An Evening with Greg Louganis," a question and answer stage forum here in Charlotte at the Booth Playhouse.

Greg, his partner Daniel, myself and my husband Ed had some long talks over dinners about our desires and passions for a charity that could help people with HIV and their pets. We all strongly believe that pets bring healing, and anyone who has HIV and is suffering and struggling financially should not have to choose between medications for themselves or taking care of their best friend.

Just this last month, our dream became a reality! The Greg Louganis Positively Pet Fund is now an official non profit and will be kicking off fund raising and services in the fall of this year. We are hoping to start small in the area, with the assistance of our first "supporting" partner, Rosedale Infectious Diseases, PLLC. Our goals are to establish a baseline of "need" in the area and develop a strategic plan that will help us in meeting the area. It will most likely begin with basic vet care, medications, and food. We have high hopes that the project will grow to include walking/visitation services, grooming, and even adoptions.

Currently Greg hopes to come to the Charlotte area in the fall to do as much promotion and "hands-on" research as he can to help make this a successful project for the HIV community in Charlotte. We will update you here when volunteer

opportunities present themselves, where you can start making donations, and possibilities of city wide fund raising events to come.

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