

# POZ HEART T TO HEART

## MARK DE SOLLA PRICE & VINNY S. ALLEGRINI

**THEIR LOVE STORY** The business cards they hand out say it all: “MarkandVinny.com,” as if they’re a unified entity, like Ben & Jerry’s. Mark de Solla Price and Vinny S. Allegrini met June 16, 1993, at an HIV support group in Manhattan’s Green-

wich Village led by Marianne Williamson and based on *A Course in Miracles*. “She said, ‘Turn to the person in the row behind you. Put your right hand on their heart and their right hand on your heart and repeat after me,’” Mark recalls of being paired off with Vinny for the prayer exercise. “There we were looking into each other’s eyes. It was really kind of wonderful.”

After the session, Mark stayed to get a promotional blurb from Williamson for the book he was writing, *Living Positively in a World With HIV/AIDS*, and when he walked outside, Vinny was waiting for him. The two went to Café Rafaella and talked for hours, mostly about treatment strategies (Mark links his diagnosis to 1983, Vinny to 1989). “We really hit it off, and I invited Vinny to my house—where we had the worst sex ever.” “Why do you have to mention that?” Vinny cuts in, his voice weary, not so much from the end stage liver disease he’s battling today, but more from hearing this revealing detail for the millionth time. Then he concedes: “It was awful. But I wanted a second date because Mark was very smart and very

kind.” Maybe they were out of sync that first night—Vinny was looking for a friend, and Mark for a relationship—but that soon changed.

Mark, who was a technology consultant in Manhattan, and Vinny, a Vidal Sassoon hair cutter in West Hartford, Connecticut, got married in

Mark and Vinny married each other for the first time in 1995.



September 1995 (the progressive rabbi who officiated lost his synagogue as a result of the publicity). But it wasn't happily ever after. Hepatitis B, cirrhosis, AIDS and dementia beset Vinny. In 2001, expected to die, he was placed in home hospice care. At this low point, he said to Mark, "You never signed up for this when you married me." That spurred them, in 2003, to have the hospice chaplain renew their vows (which they originally wrote in Central Park's Strawberry Fields). Then, inexplicably, Vinny got better, and in 2005, they were lawfully married in Massachusetts, where same-sex marriages were now legal.

Today, they're both retired and on disability. Mark, 52, still writes, and he is "a secular humanist chaplain active as a Unitarian Universalist and a Zen Buddhist—and I'm a devout atheist." And Vinny, 64, cuts hair at home for therapeutic reasons. They live in a Greenwich Village apartment they share with Troika, a Hurricane Katrina rescue dog. If you see Mark and Vinny along the Hudson River, walking Troika, say hi! They're sure to give you one of their business cards.

**IN SICKNESS & IN HEALTH** Both Mark and Vinny have been diagnosed with AIDS and hepatitis (Mark was successfully treated for hep C in 2007). "One of the great things about HIV," Mark says, "is that you come to terms with the fact that life is a terminal condition and you might not have tomorrow—and that's a healthy way to look at life." At various times, each has played the role of caregiver. And sometimes, they work together. Each month, they "pour their pills," a ritual of organizing their regimen of pills and powders for the upcoming month—for HIV, liver disease, diabetes, triglycerides and more. "The end result," Mark says, "is that we take 20,454 pills a year"—Mark alone takes 37 a day. "But," Vinny adds, "our compliance is spectacular," which he attributes to Mark's organization. They also attend all their doctor's appointments together. "In the beginning, Vinny was freaked out and needed a second pair of ears and someone to take notes," Mark says, "and when I was zoned out on [hep C] treatment, I needed a second pair of ears."

**HAPPILY EVER AFTER ADVICE** "Relationships aren't easy," say Mark, who, as a chaplain, has counseled other couples. Relationships require honesty, communication, a profound commitment to the relationship, but also a solid and mutual understanding of what you're committing to. "People tease me that our [wedding] vows include home decoration but not monogamy," Mark says. "There was a time when sex was a bigger issue—now, it's not important, we just want to cuddle—but the key is, you write the vows, you live the vows. It depends on what you commit to. You'd be surprised at how things like monogamy and community property [such as shared bank accounts] are assumed to be part of the deal." It's also important to make an effort each day for intimate, loving moments. For example, Mark explains, they both deal with

# LEARN HEALTHY WAYS TO ARGUE, AND SUPPORT EACH OTHER'S PASSIONS.

chronic pain, and "it's really easy to be grumpy when it just hurts," so they do simple things for each other, like giving foot massages, walking the dog together and expressing their emotions. "We both really love one another and support one another," Vinny says. "In bed, I look over to him and say, 'Mark, you're beautiful.' He doesn't feel it, but he is."



## THREE HIV-POSITIVE COUPLES SHARE THEIR INSPIRING LOVE STORIES.

BY TRENTON STRAUBE