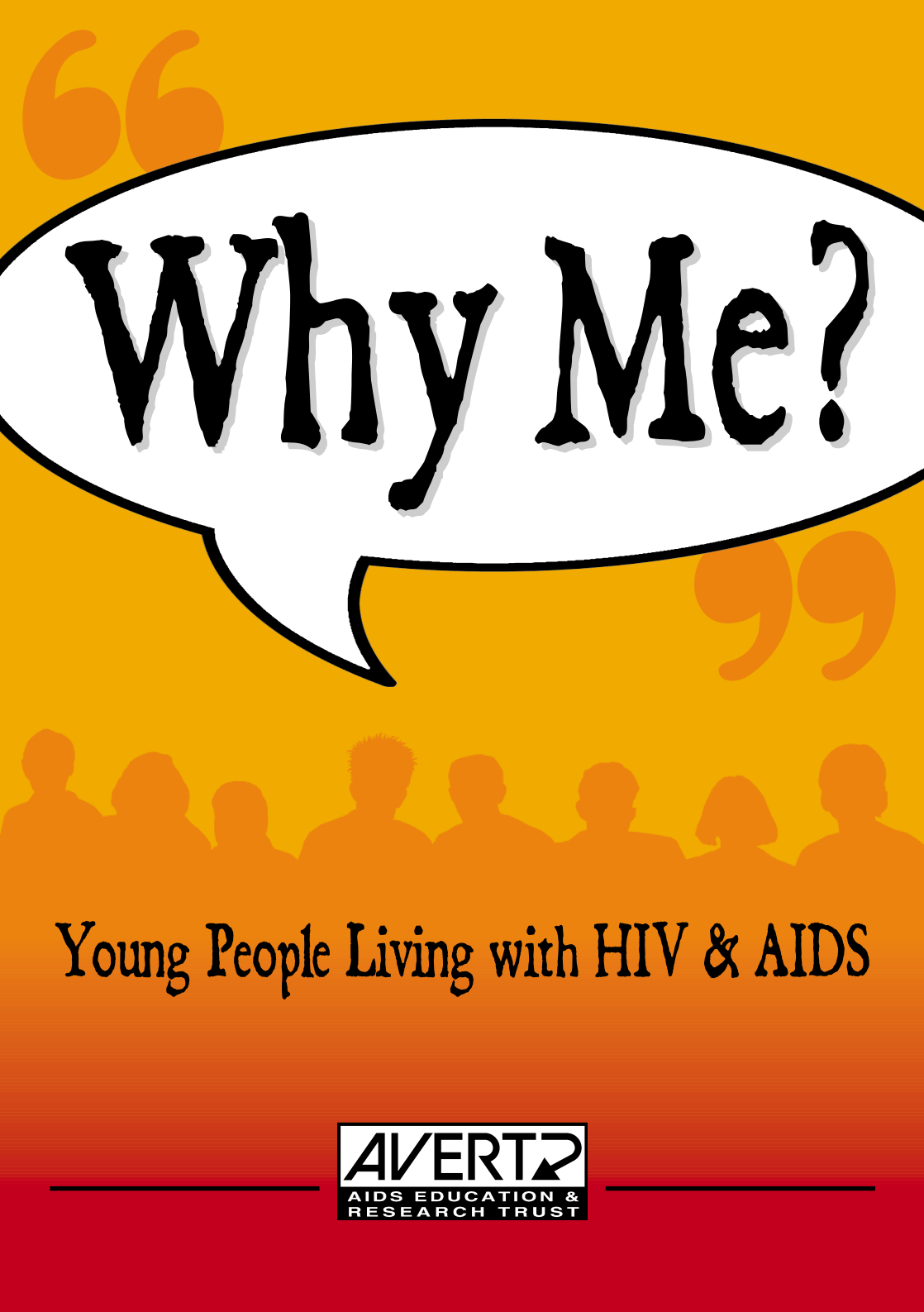
Why Me?
Young People Living with HIV & AIDS
AVERT
AIDS EDUCATION & RESEARCH TRUST

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The booklet has been edited by Annabel Kanabus and James Lawrence of AVERT and by Liz Dibb, independent consultant.

Foreword

The moving stories of the young contributors to this booklet illustrate powerfully the issues faced by young people affected by HIV and AIDS. They may themselves be infected with HIV and facing the rigours of complex drug treatments or they may have the responsibility of caring for one or both parents living with HIV and AIDS. There will be times when they feel lonely, vulnerable and robbed of a normal childhood and adolescence.

Helping young people affected by HIV and AIDS to lead as normal a life as possible is so very important. They need to feel that they are understood and listened to, that their wishes are considered along with those of other family members. There are very specific yet sensitive issues concerning the disclosure to a relative or close friend. Fear of stigmatisation and discrimination and having to cope with the death of a loved family member or friend. These are just some of the difficult areas where young people need our support and understanding. 'Why Me?' explores these issues in a frank and sensitive way. It will provide a useful resource for young people, families and adults.

The booklet supports the objectives of World AIDS Day in raising awareness of the broader issues relating to HIV and AIDS amongst the general population. This is essential to foster a supportive social climate around HIV and AIDS and remove the stigma which is still too common.

So we have a good story to tell: the UK remains a low prevalence country for HIV compared to other countries. But we cannot afford to be complacent and it is important that our prevention and health promotion work responds to the changing nature of the epidemic. Since the start of the AIDS epidemic voluntary organisations like AVERT have played a crucial role in providing information and services which are both responsive and sensitive to the needs of particularly vulnerable groups, including children and young people. I look forward to continuing our positive relationship with the voluntary sector as we take forward work on the new HIV/AIDS strategy.

– Tessa Jowell MP, October 1999

Introduction

Many young people are now living with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Some young people are affected by HIV and AIDS as a result of having a close friend or relative who is infected. Some young people themselves are infected with the virus.

This booklet is a collection of thoughts and stories from some of these young people. It reflects the wide range of circumstances in which they find themselves, and the wide range of issues that affects them.

We hope that this booklet will help other young people who are directly affected by HIV and AIDS, as well as helping to educate other people both young and old.

"Becky"

When Mum told us, I'd just come out of work to find her and my sister in the car, crying. When I asked what was wrong she just blurted out that she had HIV. All I could think of was 'Oh!' After a few minutes a lot of questions started going through my head, like 'when did you get it?', 'is that why dad died?' Everything then fitted into place. Before when I had asked about dad, I was fobbed off.

The next few days, I think I was in a daze, although the more I thought about it, the more I began to realise that I already knew somewhere at the back of my mind and that it didn't actually change anything. Since then everything has gone on as normal and I've been to a few of the women's meetings which I found very useful. I worry about my mum a lot of the time, but as she says, she's still alive. The only thing that annoys me is what people say about the disease before they know anybody who is HIV positive. The stigma around it doesn't bother you, but once you find out that someone close to you is affected, anything that is said hurts.

Telling my boyfriend and my best friend was really difficult as I didn't know how either would react. Fortunately they were both brilliant, and although they don't know much about HIV, they are both still there for me and my mum and I couldn't ask for better friends. Telling anybody else for me is out of the question, not because I'm ashamed of my mum, because if anything I'm more proud of her than I've ever been, but because I'm worried we'll all be treated as outcasts.

Maybe in the future, when there isn't such a stigma around HIV, I'll say something to my other friends, but seeing as some of my family don't know, I think that's a long way off.

"Anne"

My aunt sometimes used to go to Positively Women or Body & Soul but I never knew why. One of the workers started coming round and would talk to my aunt and sometimes to me. One day my aunt started acting strangely, she said the worker was coming round later. She wouldn't eat and kept walking around. When the worker came we talked for a while and my aunt said she had something to tell me but was afraid of how I would take it.

That's when I knew she had HIV. She said she was nervous because she was afraid I would be angry or not like her. I said it would be alright because the medicine would make her well. The worker began explaining about HIV, how you got it, what it could do to the body and that there was no cure. All three of us talked for a long while. My aunt asked how I felt and I said I felt ok, that it didn't make me feel angry or not like her. Really it meant nothing to me, I didn't understand and I still don't. Now I worry about her, if she feels ill or is not eating. Sometimes I wish I never knew, what am I supposed to do now that I know? I sometimes wish she would die, so I could have my life back to do what I want and think what I want.

We never talk about it now, only when the worker comes to visit. Why tell me when I need to ask all these questions? Sometimes I don't even know what I want to know, but I know I want someone to tell me. I get angry sometimes and ignore my aunt and she thinks I'm rude, or I just want to be by myself and she didn't understand. But the worker understands, that's why I like her. I love my aunt but what will happen to me if she dies, or I have to look after her?

Now I know about HIV I feel grown up and special. Sometimes I am glad my aunt trusted me enough to tell me but now that I know I feel she sometimes doesn't trust me. I can see her watching me and wonder if she regrets telling me. I think children should know but they need help to understand and not feel afraid and sad.

"Justina"

The first time my mother got ill was in July 1995. She started to get ill with a fever, her head was hurting, but then she got better. At the end of 1996 she became ill again, and she didn't have a pleasant Christmas. Then from January 1997 she was in and out of the hospital. Mum told me she was very ill and that she had HIV. She told my sister that she had cancer. When she came out of the hospital we used to look after her at home. I used to help her have a bath, eat, go to the toilet, and do her hair.

When she was in hospital, I used to take her breakfast in the morning at 7.30am and then leave for school by 8.15am. When I came home from school my sisters and brother were waiting for me in the house. Then I made dinner for everyone and told them to go to bed by 9pm. Then I left the house by 8pm to go and take dinner for Mum, then stayed there for a little while until 11pm. That happened several times – I wanted to do that because she was my mother and will always be. At times I used to cry when she went to the bathroom. The way she walked was like an old woman. I used to see a big strong, very fat woman but then a woman who was very thin and had no energy. When I used to look at her I used to hide and cry my eyes out, because I didn't want her to see me crying for her.

She had her 40th birthday in May 1997 and she was at home. We had a party for her, the family came to the house to eat and drink. June and July 1997 she went back to hospital for two weeks. On Saturday 5th July she was very ill and I spent the night in the hospital and on Sunday 6th July at 3pm, my beloved mum passed away and left us in this world. My brother and sister think she died of cancer – I promised Mum that I would keep it secret that she had HIV and only tell them when they were older. We all miss our mother deeply – *"May her soul rest in Peace."*

"Ben"

I always thought that HIV and AIDS would never affect me, *"I've not got it, so why should I worry about it?"*

When I was nineteen, I made a good friend. His name was Dave. He seemed perfectly fine to me. One day, another friend, Mark, took me to one side and told me that Dave was HIV positive. This shocked and disturbed me, *"What do I do? How do I act?"* For about a week, I struggled with this in my mind whilst pretending I didn't know whenever I was near Dave. I found some information on how to protect myself from the virus and discovered that it didn't mean running away from him or acting as if he had the Plague, but just being careful in what I did, making sure that I took no risks.

After a few weeks a special bond grew between Dave and I which brought us very close together and we became partners. During the relationship Dave told me that, in fact, he had full blown AIDS and had been given fifteen months to live. By now I could cope with HIV and AIDS, but the life expectancy I couldn't. As a result, we split up. I let my own fears ruin a good relationship.

I only knew one person who had HIV when I was 19. I am 21 now and know of several other people, some of them friends, who very sadly have contracted HIV. One of those people is currently living, though his life expectancy is five years. He is 17 years old. He might live longer, he might not.

I've had the test for HIV at my local GU clinic, they asked no questions, it was all done in the strictest of confidence. I'm glad I had the test and also repeated the test later on, as I know I am clear. Some of my friends haven't been so lucky. Half a minute to put on a plaster over an open wound, or to put a condom on before sex, could save a life, your life. Why risk it?

"Paula"

Three years ago I had to go and stay with my aunt because my mum was really unwell – she was in and out of hospital a lot. I was not happy living at my aunt's, all I wanted to do was live with my mum. I didn't understand why, so I asked my uncle. He said to me very bluntly *"Your mum has HIV, it is a little like AIDS, but it's not."* I was very upset and I started crying. I felt very angry because I suspected that this was true. Although I was shocked to hear this, I was relieved to finally know what was wrong with my mum.

That night I began to wonder why my mum never told me herself and I felt really hurt. The next day my mum phoned me and arranged to meet me at my gran's house. When I arrived my mum took me upstairs to my gran's bedroom and she sat me down and she said *"I have got something really important to tell you, I have got HIV and I have had it for eight years."* I just put my arms around her and I said to her *"Mum, I already know."* I told her my uncle told me and I had also seen leaflets lying around the house. She went absolutely ballistic.

My mum was angry because other members of my family had found out by accident and were strictly told by my mum not to tell me, because my mum wanted to tell me herself. I wasn't really bothered who told me – I was just relieved to know and understand why my mum was in and out of hospital. However my mum was upset that she hadn't been given the right to tell me herself, because it felt as though some family members didn't trust her to handle the situation appropriately. Other members of my family reacted quite positively and were very supportive, especially my gran and my stepfather, because they knew from the very first day that my mum was diagnosed HIV positive.

I wish that people would understand that living in a family with someone who has HIV does not mean that everybody worries about them dying all the time. Although this may have been the case a few years ago, HIV is now a health condition that people have to learn to live with.

"Susan"

Writing this story brings me bad memories. But I feel that I have to write so that those who are in the same position as I was should know how to deal with it. Because no matter what you are going through, there's always someone out there who is very willing to help.

My mother was very, very ill – this was in 1994 – and nobody knew what she was suffering from. She stayed at home for about two weeks, then went to see her GP – all she got were painkillers. I think this was because she couldn't actually explain exactly what was wrong with her and how she was feeling.

Then she was put into hospital and she was there for a long time. As I was the oldest in the family my job was to cook for her. I'd go to school every day, come home, start cooking. Then do the same thing again for a few months. At the time I couldn't write or speak English, so I had to keep everything to myself for a very long time. I was never late for school or missed a day, but I never did my homework because there was no time.

My school started at 8.45am and finished at 3.45pm. I would then get home at 4.30pm and start cooking. I did not just cook for my mum, I had two other younger people I lived with. I'd cook lots of food for all of us, put my mum's in a small container, leave home about 6.30pm, go to the hospital and then come back about 9.30pm to get ready for school. This had to be done every day. My brother and sister only came along with me to the hospital at the weekends. We'd stay there all day, because we all wanted to know what was going on. My school work was bad, I couldn't concentrate in class. I'd cry on the way home and when I was going to school.

Then we kind of got used to seeing her ill all the time. She was at the hospital almost every two to three months, then she'd be out. After a few months she'd be back in there – she called it prison. What was worrying her most was that if the social services took us, she wouldn't see much of us, and we'd forget everything about where we came from. At the time I was only 13, I felt confused, lost – I felt as though my life was ending. My mother was suffering for four years. Then she died on 21st February 1997. I miss her a lot.

I only found out that mum was HIV positive five months before her death. She also knew that I knew, but we never talked about it. I had to keep all this to myself. Many things happened and we went through a lot. My advice is that if you're going through a rough situation like I did, talk to someone about it. Don't kill yourself with all this pain – don't suffer alone.

"Michelle"

When I was 11, me, my mum and my two sisters went on holiday. There was a counsellor there and me, my mum and the counsellor went into a room. My mum said to me *"Sorry, I've been lying to you about your dad, he never had cancer he had AIDS."* I started crying because she had lied to me. I didn't mind so much about AIDS. If you get it it's just the same as having an accident I suppose. But I can't believe my mum lied to me, because she never ever lied to me and I never ever lied to her.

After what happened with my mum lying to me, I'd just like to say if something like this has happened in your family, tell them the truth from the start or after you could lose their trust in you. So please don't lie, just say what you have to say.

A need to be told, a need to talk

It can cause great difficulties for young people if they are not told that someone they know is affected by HIV. It can also cause problems if they are unable to tell anyone else, as this can make it far more difficult for them to find the support they need.

"Juliet"

I wasn't told anything in the early stages of my uncle's illness, but I'd suspected that something was wrong for a while. I'd snatched pieces of conversations particularly between my mother and her sister, and so was curious as to what the situation was. It seemed to really upset my mother so I did not question her further. I was confused at my exclusion – what was so bad that I wasn't to know?

"Ros"

How dare [Mum] keep this from me? All this time he had been suffering and I had been unaware. This was vital information and I'd been kept in the dark.

"Paula"

We were really supportive of each other and I was always there for her when she needed someone to talk to. I was also able to talk to my mum about her continuing condition. I also feel really strongly about going to hospital and doctor appointments with my mum, because I am interested in, and want to know, about her health condition and how this is affecting her.

"Ros"

When faced with a straight-laced, conservative guide leader who demanded to know why I was late for a meeting, I found I didn't know what to say. I told her I'd been at my uncle's funeral, and volunteered no more information. When she asked the cause of death (which seemed strange, but above all rude, even to a naive fourteen year old) my mind raced. *"I don't really know"* I blurted out with a cheerful

grin to mask my complete turmoil and rising tears. Subconsciously I knew that I couldn't tell anyone that he had died from AIDS. I could barely say the words myself, so I tried to deny all knowledge and refuse all prejudices.

"Michelle"

Because of AIDS my life turned to a nightmare. I had to lie and say my dad died of cancer.

"Cara"

Mum keeps saying *"You must never tell your friends or anyone."* Sometimes I think to myself, what's the big deal anyway? They can't bother us.

"Sheree"

My mum decided to tell [my friend and her mother] about her having the virus. This didn't bother them at all. They didn't treat me any different after mum told them so I was very happy and Debbie's mum told me I could talk to her if I wanted.

"Anne"

I can't tell anyone at school. Sometimes when I'm at school and remember, I feel lonely and different, really sad and wish I could just scream but I'm not allowed.

"Matt"

It is very important to me, to hear the experiences and feelings of others, to know I am not alone. Isolation is a bitter thing.

"Ros"

Who wants to spend their last days shrouded by lies and secrecy? I wish that I could have talked to people about Andy without the fear of being looked down upon in disgust. People need education, but do they want to learn?

"Maria"

I have HIV and I've known I've been living with it for four years. I was told by my doctor. When I first found out I had the virus, I thought that I was going to die very soon. I cried so bad but my mum and dad comforted me. I was 9 years old at the time. It was like I'd lost a piece of my heart. Pity, anger and sadness were what I felt. Also the question, why me, out of billions of people, why me?!

But I'm glad that I was told because I would have carried on living my life and falling sick, without knowing why. I think it's useful being told if you're sick because if the worst comes, there'll not be many questions to be asked. It's important to be told.

I take lots of medicines, big tablets which are generally the size of a 2p coin. I take 15 tablets a day – altogether 105 tablets a week! It's a hassle but it's for the best. I find taking ddC the hardest because it's so big and takes time to take. But I'm used to it – the medicines are part of my daily life and my life is a part of my medicines. I hope that they can make an easier way of taking medicines. But most, I hope they find a cure for all those like me.

If I fall sick, it is simple cases like the flu, but I have to be admitted to hospital because it could lead into something like a chest infection. I've had chicken pox twice and shingles four times, and chest infections and other infections. There was one time when I was so sick. I was 10 or 11 and I had some infection in my stomach. I had to have a biopsy [when tissue from the body is removed and examined] and I was in so much pain. I'd lost weight so I was being fed by a drip. I thought that I was going to die, but they got me better and I stayed on in hospital for two weeks. I hate getting sick, I don't think anyone likes it. When I wasn't well, I used to say I wish I could just die in my sleep, just so the pain could go away forever.

I can't join in some conversations when my friends are talking about AIDS or HIV. Like someone would go "I'm glad I'm OK and haven't got HIV". I don't like it when people say horrible things like that. It makes me feel bad. For example they say things like "You mustn't touch anyone who has AIDS or you'll catch it too".

I've been going to my hospital for five years now so they know me quite well. I get lots of help from my doctor and other people and whenever I need someone to talk to they're always there.

"Martin"

I was very bad at home and on Christmas Day I was very ill. I was being sick, not eating anything much at all. I remember Christmas night I was just sitting in a chair slumped in a heap. I had a massive temperature and I was curled up in a ball just baking hot. That night Mum had to put me to bed early. Then I was waking up at night with these terrible sweats, just waking up with my clothes all soaking wet, and my hair just soaking with sweat.

It came to Boxing Day and the doctors decided I should come to the hospital to be admitted, to have more tests done. I was on the children's ward and I remember shivering and feeling freezing cold. Everything was an effort to do because I was so tired and so worn out, and I remember my breathing got a bit strange and I felt very faint. It was as if I was just going to pass out.

I know now that I had PCP [HIV related pneumonia] and that I was very, very, very ill with high temperatures. I was in such a lot of pain that I was on Pethidine [a pain-killer] for days, which wasn't the nicest of experiences but it did control the pain. I didn't really have any choice at all, I had to have it. My mum was with me a lot, and she did calm me down through the pain. And my dad has been very good as well. But it was just so frightening.

"Sophie"

I am not very sure how I came to get the virus. When I had my test, one of my ex-boyfriends had just died in an accident. So maybe he had the virus and didn't know it, I don't know. Now maybe we never will. Sometimes it is quite difficult to hide from [HIV] because of all the medication and college and everything. The good thing is that it is normal for a girl to get into a toilet cubicle with her bag. Many times I take my medication in there. There is always a drink in my bag and what I now call steroids. When I don't take them, I become breathless, tired and at times irritable.

I started getting sick about two years ago and with time, it has become worse. At first I was just feeling tired and weak. Even when I had had my breakfast, I would find it an effort to go upstairs to my room. This would happen for a day or two then disappear. Later, with the tiredness, I would not be able to hold my food down… or up. I remember times when I would long for 'Matoke', but once I had eaten just two spoonfuls, I would lose my appetite. This continued for about six months and I really lost weight. The people who came to see me showed it in their faces that I was a 'gone' case. My mum really tried to hide it, but her tears said it all. That is when you know who loves you and who is a true friend. The people, both families and especially friends who constantly came to visit me in hospital when I was totally gone are the ones who I call real brothers and sisters.

How I feel about having the virus is mixed. There are times I am quite accepting and days when I just feel like revenging back. For example when I am in the good swing, I think that I should not spread it to other people, and I go to functions and such. But during the bad swing, I feel that it is unfair, why me?

"Clara"

My first boyfriend was a guy called Steve. We started to grow apart when we left school, and I started college. Just before my 20th birthday, my parents were diagnosed with cancer and I heard through my friends that Steve had started getting ill. Steve had barely reached 20 and I found myself at his funeral.

Three months after both my parents passed away, I went out with Daniel. He had known Steve and I from school. One night at a nightclub, he mentioned that his sister had told him that Steve had died of AIDS. I snapped back at him "No one knew Steve like I did and he would have told me." Daniel made an appointment for me to get an HIV test. The night after I went for the dreaded blood test, I asked him "What will we do if I'm positive?" I should have guessed by his answer, "I'm banking on the fact that you're not."

Well, three days later, my life ended. I was so sure that it would be negative I had taken the wee girl I looked after with me. I phoned my sister-in-law to collect me, the news was bad. I was at my lowest and felt so insignificant. I told my previous boyfriends and their reaction was bad enough, as if it couldn't get any worse. I was threatened and judged like I should have known Steve had AIDS – I was only 17 then for goodness sake. A child, that's all I was. Daniel, my boyfriend told his parents, and that was it, I was alone with nothing left.

"Paul"

I found out that I had HIV in 1991. I believe I got the infection from an ex-girlfriend who I now know slept around during our relationship. During this time I was only 16. I was in love with her but I did not feel comfortable with sex. She is also HIV positive.

When I was diagnosed, there was not much information on HIV around. I knew that the most common route of transmission was between men. In December 1991 I was very ill, at first my GP thought I had glandular fever, then I was asked to take an HIV test. This was my fifth test, and as I had never slept with a man, I thought there was no way it would be positive.

I had the test and had to wait for weeks for the result. I cannot express to you what it was like waiting for that result to come back. The day came when it was time to go back to the doctors for my result. I went into the surgery feeling very alone and frightened. I was called in to see the doctor, my heart was now racing. I sat down and the doctor just said to me, "I am very sorry but you are HIV positive." I just sat there, I don't think it really sank in. It was very hard to take in. I was not offered any support or counselling. It seemed like "I'm very sorry – bye, bye". I was not asked if I was OK or anything. At the time I had left home and my girlfriend and was living in a bedsit in Southend. I do still feel angry about that. I just went away thinking I would be dead in two years.

"Matt"

I knew I'd been unsafe a couple of times but I really thought the odds were in my favour. I felt well, happy, very much alive. On January 18th at 10.00am I was diagnosed HIV positive. My stomach and heart plunged, yet I sat calm and attentive, listening to how my life was to change irreversibly. I had no precedent for what I was experiencing, no etiquette for reaction. I stared at the two hospital counsellors looking for contradiction in their eyes. I saw none.

I cycled to the common at the rear of my house and looked homeward. Life continued there. Within those walls sat my partner, also HIV positive, awaiting my return. I sat on a bench and wondered how I would tell him. Would my diagnosis be apparent by the expression on my face? I went home. I opened the door, wheeled my bike into the hall and calmly said "It was positive". My partner walked toward me, hugged me and I began to cry.

I cried on and off for most of the following week. My head was filled with a maelstrom of thoughts and emotions. Everything and nothing had changed. I saw the same reflection in the mirror, still enjoyed marmalade on my toast, still loved my partner. Yet I felt contaminated with an invisible disease. I felt dirty inside, unclean. I felt like a timebomb, I felt dangerous.

One month later, I have good days and bad days. Today is a good day. Today I feel strong, today I feel resilient. While I know my mood will fluctuate, I am and will remain very much alive, of that I am determined. I am each day learning to live positively.

Looking to the future

"Maria"

I've learned to live with what I've got, but now and again I do have a cry but that's normal. I've heard on TV and in books that with what I've got you don't live long – by the age of 40 or so you die. But for some reason I'm not scared – I would like a nice peaceful death in my sleep.

But I hope for the future that they find a cure and help millions of people who are ill like me. But I will do my best to take my medicines to try and stay well, so I can see when that day comes.

"Clara"

Three years on (March 1999) and I have travelled like I have never travelled before, lived like I have never lived before, and loved like I have never loved before. I'll never be the same person I was before, but now I am a better person. I was put on medication shortly after I was diagnosed and now I look healthier than anyone out there. Nothing is too far away to try. Currently I am training to be a computer programmer and I aim to travel and work at the same time. My diagnosis is good and I have years ahead of me now.

"Mandy"

People who already have families are lucky, because at least they have made a contribution, they have made their mark. At least, even if they die, they have someone to remember them. But those of us, like my brother and I, who know that we won't have children, there is always one thought remaining – 'What are we still doing in this world?'

"Paul"

It is hard to explain how I feel about knowing that one day I will develop AIDS. But I thank God for all the doctors who look after me. Nine years on and I am still fighting fit, thanks to all the drugs and support from friends and family. But I would be lying to you if I said I wasn't scared of what is to come.

"Ian"

I've had to re-evaluate my whole life – so much to take in, this test, that test, t-cell count, stigma, viral load, combination therapy, side effects, drugs, drugs, drugs. There was no wonder cure. It was very hard to take in, I felt trapped. I took my time and tried to educate myself slowly on all my options. At least we have options – a few years ago, and still in developing countries today, the options are limited.

"David"

In a way, living with HIV has made me appreciate life. Nobody knows how long they have to live, or whether they'll get sick, so I must stop asking questions that nobody can answer. As a young person with HIV I can make sure that my life is not wasted. In the meantime, I am healthy.

"Matt"

I am adapting to and accepting the changes that have befallen me. I continue to laugh at my friend's bad jokes, continue to munch my way through half a packet of biscuits, continue to enjoy the spring sun. I am very much alive.

"Lisa"

Even today, I do not think that enough people understand the seriousness of HIV and AIDS and the devastating effect that it can have on people's lives. It is only when someone you know contracts the illness that you realise its full effect and that it can happen to you. I feel that more information and advice is needed in schools, colleges and in magazines. The stigma attached to HIV and AIDS is lessening, but I think that we still have a long way to go.

Help & advice

All of the organisations listed below offer confidential and sympathetic advice over the phone. Many of these helplines are often busy, so if you don't get through at first keep trying. You do not need to give your name.

Young people, children, women and heterosexual (straight) men can contact:

Body & Soul
tel: **020 7833 4929**

Positive Partners & Positively Children
tel: **020 7738 7399**

Women living with HIV/AIDS can contact:

Positively Women
tel: **020 7713 0222**

Anybody who is living with HIV/AIDS and would like advice and support can contact:

Positiveline
tel: **0800 616 212**

Terrence Higgins Trust
tel: **020 7242 1010**

Young people who would like advice and information on growing up and all sexual health matters can contact:

Sexwise

tel: **0800 28 29 30**

Anybody who would like to talk about their feelings, or thinks they may be gay, can contact:

Lesbian & Gay Switchboard

tel: **020 7837 7324**

Further information

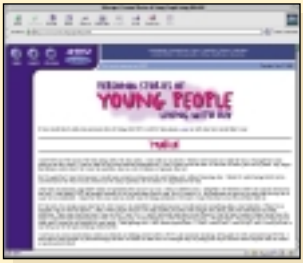
For more information on HIV/AIDS and related matters you can contact:

AVERT - AIDS Education & Research Trust

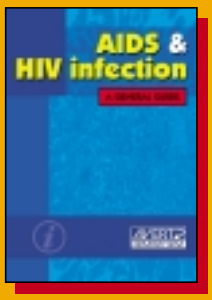
4 Brighton Road, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 5BA

tel: **01403 210202** e-mail: **avert@dial.pipex.com**

AVERT provides a free information service open to the general public and health professionals. This booklet is one of a series of booklets for young people published by AVERT. Adapted versions of these as well as further stories from young people living with HIV/AIDS are available on AVERT's internet site found at **http://www.avert.org/**



AVERT is a national AIDS charity which aims through education to prevent people from becoming infected with HIV. AVERT also funds medical research into HIV and AIDS in order to develop improved treatments and eventually a cure.



This booklet is one of many published by AVERT. Other booklets include:

AIDS & HIV Infection: A General Guide

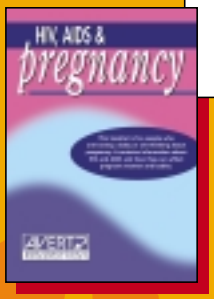
HIV, AIDS & Pregnancy

Sex & Sexual Relationships

HIV & AIDS: Information for Young People

Young Gay Men Talking

You can get a free copy of any of these booklets by contacting AVERT at the address below.



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