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My Experience

- Getting to know People through their Life Stories -

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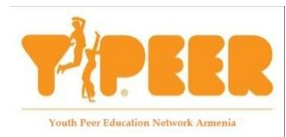
"10 Days of Activism"
Campaign



GENERATIONS'
SOLIDARITY



HOLY ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH
ARARATIAN PATRIARCHAL DIOCESE
DAY CENTER



Youth Peer Education Network Armenia

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But particularly we would like to express our gratitude to those people who trusted us and let us get acquainted with their life stories and comprehend their precious experience. Your life experience taught us a lot.

Getting to know People living with HIV through their Life Stories

– Introduction –

It is said “-If you want to know what someone is really like you have to actually meet them-”. This phrase implies that no matter what kind of information you hold, no matter what you know about a person, you can never make an appropriate conclusion about someone’s whole personality, as we actually don’t know the real person and what he/she had to go through in his/her life. Most of the time we tend to make conclusion about a person not knowing who the person truly is, or making assumptions based on his/her behavior from a single situation. As a result we get inadequate impressions about people and therefore inadequate attitudes full of prejudices towards that person, which takes away the chance to really get to know someone. This can lead to developing a stigma towards certain people; which can lead to someone being discriminated against. For this occasion Y-PEER (Youth Peer Education Network) Armenia, along with Day Center of the Araratian Patriarchal Diocese of Holy Armenian Apostolic Church, decided to introduce life stories of people living with HIV directed for the sake of people who may have preconceived attitudes toward people living with HIV. The goal is to educate people, who may hold these beliefs about people living with HIV, which will give them a chance to think over their beliefs on this matter and to make them more accurate and authentic.

Within the framework of 10 days of activism campaign (10DOA) Y-PEER Armenia along with Day Center of the Araratian Patriarchal Diocese of Holy Armenian Apostolic Church decided to create an electronic journal of life stories of people living with HIV aiming to make it available to the wider audience, particularly young people who use social networks. Afterwards with the supervision and

assistance of UNFPA Armenia CO and The Generations' Solidarity NGO it was decided to publish the journal on the 1th of December 2012, World Aids Day (WAD).

This book is addressed to the organizations that provide medical, social, psychological and other kinds of services to the people living with HIV. This book aims to make it available to a wider audience the concerns, thoughts and feelings of people living with HIV.

“Why Me?”

I was a role model both at home and among my friends. I studied nursing. During my academic years I was aware of HIV/AIDS related issues. Those years in literature it was mentioned as a terminal illness and it was said that HIV infected people have only 2 years of life. I could never imagine myself having any relations to this issue, as then it was believed that the disease had behavioral determinations, but alas...

In 2009 I got married; I left college and left for the Russian Federation with the purpose to work. Three months later my husband was sent to the hospital, where no one could understand the reasons of his endless fever. I was already pregnant but was preoccupied with my husband's health problems. One day I went visit my husband while he was at the hospital, but I couldn't find him in his infirmary. Then I decided to wait for him in the waiting room. All of a sudden I heard someone arguing in the next room. I went closer to the room to see what was going on, and I heard the doctor recommending my husband to tell me about his diagnosis, as I'm pregnant and there is a possibility that I'm infected and that my child could also get infected.

I don't remember how I left the hospital, how I was walking around the city late at night with tears in my eyes. I couldn't even remember my address. I resuscitated when it was late at night, and later on I was able to go back home.

Why me? My husband was the only man in my life and I was an ideal wife for my husband. We never used drugs. I was tortured by endless unanswered questions.

It was very difficult for me to visit him as I already knew what we are going to talk about. I was preoccupied with thoughts about death and our unborn child. I didn't know what to do, and I thought of suicide. At the end I went to the hospital and decided to speak directly

with the doctor. It turned out that my husband had known about his condition for 6 years. The doctor told me that he was connected with one Russian woman; who he had a child with. They discovered that the child was infected with HIV, and so were they. He came back to Armenia abandoning that woman and their child, leaving them in the lurch. The doctor advised me on my future steps, as I was in the 5th month of my pregnancy. I had to get medical examinations immediately, and be under the specialists' control. I couldn't listen to any word the doctor was saying to me, as I was tortured by the thought that my husband infected me on purpose. I was pondering the value of life, was thinking about love, hatred, lies and faithfulness...

I left the doctors room with a face full of anger and disappointment, and my husband understood that it didn't make sense to hide the truth.

I addressed him with one question; - what did I do to you?

He didn't say a word.

I kept taking care of him like before, feeling obliged to him, but never forgiving him.

He passed away two months later. I didn't have anyone around me; I was going through it all alone with my unborn child.

I'm grateful to God that the doctors provided me the necessary medications (antiretroviral drugs), decreasing the risk of transmission of the virus to the child down to 1%. The doctors assured me that my child was born healthy and without HIV. I couldn't believe them, and I was sure that they were deceiving me so they could keep me back from committing suicide.

Sometime later my parents visited me to take care of me. They didn't know that I was HIV positive. My mother was angry with me because I refused to breastfeed my child. All my life I hated lies, and

now my every word was full of lies. I thought I had limited time to live, and that was why I wasn't telling anything to my parents not to torture them with my problems. Every single day felt like the last one for me. I'm very grateful to God that I was around my child when he took his first steps, and uttered his first words. I didn't have any dreams, I was very angry with the luck I didn't deserve. Every morning I was quarreling with my husband in my mind trying to justify him.

It was already 2006 but I was still alive. The entire time I was taking antiretroviral drugs. I decided to go back to Armenia, where I started visiting a psychologist. Those therapeutic sessions helped me overcome my emotions and forgive my husband, so I could live in peace.

HIV taught me to live and get happy with every day, to evaluate life newly, to be able to forgive and be grateful to God for everything.

Today, it's already 12 years, that I have HIV. I'm more aware, I help other people living with HIV to overcome problems related to the infection. I understood that HIV is transmitted because of poor awareness of the issue. It can happen to anyone, no matter what his/her lifestyle or behavior.

The ones who just learned about their diagnosis I would advise them not to get frustrated, to reevaluate their life, to live a full life, to use all the opportunities given to people living with HIV to live a full life, to work, to plan a family and to have a healthy child. I would also like for society to be more attentive towards people living with HIV. Today none is insured of this disease.

35 Years Old

“The Other Side of the Coin A Story of a Person with 220 percent”

I was a drug addict. I was using drugs with high doses.

I became aware of my diagnosis in 2007, before that I had very poor knowledge of HIV itself. I thought that one can get HIV by a phone call.

One day I woke up and noticed that my foot was swollen, I could barely walk. I went to see the doctor. I went to the doctor and learnt that I have

I thought that I am dying, that this is the end, that I'm going to mold. That my body is going to tear apart. I wanted to commit suicide and that is the reason why I started taking drugs with higher doses so I could die sooner.

I was arrested in 2009. The doctor visited me when I was in jail. She explained to me that this isn't the end, that life goes on. There, I quit all the drugs I used to take before.

God gave me a second chance, a second life. Now I am more kind. I help people whenever I can, and when I can't, at least I don't hurt or impair them.

I was running a life of a drug addict, with constant thoughts ingrained in my head such as “where to get drugs, how to get money”. I didn't care about anyone. Now I help many people. HIV helped me to become a “human” to look through humans' eyes. Probably, without HIV I would be rotting in prison. I can say that I'm more scared of hepatitis C than HIV. And I suffered of abstinence syndrome when I was quitting drugs more than I ever suffered of HIV. But now I'm over it. At the beginning my system was rejecting the medications; I had to

change the medications several times. Now I take the medicine regularly.

God, the doctors and good people saved me. I can't retrieve my health, and what I could fix, I already did.

I was a good sportsman. I was very young when I became a trainer. Because of drugs I lost everything.

I became a believer while I was in jail, and I was able to overcome my addiction with the help of God. I was a person with 20 percent, now I'm a person with 220. I'm healthier than anyone else, and feeling better than anyone else.

For the ones that just learnt of his/her diagnosis, I would advise not to be scared of anything. If a human accepts his mistakes, then he/she is very strong and can overcome everything. I would advise them to follow doctors' prescriptions, to consult with specialists. And what is the most important belief in God, and everything will be good.

The ones that don't have HIV I would say "be careful about your health and don't look at us through HIV's eyes". Do medical checkups before planning a child, do it for your own children's health.

49 Years Old

“Problems are not eternal. Someday they all get their solutions”

Like others I was sure that this will not happen to me. I was living a healthy and careless life, and I was never interested in what is HIV. I have very painful memories related to HIV, because my husband's brother had fallen victim to it. After we found out that my husband was also infected I started gathering more information on what is HIV. I was then able to understand that the possibility of being infected with HIV is high, like other people, I also had very poor attitude towards my health. I had a feeling that there are many things that I didn't manage to do for my children, as I thought that this is the end. After becoming aware of my diagnosis I started looking at things from different angle. It made me to reevaluate what I had done before. I started thinking about my future plans, as there was no antiretroviral treatment available; many cases of death caused by HIV were recorded during at the time of my diagnosis. I was obsessed with thoughts of an upcoming death. The meaning of my life has changed, now I'm trying to keep others away from the risks of infection. Now, my life is full of medical examinations and treatment. Though, HIV gave me the maturity to approach my life seriously and appreciate my health and made every day more interesting, HIV took away my health and the people that were close to me. Perhaps they were not my “real” friends and relatives, and maybe that's why they left me the moment they learned about my diagnosis. Indeed, the discrimination and stigmatization from their side was very painful. I was trying not to dwell no such matters and take life's difficulties with ease. The knowledge I obtained during communicating with people living with HIV helps me to educate other people on this issue so they would not be scared of people living with HIV. Many professionals and other people living with HIV helped me to overcome HIV related issues.

I wish I could change the mistakes I made in my life; unfortunately I realize that I cannot fix them. The most important achievements of my life are my children and grandchildren and my friends that really care about me.

I wish when learn that they have been diagnosed with HIV wouldn't get angry and start looking for sinners. I wish they would take care of themselves and be careful about their life and health. People living with HIV need to live every day, be happy, and take the difficulties that come with the diagnosis in stride. Problems are not eternal and someday they all get their solutions.

Some advice I have for people who do not have HIV is stay away from the situations that can lead to any kind of disease, in particularly HIV. I would wish they wouldn't have negative attitude towards people living with HIV.

52 Years Old

“A story of 180 degree turn”

Like other people I was living a normal life until I became aware of my diagnosis. Recently I got divorced; I would rather call it “Saved”.

My ex-husband was a drug user, and apparently the HIV was a “left gift” from him. Some times after the divorce, I was ended up in the hospital in critical condition. The hospitals tests revealed my diagnosis. I had many prejudices towards the diagnosis and people that carry the virus. Before knowing my diagnosis I was thinking that only sex workers and drug users got the virus, my attitude towards those kind of people was very strict. At the beginning, I couldn’t put up with my condition, moreover I was ready to commit a suicide. It felt like my whole world fell apart. My life turned upside down, it was a 180 degree turn. Felt like everything was against me. Finding out my diagnosis was very harsh for my parents as well; it was a very hard stab. I was deeply depressed and for a long time I could not put up with my diagnosis.

I was given very strong support from different centers that dealt with HIV. Thanks to the help of one of these centers I now have a job and can overcome life’s difficulties. Now I’m able to go back to my daily routine. My parents are with me, and support me in every situation.

I really want the negative attitude towards HIV diagnosis to change; this would help people living with HIV overcome the disease. One of the biggest achievements of my life before the diagnosis is my son, who is the meaning of my life. After learning about the diagnosis one of the tangible achievements is my job, which gives me confidence.

I’m grateful to God, that I learned about the diagnosis early and that now I’m around my relatives.

31 Years Old

“My little Savior”

Before knowing about my condition I was living a very happy and easy life. Indeed, there were different problems in my family to which I was trying to give appropriate solutions, but I would never imagine that I could get HIV. As I was running a normal and healthy life, was faithful to my husband, was a good and careful mother.

The first sentence I uttered after learning about my diagnosis was – “It’s not happening to me, it can’t happen to a person with this level of education, with this kind of morality and values. How many years do I have to live? Will I manage to see how my little daughter is growing up. I always thought that only immoral women get this disease, this shameful virus. That they have bruises and wounds all over their body, and they are pale and gaunt.

But I was lucky to have my very close relatives around who gave me courage to live and struggle with this bitter reality. Some period ago I got in a very critical condition where I extremely needed antiretroviral drugs. I was taking those medications with great discomfort and very unpleasant. My daughter was already 10 years old. And one day, seeing the tortures I was going through, my daughter came to me with the medications in her hands and said; - Mommy, I just beg you to take those pills on time and with pleasure, as they are the only salvation for you, you need them to live, and I need you to be around me for many years.

After those words, I started looking at life differently; I started dedicating some time to myself, being a little selfish. I understood that you never should unconditionally love someone, you should love yourself in the first place, then the ones who surround you. You should live happy and not get obsessed with the disease but also be very careful about your health. I want to share my bitter experience with

people that just learnt about their diagnosis, and tell them that you shouldn't get frustrated and should live a full life. And the others that don't have HIV, I'm sincerely happy for them and wish them not to be bounded to the medications, as we are, wish them to live a full life. Wish you to be healthy and live a very long life.

35 Years Old

“I Have To Lie”

I had a very easy life, full of joy. I was a drug user. I started feeling weak and I was sickening very often. In 1996 my girlfriend and I decided to take medical examinations, which revealed our status. I had no idea what HIV was, well, of course I did have some knowledge, but only after getting HIV I started studying the disease in details. That's why I didn't feel bad when I just learned about it, my girlfriend explained to me what HIV is. I felt really bad when the doctor said that I have 3 years of life. I was living to enjoy the time left. All of the interesting plans I had, had changed. Everything turned upside down. I've lost the meaning of life. For 3 years I was waiting for my death, I was in tortures. Three years later something went wrong and I was still alive, and I decided to visit the doctor again to clarify when I was going to die. The doctors said - “go and live”. When I came back to Armenia I was trying to find out what kind of NGOs there are that carry out initiatives in the fields of people living with HIV/AIDS. But I was trying to be careful so they wouldn't learn about my status. My mother knows that I have Hepatitis. I'm very close to my Grandmother and I also told her that I have fatal illness but I don't know the name in Armenian. This way I wouldn't tell her that I have HIV. In my opinion the majority of outgoing workers have HIV but they are not aware of it.

Those changes were unbearable. Now I don't think so but when I was going through it all, it seemed unbearable. All of my future plans related to work, family and children vanished. The only positive thing is that there are different NGOs which offer opportunities to people living with HIV; to gather, communicate with each other and for a moment forget about their daily routine and concerns.

I had many difficulties both in my work and my life, some of which I still have. Today, HIV is a simple disease for me, the only problems are related to work and it is complicated. I'm a cook, and in

that field people with my status are prohibited to work. Before, I was facing difficulties together with my girlfriend. Living abroad, I received high quality therapy and visited psychologists. Today the church and different NGOs in this field help me to communicate with people where I don't have to hide my status; meanwhile I have to lie to the people closest to me.

I would like to regain my health, but it's impossible. There were two things that hurt me the most; first was that I won't be able to work by profession and won't be able to have a family. But here I learned that it's possible, what I need is time.

Because of HIV I lost my job, my profession, my dream of a traveler, the youth force I had and everything drastically changed. But nowadays, it doesn't matter. I overcame everything. Now, I can feel happy about my life again.

There were times that I explained to people who had just learned about their diagnosis, that there is nothing to be scared of. Science and medicine is developing and if people regularly take their medications they will live many years. I think that nowadays there are many other terrible diseases than HIV.

I wish that people who don't have HIV never get sick, although no one can be assured of this disease.

39 Years Old

“I Have To Stay Positive”

My life was full of chaos before becoming aware of my diagnosis. My husband was sick more than a year.

Doctors... dozens of medications... long period of rehabilitation... but nothing worked out. Hopeless condition full of disappointments.

Before becoming aware of my diagnosis I thought HIV is a fatal illness, terrible virus which takes human life and has no remedy. I learned about my diagnosis from my husband. It was a sudden hit from the back that I was not ready to put up with. In a minute my whole life flashed in front of my eyes; the difficulties of family life, humiliations and offences, blames, conflicts ... an illness whose name is HIV. My husband is sick so am I. The fortune hit me once again, this time with a fatal illness of the 21st century. I felt hatred towards the whole world. My heart was broken. My life froze, and I had unexplainable hatred and anger towards the people that caused the transmission of the virus. Everything was broken. After knowing about the diagnosis I had different personal problems, I got depressed and lost my desire to live.

But my life continued. Everything fell in its place. HIV gave answers to every question; it solved every problem that life caused me. It didn't cause big changes in my life, only I gained a huge desire to struggle and live for my children. HIV diagnosis took away my health, feels like I became disabled. But what soothes me the most is that it gave me new friends who can understand, support and help me. Before I was facing difficulties together with my husband for our children thinking about their life and future.

Now I face challenges with the help of my sisters and new friends.

I received great support and help from the whole staff of a center that takes up initiatives with people living with HIV, also other people

that have HIV diagnosis, who became very close to me and I hope they will stand by me for my entire life.

With their help I understood that I am not alone, that I shouldn't be frustrated, I need to be positive, and shouldn't give up, I need to struggle and to overcome all difficulties. Also I realized that I'm not neglected by the society. There are organizations that stand by my side, that I am surrounded by kind people who take care of me.

I gain support which is the most important thing for me, and which gives me big power to live and struggle sin/evil and difficulties of the mundane life.

I can't change anything, but if I would have a chance to turn time back then I would change the mistakes I made because of my wayward and haughty character, I would listen to my parents.

Before becoming aware of the diagnosis the most important achievements of my life were my home, my family and my children.

After the diagnosis I achieved a new life, new friends and what is the most important thing that I do now is that I started to pray which I didn't do for about 20 years. I listen to the word of God, which gives me power to live, teaches me to be kind and forgiving. I've found a big source of love, which helps me to love life, others, and to love everything and everyone. I don't hate people I pray for them.

The ones that just learned about their diagnosis I would like to say. – live a double happy life, ignore and neglect the disease instead of yourself and your life. You're not neglected, you're not alone and abandoned, we are all together, powerful and invincible. Never be frustrated. God is by our side.

The ones that don't have HIV I would wish them to always be healthy, aware of HIV and be safe.

38 Years Old

“Broken Arrows”

It feels like time has stopped, and I can hear the ticking of the broken arrow that stuck in the same place.

I was the only child in my family and lived like a princess. I was very young when I got married. A relative of mine fixed me up with my husband. To be honest, the picture of marriage was completely different from the reality I faced. Marriages were pure and idealistic. I was very trustful and deep in love; I was looking through rose-colored glasses. During the first year of our marriage my husband decided to travel to find work leaving me pregnant, though it was not necessary for him to leave. He came back home for five months after the birth of our child. He stayed with us only two months after which he returned to Russian Federation, very soon I got used to life like this. Four years later I got pregnant with my second child. This was the beginning of everything, hard pregnancies and loneliness.

After a while, a woman called me and introduced herself as my husband's wife. The woman warned me not to harass them and told me they are very happy together.

I can't even find the words to describe my tortures, the feeling of feebleness that I experienced. Then my little boy was born and 40 days later different kinds of incomprehensible symptoms came out. All alone I was running through hospitals with a child in my hands and he didn't even call me to check up on his child, I couldn't tell his parents anything. I didn't know who to go to, who to tell about the unbearable pain I had. I wanted to keep away my parents, from my tortures.

A year passed, I've struggled to form my child's life, he pulled through and then we decided to go to visit my “Husband”.

I had been going through disregard, apathy, and sleepless nights full of anxiety. I started emaciating and a year after my departure I became very sick, my health condition was worsening. Now I remember my children's cry and my helplessness. I was sent to take a blood test, the results were terrifying. The blood had frozen in my veins, it turned out that I and my second child are infected with HIV.

I can't write, every word is accompanied with tears. I can't describe what I and my children had to go through.

Being unaware of HIV, I even tried to commit suicide, but I couldn't because my little children were watching me with begging eyes. I understood that I have to stay with them, because I was the only one they had, and I was the only world they had. I couldn't get medical help because I didn't hold citizenship in the Russian Federation; therefore I came back to my home country.

Time has passed and perhaps I have become apathetic, I'm reconciled with the situation I'm in. I have incredible parents. I live with them, and also with my brother's family. But only my parents, parents of my "husband" and the person that fixed me up with my husband know about my diagnosis. Only my family accepted me, supported and support me till now. I bow before them for everything they did for me and for supporting me till now.

Right now I don't see my future.

My advice for men is "don't destroy your soulmate's life that you chose as a friend of your life".

I would like that each person could insure his/her health, to be aware of HIV, and the most important to be aware of any HIV diagnosis in his/her partner and to support and treat her/him like a human no matter what the diagnosis is.

Also, I wish that HIV test wouldn't be mandatory for applying for a job.

Before becoming aware of my diagnosis, as an achievement I consider my two little miracles. One of my achievements after my diagnosis is my indissoluble connection between me and God, which, unfortunately, I didn't have before the diagnosis.

Only now do I understand how far I was from God and Church. I'm grateful to God for being inside me, not leaving me alone, and always being around me.

30 Years Old

“Denial”- The Choice I Regret The Most

I was working in a restaurant, I had different famous acquaintances, and I had many friends and girlfriends. I was fooled by her beauty, after a while we got married, then she got pregnant and then she took the test and learned that...

The doctor said; - you have something in your blood, you can't come here anymore, there is a special place for you, you need to go there. No matter what kind of education you have, the most important is the humanity that many doctors omit. When we visited the center for people like "us" they said that I also have to be examined. The results should be ready in a few days. Those days we drank the whole day long to literally shut down our brains. That time I absolutely didn't have any idea about the disease, I just heard that it's fatal. When we learned about the results my wife got upset, because she was feeling guilty about me. The doctors were treating us with ignorance; they didn't even inform us about the disease, the clinical course of the disease. They didn't provide us neither with the medication nor with the psychological help we needed.

We went back home without a desire to live. They treated us with ignorance and we also carried on living the way we lived before ignoring or rejecting the fact of the illness. After the parturition my children were given medication which helped him to stay healthy. Once I came across to a phrase in a magazine – “to remember HIV or to forget about it is your choice”. My life didn't change because I chose to forget for which I regret the most. At that point I was very scared of the reality I was avoiding, which led me to the critical worsening of my health condition. If I knew that the antiretroviral drugs will help me to prevent the pneumonia I would do everything to avoid this situation. But since the doctors didn't provide me with any treatment I fell in a

very terrible situation. Doesn't matter what citizenship you hold and where you live, as all of the politician mention, the most valuable thing is human health. Unfortunately few doctors take it seriously.

I left my wife taking with me my child and HIV.

HIV took away my profession, my connections, the person I love and my new girlfriend who I had to leave, as I didn't want to ruin one more life.

On the other hand it made me to start a new life running a healthy lifestyle; quitting smoking and drinking. If I was kind before, now I'm 20 times kinder. When a person has a fatal disease the vision of life changes. When a person is vivid and healthy full of life he doesn't value his life. He values his life for the moment then God reminds that every moment you can die. You should avoid any kind of seductive entertainments, to be faithful to your partner which can provide the happiness of your life.

Because of HIV I had to face problems related to family planning and finding a job. Moreover I had to face everyday problems of living such as keeping a diet and the necessity to take the medications regularly. You become a half man.

At the beginning it was very difficult for me. I was stressed all the time, but new people started to surround me who knew about my diagnosis, who understood and supported me. I visit an organization that works with people living with HIV; there are other people there who also have HIV. We are all equal there we understand and support each other.

I am happy that there are such organizations which provide communication, helps people to cut off from the daily routine, also to learn new things. I have some friends abroad who help me a lot and know that I'm sick, but don't know what kind of illness it is.

If I would have an opportunity to change the past, I definitely wouldn't run a lifestyle I used to have before. I would choose a partner with a higher sense of responsibility. There are many seductive entertainments in life and humankind has to be very strong to fight them off.

Now I'm with my son, I pass time with him; I appreciate and value my new life and my parents.

The ones that just learned about their diagnosis I would say – Don't panic, keep your cool, harshly change your lifestyle except the fact that you have the illness, study it so you could prolong your life.

The ones that don't have the diagnosis I would advise to be faithful to their partners not only not to hurt them but also for their own safety.

36 Years Old

“The Payoff of The Joy”

I was living very active and entertaining lifestyle, but I did not care about my health. Before becoming aware of my diagnosis I was thinking that HIV/AIDS is just a scary story, that it does not exist. I was sure that the disease is only for the rich people and it cannot have any connection to me. After lots of problems related to my health I was informed that I am an HIV infected. The “nice” doctor with a very “nice” voice told me "Congrats, you have HIV". I was shocked, I thought I am sleeping, I saw all my life in front of my eyes, I was hardly breathing. I thought that everything is over. Some hours later I came back to the world and started remembering the stereotypes that I had about HIV/AIDS: "It is a fairy tale and cannot have any connection to me". I have been tested 3 times, because I could not believe in that and every time the answer was the same. I did not know what to do because my health condition was very bad: I could barely move, I was locked. Step by step I started to understand what life is, what values it has and for what we live, but after a while I started hating people because if they knew that I have HIV, they would look at me in a bad way. I was thinking that I am the only person in the whole world that has HIV and it is written on my face. First of all I told my mother as I was scared to lose my family, I was scared that I could have infected also my wife and my child. The thought about that was killing me more than the reality that I am infected. With the help of my very good doctor I understood that the probability to infect my wife is very little and after taking the HIV test we found out that she does not have HIV. But before that it took me 2 years to get enough courage and tell my wife about my disease. After that I was recovering faster and faster. That news gave me a new strength to struggle for my life. I started recovering physically and psychologically, I overcame the other infections that I had, though it seemed impossible and was very difficult. I had eager desire to be with my family and for that I managed

to cope with all the diseases that I had. My mother was helping me a lot, I was also participating to peer-to-peer counseling sessions for the people living with HIV/AIDS. I was visiting psychologists and priests and they made me to look on my life in another way, that I am still living and I have to live like a normal person in a society. After that I understood how easy it is to lose and how hard to retrieve. After some time I was able to help the people that were in my condition.

Now I am living my second life, I am newly born, and that is my biggest achievement. I lost my life full of joy, but I got HIV, which was the cost of that enjoyment. From the other side I got opportunity and ability to help people. I would just like to get rid of the virus, but the rest is wonderful.

To the people that were just informed about their disease I will say that they never think that this is the end of their lives, this is an opportunity to reinterpret their lives and start living healthy.

To the people that do not have HIV I will say that no one is secured from the diseases and in many cases the most impossible things happen, even some fairy tales for us. In this life you have to pay for everything: my condition is the payoff for my joyful life.

23 Years Old