LIFE IS FULL OF MYSTERIES AND SURPRISES

Looking good can be

seen as a bad thing

**Occasion:** World Aids Day (WAD), last year. Place: Nakuru. I’m all set for the

launch of my biography by Vice President Kalonzo Musyoka.

It’s not every day that prominent people launch the biographies of people living

with HIV so I feel extremely honoured. You can imagine the butterflies in my stomach

when by noon the guest of honour hasn’t arrived.

It’s at this time that I see someone I think I know walking towards me. I can’t exactly

tell where I’ve seen him before. This is the current situation with my memory; I

just can’t seem to recall where I saw someone. And let’s not even talk about remembering

names...

The man introduces himself as Alex and extends a frail hand. My prognosis is he’s

positive: HIV stage four is my “educated” guess.

“I learnt that you were coming to Nakuru for the WAD and vowed I’d come to see

you so you’d help me,” he sighs.

Help him? This guy has just alighted from one of those fuel-guzzlers you’d want

your maths teacher to see you driving because of the many times he remarked that

you’d amount to nothing.

“I’m not promising miracles, but I’ll help where I possibly can,” I tell him, which is

my standard answer to folks so they don’t have unrealistic explanations.

“You mean you can’t remember me?” he asks.

Then he reminds me. I can’t believe it: here’s the

big shot who once cancelled my contract for the

strangest reason I’ve ever heard.

**Memory Lane**

It was back in 90’s. I had just started HIV

work and gone public about my status.

Alex was the director of an organisation

that had HIV workshops all over the

country and they wanted me to work

with them.

I had to facilitate about 20 workshops.

During the second one,

Alex and senior management

were present and

their comments were positive:

“It’s great.” “It will really

impact on people’s attitude.” “It will contribute to

behaviour change.”

The professional fee I was to get was, to me,

was like hitting the jackpot.

“Once I get paid, I’ll move from my 11-by-10

room in Kayole, and get a double room,” I swore.

“My landlady’s a monster, always there at the

stroke of month-end. “She’s always going on

about how she’s doing me a favour because I have

so many people crowded in one room. For the

first time I’ll pay rent in advance.”

I also planned to buy a sideboard with a cabinet

for a TV set. The telly I planned to buy wasn’t a flat screen, but a *Greatwall*. Plus, I

was going to buy several metres of a plastic flowery carpet.

**“Un-counting” my chicks**

On the morning I was to travel to Naivasha for the next workshop, I was asked to

see the director first.

As soon as I stepped into his office, Alex, without looking up, told me he had cancelled

my contract. Reason? According to him I didn’t look like I was HIV infected. I

looked too good. Too healthy. Too beautiful.

When you’re infected with HIV, there are many insults that can be hurled your

way. But I never expected my rights to be denied because I looked too good to be

HIV-positive. HIV really has mysteries and surprises.

I was broken-hearted as I boarded a *matatu* home to the room I had planned to

expand. I cried the whole night, hiding from my siblings and my son, Peter. I consoled

myself that I shouldn’t stare too long at the shut door because I could miss the

next opened door.

In no time, I forgot about this. But I wished in my heart that this man could understand

what one goes through when they’re HIV-infected, because if he did he would

not have denied me the job I so badly needed.

Back to Nakuru, last year.

“Asunta, I tested HIV-positive. Despite following my doctor’s orders, my health

has taken a turn for the worst and that’s why I wanted to see you.”

I don’t tell Alex how I hated him when he cancelled my contract. I feel sorry for

him and feel like my cries and bitter prayers to God that day may have caused this

repercussion. Maybe I should not have been that bitter; after all, it was his money.

We agree he’ll come to see me in Nairobi, although, honestly, I don’t have definite

answers.

This is the diary of Asunta Wagura, a mother-of-three who tested HIV-positive

23 years ago. She is the executive director of the Kenya Network of Women

with Aids (KENWA). Email: asuntawagura@hotmail