TWENTY

& POSITIVE

**IT ONLY EVER TAKES A FEW MINUTES OF MISGUIDED**

**FUN TO LAND IN A DITCH THAT CHANGES YOUR LIFE**

**FOREVER. IT HAPPENED TO WINNIE WHEN SHE WAS**

**ONLY 20 YEARS OLD. NOW, SHE SHARES HER STORY**

**WITH THE YOUTH, IN THE HOPE THAT THEY MIGHT LEARN**

**FROM HER MISTAKES, RATHER THAN MAKE THEIR OWN**Nothing good can come

out of ostracisation.

That is what I have

learned since I found

out that I was HIVpositive.

I write this

in tears, reflecting on how my life has

changed. My doctor was kind enough

to hold my hand. He advised me that

you just cannot trust anyone with

your status, until I got sick and had

to tell someone at home. I loved my

brother and thought he was the best

but I was wrong. As soon as he found

out, so did Mum and my big sister. I

was disappointed when my mother

came to hospital and had to hear the

news from my doctor. She cried and

thought that was the death of me

until we both received counselling

from my doctor. We all thought Dad

would react negatively, so we kept it

from him.

At home everything became

complicated, from diet to attitude

to frustrations. Mother was always

making me eat greens. It was very

thoughtful of her, but I wanted her

to treat me the way she always had

before. She even asked me to move

my toothbrush to my room, away

from the rest because of my small

sister.

The little things people do when

they consider you to be different

eventually change your attitude

towards life and people. My mother

did not want me to do her laundry,

the way I used to do before, ostensibly

because I would get tired. I remember

once making supper before

she got home. When she arrived,

she asked, “Why did you cook this

and not that?” Deep down, I knew

that she felt frustrated but did not

know how to tell me about it.

My brother told me that he had

never seen someone so brave, that

in my situation, he would have

ended his life. That is not the kind

of advice a person in my position

needs. However, I have to take

heart. He even told me that it would

be better for me to stay at home and

just watch movies instead of going

to school.

I did not want to be HIV-positive

at the age of 20, or any other

age, for that matter. My youth was

distorted even before the orange

light came on. I had completed

high school a virgin and promised

myself and my mother to remain

pure until after marriage. However,

peer pressure got to me and I was

swayed by the hype among teenage

girls of, “I will break my virginity

on my first Valentine after school...”,

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BE FAMOUS. **daily NATION August 30, 2013**

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**ASK.COM has Jonathan Grimshaw**

**listed as the longest living**

**HIV-positive person as of 2013.**

**He tested positive for HIV in 1984.**

**After becoming infected he began**

**working as an Aids activist. Timothy**

**Brown, 46, became the first person**

**in history to be “cured” of HIV after**

**receiving a blood stem cell transplant**

**from a person resistant to**

**the virus, according to a report on**

**dailymail.co.uk**

alcohol in the wine was so little that

it would not affect me, that it was

just be like drinking soda.

So I agreed to drink some. After

some time, Dominic asked me to

accompany him to the balcony so

that we could have some privacy.

We got to talk and share a lot. I even

told him about my argument with

my father. He promised that he pay

for my tuition at a private university

and marry me. I was really excited,

thinking that I did not need to go

back home.

It was getting late and my parents

and siblings started calling

me on my phone. Dominic asked

me to switch it off as the ringing

was spoiling “the mood”. I obeyed

without hesitation.

Dominic was very good with

words. He began making passes at

me, which I innocently ignored at

first. I eventually gave in because

I thought it was fine as he was

going to be my husband as soon

as I turned 18. He was sweet, but

every time I tried to refuse anything

he suggested, he would shout

in mother tongue, which I did not

understand. I got emotional and

started crying and he called Russel.

He started explaining things to him

in mother tongue, which I could not

understand. He then left me with

Russel.

Russel was rather young compared

to Dominic and sweet. He

told me to be patient with Dominic,

that he had a bad day. He was eager

to tell me how good Dominic was,

all the nice things that a man would

say about his friend.

Dominic came back after about

half an hour and again they conversed

in mother tongue. Dominic

apologised, reminding me about all

the late night calls he had made to

me and asked me if I liked him. I

was not sure what to tell him, but

I was sure that I did not want to go

home. I reasoned with him and we

talked things over “like grown-ups”.

I looked in his eyes and thought I

saw love, a happy life, and a great

tomorrow written there. He told me

that all I had to do was give my true

love, my all, and we would be happy

together.

We went to bed and I was eager to

embark on this new adventure. Dominic

was sweet and did everything

to win my trust and confidence. He

told me that my virginity would

remain intact if he used a condom

and that all would be well. That

night I lost my innocence... and my

future.

**In so much trouble**

The following day we went to

Russel’s place. We found his brother

there and spent the day. In the

evening I took a walk with Russel.

I excitedly told him everything that

had happened, but he did not seem

to be happy. He took me to a chemist

and bought me contraceptive

pills, telling me, “You can never be

sure about the future.” We had a lot

of fun, watching movies and sleeping

that Sunday night. However,

Dominic seemed unwell, I thought

it was just a hangover. I felt like a

woman who was about to get married

to a noble and sweet man.

On Monday morning I switched

on my phone and found a number

of missed calls from my parents

and siblings. When my sister got

through, she scolded me and told

me that our mother was very worried.

I could not help but cry at my

sister’s words. I explained what was

happening to Dominic and he offered

to take me to the bus stage. I

was astounded. I thought he would

accompany me to my home to tell

my parents that he loves me and

wanted to marry me. Dominic escorted

me to the stage and did not

even bid me farewell the way I imagined

a person in love should.

I found my parents very angry

and hid in my bedroom for two

days to avoid them. When my father

finally decided to talk to me,

he said that was not the way people

resolved problems. I could not tell

anyone about Dominic because he

had not given me the go-ahead to

talk about our supposed newfound

love. I decided to quit my job and

think about my life.

Dominic did not call the whole

week to find out how his “love”

was doing. I decided to call him but

his phone was switched off. I was

heartbroken and decided to take up

a short course to occupy my mind.

I fell ill and when I went to hospital,

I was told that I had malaria. I took

the drugs prescribed and recovered.

Later, I got a sexually transmitted

infection and my lymph nodes were

swollen. I was too scared to go to

hospital, so I bought antibiotics

from a chemist without telling anyone

in my family. I decided to go for

testing and it turned out that I was

HIV-positive.

I do not like thinking about how

life has changed. It is too late and I

did not see it coming. I do not even

know what I was looking for, but

karma was quick to give me something

else.

Frustrations sometimes get the

better of me. My friends often say,

“*Heri ukimwi kuliko* ball”, but now I

know different, I know that sometimes

you do not appreciate what

you have until it is gone. Sometimes

at sleepovers, they ask why I

take medicine and I say that I have

a headache or an allergy. They ask

why I do not want to date. “Aren’t

you straight?” they ask. Sometimes

I try to hide the pain of not feeling

the love of my family, the feeling of

indifference, of being reminded that

I am growing skinny by my sister,

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Sometimes I feel like drinking

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Therefore, it is vital to choose to

live for ourselves, not for others, by

ending stigmatisation. What I know

is that it is not over until God says

it is over. I just have to be strong,

keep away from stress, exercise,

eat healthy, and take my meds on

time. I hope to live to see how my

children look like. My number one

wish is for the invention of a cure

for this disease.

This article is a first-person account

given by Millicent (not her real name),

a college student whose life turned

drastically unlike she had planned.

even though I had not found the

perfect person for me.

I have always been positive towards

life, ready to face the world.

So after my computer studies, I

took up a job as a secretary/office

messenger at a relative’s office.

The salary was not that much, but

I knew that you have to start somewhere.

My father was not happy because

he thought the job would prevent

me from continuing my studies.

He insisted that I quit, but I did not

want to just sit at home waiting to

join the university.

When I got my first salary, I was

really excited and decided to buy

something to take home. After

supper, my father asked me if I

had made up my mind about what

I wanted to study in college. I had

a passion for journalism but he did

not consider it a worthy career. I

refused to be coerced into taking

a course of his choice. That night

marked the turn of events at home.

My father got agitated and started

shouting at me angrily, even saying

that he would not pay my tuition

fees. I still remember his words,

“*Ata sitakulipia io* university *unataka*

*kuenda, utakaa hivyo tuone.”*

For a moment I thought I had

lost my father

completely. I

cried bitterly and

went to bed unusually

early, wondering

what to do next. I felt as if

my life had come to an end, that

my future had been shattered, and

that I would end up hopeless. I had

no one to talk to except my phone,

which I still consider to be my best

friend. I was almost turning 18 and

kept thinking that if he was not going

to pay my fees, then I had better

get a life.

The following day I woke up late

and did laundry in the afternoon.

I received a call from this guy,

Dominic (not his real name). I did

not know him well. He had got my

number from a high school mate.

He invited me out. He sounded

very promising. I thought he would

be my prince charming as I had

already fallen for his voice and the

way he spoke English. I got dressed

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and left, telling no one where I

was heading as I was sure that I

was never going back home. I felt

unwanted and without a future. I

thought this would be the beginning

of a new life. It sure was.

Dominic, accompanied by his

friend, Russel (also not his real

name), picked me up near my home.

He was not physically attractive,

but I did not want to go back home.

We had dinner at a restaurant, then

later went to his friend’s apartment

for soft drinks and to watch a movie

as we got to know each other. At

around 9pm, Francis, the owner of

the apartment, joined us. He suggested

that we drink beer instead,

but I declined as I had never taken

alcohol before. Dominic insisted

that there was special red wine in

the fridge just for me. I had never

drank wine before, but I knew from

the soap operas I watched on television

that it created that special

mood. Dominic told me that the alcohol in the wine was so little that

it would not affect me, that it was

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So I agreed to drink some. After

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