RED RIBBONS AND ROSES

STORIES AND POEMS
WRITTEN BY YOUNG PEOPLE
FROM ZVANDIRI
WITH SUPPORT WE STAND STRONG
Authors: Alice, Anesu, Arnold, Beatrice, Ezie, Farai, Keith, Kelvin, Kudzi, Lister, Maximina, Modest, Nomae, Phyllis, Samantha, Tanaka

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Project Coordination: Rumbidzai Chidora and Kate Iorpenda
Layout and Design: Baynham Goredema and the Zvandiri Youth
Email info@africaid-zvandiri.org | www.africaid-zvandiri.org
We are a group of young people living with HIV, aged 16 to 24 years, from Africaid’s Zvandiri programme. Like the millions of children and young people around the world who are living with HIV, we have struggled with sickness and sadness in our lives as we lost loved ones and learnt of our HIV status. But now with ARVs and the care we get from clinics and programmes like Zvandiri, we are learning to accept our HIV status and to look forward to our future.

As we think of this future, we too want to be able to enjoy happy relationships and families, just like our HIV negative peers. But this brings a new set of issues which we are now learning to cope with. Can we date and get married? How do we tell our partners that we are HIV positive? How do we protect our partners from HIV? Can we have children of our own and will they be infected with HIV? How do we talk about our sexuality? We know we are not the only youth with these questions, so we wanted to share this collection of our own stories and poems with you.

You will see that we have very different experiences on different issues but that we all share the common dream of happy, healthy, relationships and a family of our own.

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From the Zvandiri Youth
I found out my HIV status as a child and as I grew up, I came to accept my status. But as we are growing up, we HIV positive adolescents have new issues affecting us like dating. I have seen my peers getting into relationships and getting out of them for all sorts of reasons. Being HIV positive has caused me to think deeply about dating. For some of my peers it has worked for them, when they have disclosed their status to their partners, but will it work the same for me? How will I react if I get rejected in a relationship? Will I understand it?

Statements are always being made by religious leaders I trust that discourage me from getting into a relationship. I hear statements like “My dear sons, if you are not prayerful and wise you will not marry a girl who fears God, you will end up with a girl who has HIV, and what good will that be for you?

My wish is to get into a relationship with a guy who fears God, yet those who fear God are being told that the last thing they should do is marry someone who is HIV positive. I know in my support group that there are God fearing guys, but is the only option for me to date HIV positive guys?

For this reason, when I think about dating, I think “Ahh, I will deal with it later.” For me it is a non-starter.
When I see her, I stutter, I stumble, I freeze
When she looks, I smile with pretentious ease.
I win, I lose, I crash or soar
Like any other guy, my heart gets sore
I wonder too, like you, if she's the one
I smile, I cry, I laugh, I groan
At times I get it right,
At times I don’t
HIV doesn’t mean that I can’t wed
A red ribbon doesn't stop me singing ‘roses are red’
Growing up is something to look forward to for most young people. But for some of us, having to think of it brings pain...will I reach my destination? Who will I become? Who will want me? All these emotions and questions loaded in one soul.

Growing up as the “hospital baby” as they loved to call it, life was never easy, no one was willing to tell the truth about what I was suffering from. All I was told is that I had pneumonia. I grew up believing this and took my medication religiously up until one day during a support group meeting, I got to know of my status. I kept this to myself but the one thing that came in my mind was breaking up with my girlfriend because I was not ready to disclose. I knew very well that I could not handle the pain of being rejected because of my status.

I stayed in my shell for a while afraid to date and mingle with others. My friends urged me to get a girlfriend, but I did not want to. What was the point after all? Most of the young people are not well versed when it comes to issues to do with HIV. I don’t want to be a laughing stock. I decided to start dating girls with the same status as me but what I found was pain as there was nothing different portrayed in the behaviour of the positive and the negative girls. Girls are all the same...this got me back to square one! Who should I date? Does the status really matter or it’s the connection of the heart that we really should be looking at?
Should I tell him? Yes, I must tell him. That is what I am. I need to tell him the truth if he wants to marry me - that I was born with HIV. We all know that it's wrong to marry someone without revealing your status, so I have to disclose to him first before we marry each other. But how will he react?

I want to tell you my story. I fell in love with someone and at first, I was afraid to tell him my status, but as time went on, I asked myself – should I tell him? My heart told me – yes.

One day I had a special time with my boyfriend and I told him I was born with the HIV virus. At first, he did not accept it. He thought I was joking. The following day he called me and said “Baby, are you serious about the story you told me yesterday?” and I replied, “Yes I am serious”. He asked himself whether he should marry this girl who was HIV positive. He made his decision and my boyfriend told me that he was no longer interested in me and he told me that from today onwards please do not call me again. He shouted at me, “I cannot marry you with your status, you want to kill me with your HIV virus”.

He spoke many words, but I accepted it because I know one day my perfect partner will come. I told my best friend what my boyfriend did to me and she comforted me with words of love and care.
I have a loving and caring boyfriend. When we were dating, I was concerned about how he would react when he found out my status. What I feared most was to be rejected. Is my status important to him? That was the question that kept on ringing in my mind.

The answer came when I was strong and told him my status in 2010. I told him that there was something I wanted to tell him. At that moment there were tears running down my face. He asked me, “What is the problem?” That was when I told him that I was HIV positive. He said he loved me for who I am and that we would overcome this together and he encouraged me to be strong. At that moment I felt relieved.

Right now, we are still together. I want to prove people wrong who discourage us from dating HIV negative guys. They say we are from different worlds, but it only takes the understanding and sacrifice of one person.

In our support group we have young mothers and fathers who are discordant partners and they have HIV negative babies. That is what motivates me and gives me hope. With the support of my family, peers and Aunties from Zvandiri and Newlands clinic, I will conquer it all because the sky is the limit.

I encourage everybody out there to disclose their status to their partners, to build trustworthy and honest relationships.
I started dating when I was 18 but it was never easy to date knowing my status. I was shy and scared which led me to self-discriminate. But in a flash, I realised it was for me to choose whether to tell my girlfriend or not. I did, and it did not go well. My girlfriend ditched me, and I could not forgive myself. It was as if I was the one who had refused her.

But take this saying from me - “behind every good man there is a good woman” (who is willing to risk it all for you). I have now met the one who understands me. I didn’t know she was positive until she told me. Now I have the love of my life who I share ideas with. This means you should take time to study who you will disclose to before you fall in love.
When I was a young lady I used to tell myself that I couldn’t date people of the same age as they were too immature. Then my prayers, made in secret, were answered. I met a 30-year-old man who was loving in the first few months of our relationship. It was all rosy, he was caring, always made me smile and we forgot about everything in life but us. We dated for three and a half years, however the coin of life soon flipped to the other side. Each day we grew apart from each other emotionally, love turned to a battle field and we quarrelled more than loving each other.

Reality hit me when I went to the clinic to book for ANC and was tested HIV positive. I was 19 years old and I found out the hardest thing ever, how was I going to raise my child if I was sick with HIV? How was I going to give birth to an HIV positive child and how was my spouse going to take it on? I was confused, alone and afraid...who was I to confront him with this disheartening news? I drew all the courage in me and told him of both my pregnancy and my HIV status. I won’t forget the look in his eyes. He looked at me with eyes full of disgust and hate, without saying a word he left.

When he came back, he was hushed whenever he spoke to me. He told me that he didn’t want any children now. This guy is not serious, how can he ask me to abort my baby without even caring for my health? I encouraged him to go and conduct an HIV test in which he tested negative. I was patient, hoping that he’d change, and he did! After some months he changed and took full responsibility. I gave birth to a bouncing baby boy who was HIV negative but, he had lung complications which led to his death. I was heartbroken, hurting inside and always in tears after the loss of my child, thus also losing my boyfriend’s love in the process. We broke up. However, in June 2018 I started dating again after a long time.
I met Herbert who was the same age, loving and caring. Even though I was faced with the risk of being rejected after disclosing I jumped into a relationship with him.

One day I decided to disclose to him, with tears in my eyes I prepared myself for the worst but I was determined to tell him. I told him that it was over between us, he was confused, and he refused to break up with me without a valid explanation. I was stammering as I told him I was HIV positive. He quietly listened as I narrated my story to him. After telling him, he looked at me and told me that it was not a good reason for us not to date, for he loved me the way I am. I was happy and surprised to hear those words coming out of his mouth. We're still madly in love even though we are a discordant couple. My biggest fear I now have is to have a baby because I fear that history might repeat itself.
Here comes the day
The day everyone was looking forward to
Comes like a summer rain
But with sour pain
Red roses from lover to lover
Presents and parcels from darling to darling
Here and there, everyone is chatting and smiling

To me it was a day of lamentation
Full of darkness without any hope surfacing
My red rose turns to black
Its decorations were now destructive
My parcel was a dent which was left
Inside my innocent heart
It bubbles and boils in the blisters of my heart

My heart throbs each time
When I glance and pass through the spot
No human being perished on that spot
But my love
My relationship
My future vanished
And came to an end like bathing soap

The sooner the better
I thought it was the right time to disclose
Without knowing that it was the right time
To be dumped and left utterly amazed
To be in love with an HIV positive girl
Is like committing suicide
Digging my own grave

Turns out to be the one I lost
Tears may dry but memories never fade
To lose a lover on that lovely day
Was unbelievable and unrealistic
It was not red but black Valentine’s Day
Which was characterised by tears and sorrow.
When I was growing up, I always told myself that I want to be able to tell any guy I dated about my HIV status. Gee! That was a BIG LIE! Life is full of surprises and blissful packages. I dated four guys in my teenage years and with all four of them, we broke up at different intervals, but I always felt like they didn't deserve to be told. Then it happened that I met up with this fine dude and I felt like there was something about this guy that was so special and a story yet to be told.

We dated for two months and every time I got to see him my heart kept bleeding, like I was hiding something away from a person who loves and cares for me that much. I felt that this was the right guy and I said to myself “He is going to accept my condition no matter what”. I asked him to come over to my aunt's place and decided it was now time.

I told him it wasn't easy to say because it is an emotional story. I looked at him and said “Trymore, I was born with the HIV virus”. All he managed to do was to get hold of my hand, as I felt tears flowing down my cheeks with relief. Then do you know what he did? He gave me a warm and caring hug and told me it was OK and that no situation could ever change the way he felt for me.

I am the happiest girl in this whole entire world because of him. This happened on the 30th May 2010 and we are still dating now. He has never changed, and he loves me even more than before.

I am so blessed. We all are. I am also talking to YOU. It is high time that you decide whether it’s the right time to disclose. Ask yourself and you will get the answer. In my case something inside me just pushed me to do it and it was, and still is, the best thing. Trust me.
It all started when my father married another wife. He rejected me and my mother for this woman. I developed bitterness. My mother suffered a lot, she became very ill resulting in her becoming blind. I struggled to stay in school as I had to look after my mother and my siblings. When I was 14 my friends and I started running away from school, going to nightclubs to meet men who had money to buy us all sorts of things. I dropped out of school completely when I was 15 years old. My friends continued going to school so I found new friends who were much older and experienced. We made more money staying in the city, leaving my visually impaired mother with my siblings in poverty.

During all this time I stopped taking care of my mother. I did not take my ARV medication, I didn’t want to be seen taking them by my clients. Most of my clients were older than me and I felt shy to ask them to use protection. I developed an STI which slowed down my business for a while. I was given some herbs by some friends to try and treat my condition but it did not work. Eventually I had to move back home to my mother. I got really sick and was referred and accompanied by the CATS for treatment at the local clinic. The CATS also referred me to another organisation that worked with young women for further psychosocial support. My viral load was very high and they could not help me much. As a result they referred me to another clinic where I received counselling and was recommenced on ARVs. After some time I started feeling better and went back to the city as I needed the money.

Now I am 18 years old, I have learnt from my mistakes, I have become more responsible, adhering well to my medication and visiting my clinic religiously for my scheduled appointments. I have been empowered with the skills I need to negotiate condom use with my clients. I have to look after my mother, I cannot neglect her just like my father did, she needs me. I have learnt the importance of adherence, disclosure and acceptance.
Many youths are concerned about what their lives will become if they don't have children of their own. I myself had that question ever since I found out my HIV status. It always came into my mind whenever I thought about my future. I put my mind to rest the moment I found out about the resources and information that could answer my question.

Clinical trials are being conducted around the world by health institutes to find the best way for HIV positive people to have healthy children. They have done an amazing job researching treatment and prevention. They have carried out many studies comparing drugs, trying to find the ones which will work most effectively. All these efforts researching the prevention of mother to child transmission give us hope for a brighter future.

I can strongly say to you, yes, we can have children. We need to adhere to our treatment well. When we do, our viral load will go down, lowering our chances of transmitting the virus to our partners and our children. We need to be open with our partners and get help from clinics, so we know how best to protect our children from HIV.

I believe that all things are possible and so, there is nothing stopping us from having children. It only takes belief in ourselves and the confidence that we can do it and we can have a brighter future.
I got married two years ago and I was always worried about telling my wife my HIV status. I was confused and afraid to tell my family, too. But then my health deteriorated, and I asked the health workers to assist me. More than anything I was ashamed, embarrassed and afraid to tell my partner, since she had tested negative. With encouragement from the health workers, I was empowered to tell my wife, but I felt guilty. I asked her if she would accept me after I told her my status. My teardrops fell as I began to tell my story of how I was born positive. My wife accepted and encouraged me not to worry about it and she assured me that she still loved me.

After that I disclosed to my family and they accepted my status, as I needed support from them. Where there is acceptance and love it is possible to marry even if you are positive.
I could not believe it. I could not dream it, nor visualise it.
That a wedding ring would sparkle and shine
On my left finger

Knowing my status
I thought I would never make it
My wishes and hopes were erased
I eventually lost
My confidence
My dignity
And all my priorities

Let me celebrate at the top of my voice
Let me shed tears of joy
I have got it.
The wedding
Although others have got it,
Their meaning is different
Mine symbolises true love
This is my wedding
My family, friends and fellows
Could not believe it
Could not dream it
Nor visualise it
With God, everything is possible.
“Have self-control and do not indulge in pre-marital sex” I have been told. Despite the advice, I went on to indulge without really considering the effects of my actions. Having sex for me was a regrettable act, though I was neither forced or raped. The consequences I faced in the name of love taught me a big lesson.

My partner knew my status, but I wasn’t sure about his. He said that he had been tested and was negative. I couldn’t be sure, but I trusted him because he insisted. I was abused emotionally and psychologically, thinking I was in love. I didn’t realise that love was not jealousy, possessiveness, obsession and controlling behaviour. My partner followed me around, ignored my feelings and was very selfish. Hence, I suffered greatly and gave in to his pressure to have sex.

Birth control measures were not considered seriously. I didn’t intend to get pregnant, I trusted that condoms and the withdrawal method would turn out alright, and besides, I didn’t think my man would get me pregnant without my consent. I was very wrong, and he got me pregnant. How dumb and blind I was. But then again “Where you come from is just
where you come from. What really matters is where you are going.” A life lived productively and positively is a life well lived.

With a baby on the way my partner has left me, but I know I must focus on protecting my baby through the EMTCT programme. I have the right to a happy and fulfilling relationship, but I also have to protect my baby.

Remember, you are better for knowing your status so that you can get treatment and live a longer and healthier life. To avoid guilt and disappointment when it comes to sex, it is better to save sex for when you are married. To avoid sex, set limits and maintain them, avoiding tempting situations. Say no and mean it!
Going to the ANC clinic as a young mother there were so many expectations, so many questions, hopes for the future and feelings of disappointment. How did I end up here? How will I tell my family I am pregnant?

As I got into the nurse’s room, I felt like a huge stone hit my face. So, it’s true I am going to be a mother and I am just 19. We are going to have an HIV test she told me. This did not bother me, because my partner was healthy, “so I will be fine” I told myself. I waited patiently for the results. The nurse called me in and with a big sigh, she said the blood sample we took shows us that you have HIV. For a moment my world stood still. How was I going to say this to my family especially after all the investments that they had put in for me. They had already secured a place for me at the University. Will they still want to pay for me? Will they keep me at home?

It was a huge blow to my family, but they did not let go of me that easy. They said they were going to continue paying for my fees but for the father of my baby it was a different story. He started mocking me and did not want anything to do with me. All he said he wanted to deal with was the baby. How could he do this to me especially after wilfully infecting me. I was bitter and heartbroken, but he did not even take note of that. Later he got married to another girl. I was put on treatment and given protective medication for my baby. I gave birth to a bouncing HIV negative baby all thanks to the EMTCT programme!

I worked hard on my degree. I am now working on my master’s degree and looking forward to brighter days for my baby and maybe who knows I will again be the princess to wear the white dress! In short, my story is just beginning.
Of course! It’s my right to have children. I can have children if I get the right information and follow the right guidelines.

I am HIV positive, but my partner is HIV negative. We took medical advice when we wanted a child. This included taking my ARVs properly and using condoms until my viral load was undetectable. Then we suspended using protection on medical advice and my partner became pregnant. She gave birth to an HIV negative baby who brings joy into our lives and family.

It’s possible to have a family if you follow the right guidelines. Now I am a father of one child and am living happily with my partner and baby and they are still negative.
I am deaf and HIV positive. I have a 3-year-old daughter who is HIV negative. My husband is also deaf and HIV negative. We stay with my husband’s family, they support us very much. I was one of the lucky deaf people who became a CATS, helping other deaf children and their parents to understand the importance of adherence. I managed to take my medication well and this helped me to grow well, have a negative baby and stay strong.

With the information I had, I was able to make good decisions. After disclosing my HIV status to my husband’s family, they helped me to take my medication and they supported me a lot. When we go to the clinic my mother in-law is the one who communicates with the health care providers and she will explain to us in a way we both understand.

Before I married my husband I was in a relationship with another deaf guy. He wanted to marry me but his family heard about my HIV status and they told him it was a bad idea. The family said a lot of bad things about our relationship. I was heartbroken and thought I would never be able to have a family of my own. Today I am a happy, HIV positive mother, wife and daughter in-law. My lobola was paid and our traditional wedding was beautiful, and I received support from my family and friends. I look forward to having a white wedding soon. Currently I do bead work and volunteer in a deaf community organisation supporting women with life skills.
I thought nurses, doctors, care givers, family and support group leaders were annoying me on the issue of taking my treatment correctly. I always debated in my mind why I should take pills at the same time, twice a day. The importance was revealed to me when I started seeing a change in my health and it occurred to me that these people were not a nuisance but a blessing.

I was a person who had suffered much from this pandemic, I felt I had no future. Since birth the most common place I was to be found was the hospital, being treated for different kinds of diseases. I would spend one week at school and find myself in hospital the following week. When I least expected it, I suffered from leg sores. It got worse, to an extent where I could not walk for two years. My worst nightmares were that I could not go to school, play with friends or do anything for myself. All my fears were lost when I was first introduced to antiretroviral therapy. I could not believe the outcome I got from this treatment. The pain went away and I could walk again. My hope was restored, and I had something to look forward to in the future. As I took my treatment twice a day, at the same time, my health improved dramatically. I saw how important it was to adhere. I went to school, spent time with friends, started dating just like any other ordinary youth and went to many places I wanted to go.

In a nutshell, I am saying it is important to adhere, my dear sisters and brothers. Looking at what treatment has done for me, it will certainly do it for you if you adhere. I am living the life that I always dreamed of and you can too. When you adhere, it might result in you being admired. You can be a role model to another teenager; it only takes courage and being wise enough to know how to live your life healthily. You can have many riches in this world and have a beautiful family but you cannot enjoy these without having good health.

Why allow deteriorating health to stop us when we can reach for the sky?
Through adherence I am living the life I always wanted for myself. I know one day I will be happily married with children of my own. I can achieve those goals that can pave a way to a prosperous future and it can happen to you too if you believe in yourself and stay committed to taking your treatment correctly. Together let’s take adherence for a ride to the moon. If we do not reach the moon, at least we will land on the stars.
A drenalin kicked in, emotions flooded my broken heart and there was nothing I could do to change it- but just go with the flow of pain. Every part of my body ached like one hit by a fifteen-tonne vehicle carrying sand. She had left my life and this time for good. It's funny when a guy is in tears especially tears of being dumped, tears one cannot share with family or friends but with thy soul only. Suicidal thoughts graced my numb mind, giving me an easy way out. Only the soul was against such thoughts but the body- yes, the heart was embracing death as a better remedy for the life of mine which seemed close to a drastic end.

It has been six years I have known Hazel. She was a Greek goddess, well-built, complimented with a sweet voice and angelic smile which weakened my knees whenever I told her a joke. That was the only way I could be close to her, just to park at friend-zone area as I was scared to ask her out. How can I ask her out, my God…? How was I to bring myself to disclose my HIV status to her? Impossible it seemed. It was April when I met her, after staying three years without keeping in touch. I couldn't believe my eyes she had grown to be extremely gorgeous. We ran to each other the moment we saw each other, hugged and am sure she shed one or two tears of happiness, so I tell myself.

The joy I felt of seeing her on her return from South Africa compared to nothing else on earth. Like always we started spending time together, three months down the line I proposed to her, hands shaking as I typed the forbidden words “I love you so much Hazzie. For the past six years I have been meaning to tell you but I couldn't bring myself to do so.”

To tell you the truth it wasn’t hard at all, she told me she felt the same way, but it was difficult for her to make the first move. She was coming out of a 2-year relationship with her ex-boyfriend and she feared being heartbroken once again. Guilt had the better of me, do I tell her or not? God-forbid, I wasn't going to blow up this dream of a life-time just because of living with a condition... never!!!!
We dated for seven months, we were the couple who inspired many young people in our community. People envied our relationship, walking on the streets hand in hand and we did everything together. But behind all the glitz and glamour lay a dark secret that was going to shatter this perfect couple to pieces. I was unable to bring myself to disclose my HIV status to Hazel, but someone out there already knew my secret. An anonymous person called her and told her about my status without my consent. She called me and told me it was over.

I tried to explain myself to her, but I was the last person she wanted to see. It was useless for me to try to chase after her since I was now the enemy number one of her love-state. I hid myself from everyone, I was ashamed to be seen walking alone without my Hazel. I thought everyone now knew my status. After talking to my counsellor, he advised me to accept that it was over and to learn from it. It was not the end of the world for me, I had a bright future to live for and a lover waiting to accept me AS I AM.
Young, HIV positive and gay - surrounded by these three difficult elements has never been easy. I try so much to hide who I am but it’s not even working for my good as I experience depression daily. I want to be in a relationship, my partner should know that I am HIV positive and at the same time I must adhere well to my HIV medicine. It’s so sad and it hurts so much.

I had casual sex with a person of the same sex. When we were done I noticed that the condom broke. The guy told me not to worry as he was taking Truvada as Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis. I felt so relieved and I did not bother myself to get access to Post-Exposure Prophylaxis.

Days and time moved effortlessly like sand in the river. It had been 12 months without having sex as I was worried. I decided to get an HIV test and I tested positive, my viral load was very high; I could not believe what the nurse told me. It was difficult for me to tell people about my HIV status as I was not ready to respond to the obviously asked question, ‘How did you get it?’

I felt so depressed, various thoughts came in my mind. I thought of taking my life so that I wouldn’t struggle to answer all the questions which people might ask me when they know that I am HIV positive. As a person who grew up in a Christian family I worried that people will know that I had sex before marriage which is unacceptable.

I managed to open up about my HIV status to a person from Africaid who took her time to make me understand and she told me that I am still the same person, and nothing has changed in me. At that time, I did not want her to know that I was that person who has feelings for people of the same sex. It took me time to open up about my sexuality but I have received a lot of support despite my HIV status and my sexuality which is not easy, especially in Zimbabwe.
Notwithstanding the support which I am receiving from Zvandiri, there is still a lot which needs to be done in the health service delivery system so that young gay people can have access to sexual and reproductive health and relevant HIV testing services without being judged. Sometimes we smile outside but inside we will be soaked in depression and let other diseases grow within us because of fear of being judged by the people who are supposed to be helping us to get better.

To my peers who are in the same situation as me, it is important to adhere well to your ARV medicine, share your experience with people you trust and those who give you good advice like I did. It is good to wait to get into a relationship until you fully understand your HIV positive status, the treatment you are taking and have a suppressed viral load. When you want to be in a relationship, get advice from the people you trust on how you can disclose your HIV status to your partner and make him understand more about being HIV positive and measures which can be taken so that he can maintain his HIV status.

My wish is to be in a long lasting relationship with a HIV negative person or someone like me!
They say good things come to those who wait, indeed you wait and keep positive energies for things to happen in your life. My disclosure story has been one blessing after another, I have never walked through thorns but only a bed of red roses that brings smiles to my face. It all started about 5 years ago when we were just friends. I had met somebody who I called a friend, who understood me, who I laughed with and could tell anything to. We were so close that in the journey of our friendship I decided to tell him about my HIV status. I wasn’t afraid of what he would do or say because I already knew he was a true friend. He wasn’t shocked but rather encouraged me to stay positive and he said he admired the boldness and confidence that I had to be able to tell a ‘friend’ about a such sensitive thing. Well, I just had to because he was someone I could trust.

After some time, he started developing feelings for me. It so happened that I felt the same. We dated for two more years and in the third year he proposed, we got engaged and got married!! My dreams were all coming true, I’m grateful because I told myself that HIV will never bring me down in my life and truly not even a single day have I come across negativity. I empowered myself to say nobody would ever put me down because of my HIV status.

My husband decided on his own to tell his mother, my mother in-law about my HIV status. He did it before we got engaged. I only
found out he had told her before we got married. He knew I would not mind if anybody knew about it and so he told her. She has always been that kindest, sweetest, joyful, glorious mother to me, more than anyone could ask for. From the very day I met her until this very day she has been one of those women who are just beautiful souls. She initiated a conversation after I got married, asking how I felt when I found out my status, how I feel now and how I became the person I am living with HIV? We have deep conversations not only about HIV but also about life in general. I prayed for an understanding loving husband and husband’s family and I got it.

My advice to others would be to remember it all begins with being honest with ourselves, accepting our HIV, loving ourselves and having a positive mindset. We need to have self-confidence to know we can do anything we want. HIV can never limit or stop me from seeing the good things in my life. As the bible says in John 9 verse 1 to 3, ‘Believe in yourself and nothing will ever fail’.