Death by Disclosure

Doing “the right thing” did Amanda in

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To tell or not to tell? If what happened to Amanda Carlson-Bey is any indication, HIVers seeking to avoid criminal prosecution for not disclosing to lovers may want to think twice. Once his fingerprints were found at the crime scene last October, security guard Michael Charles Stewart, 23, of St. Paul, Minnesota, admitted to fatally stabbing his ex, Amanda Carlson-Bey, and their 2-year-old son, Jereau, after a fight in which he “went into a rage.” The cause? Finding out she had HIV. Carlson-Bey, 21, was five months’ pregnant.

But Bobbie Carlson, Amanda’s mom, doesn’t buy the “HIV made me do it” excuse. She said her daughter was “very open” about her HIV; besides, “If it was because of Amanda’s diagnosis, why would he kill Jereau, who was HIV negative? Stewart’s using HIV as an excuse, so he can sway the jury.” (It could decide that the multiple stabbings were crimes of passion, and bump three counts of second-degree murder down to manslaughter.) “I think it was about child support,” she added. “Why would an argument over money get that heated?” countered Stewart’s sister, Rachel. “I don’t think he knew she had HIV until he went over there that day.” Stewart, whose serostatus is not known, pleaded not guilty. If convicted, he faces life in prison.

“The real tragedy is that Amanda was doing what she was supposed to do by disclosing,” said Minnesota AIDS Project’s Lorraine Teele. “As a result of domestic violence and HIV fear, she was killed for it.” Worse, she added, the press bought into Stewart’s story: “The media implied that murder is a natural reaction to HIV disclosure. One reporter asked me how often people kill the one who infected them. As if that happens often enough to keep statistics!”

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