Ladies First

All of Us, a new film about the plight of black women and HIV in the United States

November 1, 2008 By Kellee Terrell

When Emily Abt, a Columbia University film student, and Mehret Mandefro, a Harvard medical student, first met in London as Fulbright Fellows, they clicked instantly; both share a passion for social change and feminism. Mandefro returned to the United States to start a residency at a hospital in a South Bronx neighborhood. When she saw how HIV was ravaging black women, she called Abt, and the duo reunited to make a documentary that chronicles two HIV-positive women—Chevelle and Tara. *POZ* chats with director Emily Abt about the filmmakers' mission of uncovering why the rates of HIV are so high among black women in America.

Does the film's title have any special significance?
People have asked me why as a white woman would I make a film about AIDS and black women. I am really offended by that, because this disease is everyone's problem. So we named the film All of Us because these issues are universal.

What factors may explain the high prevalence of HIV among black women?
We saw a strong connection between domestic violence and the likelihood of being diagnosed. We also saw connections between drug abuse, incarceration rates, lack of black men in the community and lack of black women having health insurance.

Was it difficult for the women to open up on camera?
There were some false starts from people who initially expressed enthusiasm and then pulled back. But then we found Chevelle and Tara, and they were so open and willing. Chevelle says that being in the film was an amazing opportunity for her to break the silence around the issue within her community.

Learn more at allofusthemovie.com

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