Fifteen Candles

Noah Murphy worried about meeting girls—until he went off to camp.

January 1, 2008 By Noah Murphy

Hello, I'm Noah! I'm 15 and I live in Toronto, Canada. I am excited to write this article, as it gives me a voice and a feeling of empowerment over something I often have little power over. I have full-blown AIDS. I got it from my mother when I was born, and I've known I've had it since I was 7. When I was younger I struggled with Pneumocystis pneumonia (PCP), parasites, bronchiectasis, asthma and, of course, the obligatory swollen liver and spleen.

When I was 3, my mother was admitted for palliative care, and I went into foster care. This was in the mid-'90s, when most people were even more freaked out about HIV/AIDS. Child protective services had to make hundreds of calls to find a foster family that would take me. I was scared. But my newfound family were very kind to me, and soon I was my happy-go-lucky self again. They developed a close friendship with my mom in her final months. She died knowing that I was with people who loved me and would be there for me for the rest of my life.

My viral load when my mother died was 1 million, but now, thanks to the meds I am lucky enough to take, it hovers under 500. To the outside world, I think, I appear to be a healthy teen. I enjoy most of the activities my friends enjoy. In fact, despite my health issues, I live a relatively normal life. I have a wonderful family and have great friends who know my status and support me entirely. So do my many brothers and sisters, most of whom are also adopted.

When I first told my friends I was positive, they were filled with sadness and sympathy, not fear. Maybe that's because they had a very limited understanding of AIDS. One of my friends even said, "So what? I'm lactose intolerant!"

Yup—very similar.

They began to research AIDS and tell me things even I didn't know. It means a lot that they are thinking about me. Twenty years ago, the public had little information about AIDS, so people reacted out of fear. Sometimes I worry this could happen again—that people could just make assumptions about me and HIV, instead of taking the time to find out the facts. I have also worried that I won't be able to find a wife who understands my condition—or that I won't live long enough to get that opportunity. Finding a wife may not be too much of a concern, though, because I happen to be a chick magnet! (Smile.) Every summer, I go to a camp for children with HIV/AIDS,

and I can’t keep the girls away! I even met my first girlfriend at the camp; solves the problem of “How soon do I disclose?” My adopted little sister, who also has AIDS, is already thinking about boyfriends—and she’s only 9! I worry about her more than myself, because she has had two cardiac arrests and was in a coma for a long time. Because she was born addicted to crack, she is also kind of hyper. But when she flashes those blue eyes at you and tosses her hair back with her hands on her hips, watch out. We attend the same clinic appointments and take our meds together. I hold her hand when she has blood work done. It is nice to have others to go through this with.

With all the medical improvements out there, I think a cure will be found in my time. However, I always do my part—by sticking to my medication regimen. I hope my story will inspire other positive kids to do the same.

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