Sowing the Seeds of Love

December 19, 2012 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

Inviolata Mmbwavi inspires me. As a girl, Inviolata helped plant a tree in Kenya as part of its Green Belt Movement. At the time, planting trees was considered an appropriate activity for boys only, not girls. Testing HIV positive at the age of 19 fueled her activism, especially on behalf of human rights for women and children. Much like that tree she planted as a girl, her activism keeps growing.

Her biggest challenge yet comes in March when she faces election to become a member of the Kenyan Parliament. Read our Q&A with her here. Advancing human rights for women helps women, of course, but it also helps society as a whole. The more women are empowered, the more they can control their HIV risk. Win or lose, her courage and determination are undeniable.

Planting a seed is not only an act of faith—it's an act of love. The three couples who share their love stories in Heart to Heart show us the virtues of patience and persistence. Both partners in each couple are HIV positive.

How do these couples make it work? What role does the virus play in their relationships and health? Nathaniel and Linda Scruggs (our cover couple), Mark de Solla Price and Vinny S. Allegrini, and Scott and Cindy Daly get to the heart of the matter.

Although relationships can provide us with shelter from the harsh realities of life, sometimes relationships can be the source of that pain. Such was the case for Brandon Kennedy. He let his guard down, believing his now former boyfriend was HIV negative. Unfortunately, he was wrong—and far from alone among his fellow young black men who have sex with men (MSM).

If the proverbial house is on fire when it comes to the HIV epidemic, then young black MSM find themselves directly in the flames. In addition to battling the virus, young black MSM also have to fight stigma from other gay and bisexual men and the black community. Myths about black MSM drive that stigma. Read more about Brandon and how studies presented at the XIX International AIDS Conference dispel the myths.

I can relate to Brandon. My late boyfriend didn't disclose he was HIV positive before I let my guard down. I was able to forgive him by realizing that I also was responsible for contracting the virus. As Brandon says, "I take my fair share of the 50 percent of it."

Despite my personal pain from that relationship, I never gave up on love. I hope none of you ever do. Happy Valentine’s Day!

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