

Yaliyopita Si Ndwele (*Life goes on*)

Living positively with HIV and AIDS in Tanzania

An excerpt

Vumilia Omar

I was afraid to get my answer after getting test for HIV/AIDS in 1995 at Muhimbili Hospital. The reality made me hide for months, I was pregnant. I had to admit to the truth.

After having the baby I was advised not to breastfeed, something which made my husband ask many questions. I had not yet told him about the situation I faced. It was very difficult for me to tell him the truth.

When I finally decided to tell him, he became furious. He wanted to know where I got HIV/AIDS. I tried to make him understand but I failed. That was the beginning of complaints in my house and it was the end of almost everything else with him, including sleeping and eating together. He didn't want to look after me or our children, we had three by that time. Everything became very hard for me.

One evening when he came home he found me sick. He got angry, wanted me to put on my clothes and pack everything, he wanted to send me back home. We had an argument and he even used force to try to push me out. He failed but then he left, leaving notice that when he came back, he didn't want to find me or my children around in his house.

I could not believe what was happening. After getting advice from the neighbours I decided to go to the police station to file a report. When I got back home late I found that he had packed all our things and left, leaving the house empty. I didn't know where he could have gone, I was left there with my children with no where to go.

I had so many emotions after my husband ran away from me. I got good advice from counsellors, who helped me to forget all my pain. I started to see things more clearly.

One problem remained, how was I going to answer all the questions from my children? By that time one was five and the other 10 years old. They wanted to know why their father didn't come home. I didn't want to tell them everything, they were still too young.

As they grew up, I started to educate them about HIV and AIDS until I was confident that they had an understanding of what it is. Then I decide to tell them the whole truth, including my HIV positive status.

They did understand. They feel sympathy for me when they see me tired. More than anything they have been so helpful to me in many situations at home. Now they have become HIV and AIDS advocates, informing others.

My neighbours have a different attitude to me. Some of them have said some sore words like “we were counting the days that you would die this week, next month or next year, but its surprising, years are passing through and yet you are still alive with good health”.

From when my husband left me I have been going on my business of selling tomatoes. I buy them from Iringa and resell at Kariakoo market in Dar-es-Salaam. I thank God for the business; it has been helpful to me. I managed to get enough money to go through my life with my two children Kassim and Salum. My third child died in 2001.

After my husband run away from me things were tough. My children were stopped from going to school just because I did not have money to pay for their school fees and other school contributions. They had to stay at home for almost two years till I manage to get assistance.

I thank God, that after facing many problems with me, my children know how to value the importance of education, and their health and lives. My children give me hope, now I am living with hope. I use more and more of my time to educate people on HIV and AIDS and give advice to youth and other members of society about living positively and how to live with hope.

I got lucky to be given a special column page in FEMINA HIP magazine. This is another great opportunity for me to talk about my experiences and deliver my message while educating our community. Somehow, with the magazine I got famous. I'm known to many youth and adults now. These day's people everywhere ask me things about HIV and AIDS. They do it anywhere, even when I'm walking on the road people come up to me. I'm feeling very happy to share what I understand with them. This is my contribution in the big battle against AIDS.