

Interviewing Marco Gomes



“The day I found my status became one of the toughest days of my life. However, my family and friends were very supportive and I am now doing the things I have always wanted to do, living a much healthier life and looking after my body. Being positive has changed me into the person I am proud of” says 26 year-old Marco from Canada while he relives the last four years of his life living positively.

How I got infected – My ex-boyfriend infected me. I was in love when we decided to engage in intercourse without a condom. I went along with it despite being fully aware of the consequences that could arise from this action. However, I trusted that he was not infected and honestly believed that he loved me enough to confide in me if he was infected. I later found out that he lied to me and had intentionally infected me. I became very sick for several weeks and just slept all day with fevers. I could not eat since my glands were blocking my passage. I had a hard time standing up and stopped participating in daily activities. At one point I stopped breathing and was rushed to the hospital where they did a lot of tests but did not discover anything serious. Their only response was that my white blood cells were very low and that it could mean that I have leukemia, but they were not certain. I finally went to see my family doctor where he decided to perform an HIV test. I discovered of my status a day before Easter, April 20, 2004.

How I felt about my diagnosis – The day I found out my status became one of the toughest days in my life. Everything turned into anger and frustration. I could not believe what was happening and that it could not be true, how!? The doctor consoled me by telling me that he was sorry but it's not a death sentence. I responded by saying, “you are right and that I am thankful”, but at that time I felt like I had no energy left. I knew that my thinking had to change because I needed to be strong for what was about to come my way. I needed to let my ex-boyfriend and my family members know about my status. It was my duty to protect others, including my ex. I can still feel the pain of that Sunday when the entire family gathered to celebrate a joyous occasion and the only thing that came to my mind was how I could face them with my positive status.

Personal Reaction and Reaction from Family and Friends – The first family member I told was my oldest cousin. At first, he was very angry but then he told me that he accepts me and will support me all the way. I told my mom while we were cooking. I was crying so much that she guessed something was wrong. The rest of the family was told in a family dinner a few weeks later. I am very lucky to have a very religious and cultural family, who understand love and family values. They were thankful that I shared a private and painful discovery. I believe that a person's status should be shared with those that he/she is comfortable with. In my case, my entire family and most of my friends know about my status and have been very supportive.

Living Positively – Having a balanced life is the key to controlling you and the virus. Another tip that has worked for me is to continue to have fun and enjoy life without completely focusing on HIV/AIDS issues all the time. I also take vitamins and herbal medicine for good health. Being positive has not changed me too much and I do not think it will ever. Things that have changed are that I am much healthier in my food intake and I work out and pay attention to my body much more. I love life much more. I have a great lifestyle right now and advocate for HIV/AIDS. I have an amazing family, friends and a job that I love. I am in school part-time and majoring in Marketing and the non-profit sector, so that one day I can involve my passion and advocacy together. I am a lot more satisfied with myself now than before I was infected. Being positive has

changed me into the person that I am proud of. I am currently not, and have never been, on ARVs.

Life and Aspirations – My greatest ambition is to be happy and get married with the man that I love. I believe that my being positive will not stop me from realizing this dream. If it does then I will still be happy with myself and my work. There is nothing that I wished I was doing before I tested positive that I cannot do now. I want to be remembered for my love of life, my passion for issues that face humanity and for my humor. I also believe that every person is a role model in him/herself. If I were to choose one person, my role model would be Stephen Lewis because of his commitment towards HIV/AIDS in Africa.

Facing Stigma – This past year my doctor requested that I get some blood tests done at the clinic. At the lab, I showed the nurse a clinical requisition that was signed by my doctor. She found out that I was HIV+ and refused to draw my blood. I decided to take action against refusing services especially since she worked in the Health industry and there are regulations against this. I approached the HIV/AIDS Legal Clinic in Ontario (HALCO) and it was decided that this case would be addressed to the College Of Nurses of Ontario.

Halting the Virus – I think the way we can halt the spread of the virus is by showing the true face of HIV/AIDS and what it does to an individual not only physically and emotionally, but also socially. We need to focus our attention on youth and need to let them know that having fun is not a bad thing, but that there are ways they can protect themselves and their partners from HIV/AIDS. They should have the liberty to get a condom without being questioned and we should provide information that will educate them. Youth need to get involved and should be given proper training and opportunities needed since young people are the best peer educators for themselves. I think that the best thing stakeholders can do is provide funding for access to information, education and services that will improve and bring opportunities.

Advice for Other Young People – I think that youth should do what they think is right for them and their safety. Many young people do not tell their status for safety or stigma concerns. I really believe that you need to accept your HIV/AIDS status to live well and to be happy with yourself. My advice to other youth that are living positively and cannot disclose their status, due to depression, fear of stigmatization and so on is to seek help. There are many non-profit organizations that offer counseling and programs that connect you with other youth that are infected with the virus. It provides a ground to share your feelings and concerns while learning from each other. Another advice is to accept your status and not ignore it. Deal with your problems; do not run away from them. Accept life and its destiny.