

Providing culturally appropriate services



Sub-Saharan African Youth & Family Services in Minnesota (SAYFSM) provides culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate HIV/AIDS education and social services to all Africans in Minnesota.



Mbiu



A newsletter of SAYFSM

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Part 2 of Solomon's story: There Is Life after HIV

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Living with HIV since 1997

Solomon Berhe of Ethiopia tested HIV-positive at the age of 31. In this second part of his story, he assures others who are living with HIV that they can live full lives and even fall in love, get married, and have children.

Read Solomon's story on ages 5 - 6 . . .

**From
Consulting
Editor
Swallehe Msuya**



Parents, Talk to Your Children about HIV/AIDS

Mothers should talk to their daughters.
Fathers should talk to their sons.

Our children must be taught that unprotected sex before marriage may lead to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. They must be told that HIV has no cure or vaccine and unless they take deliberate steps to stay free from HIV, any one of them can be infected. When our children grow up and are about to choose their life partners, we should guide them to make proper choices before marriage. We should encourage our children to get tested for HIV, and if they test positive, we should assist them in getting life-prolonging therapy.

Parents must strive to learn as much as they can about how HIV is spread and pass on this information to their children. Parents must stop being shy and act responsibly if they are to avoid the misery of burying their loved children prematurely. Resources are available and can be accessed free for those without money.

If parents resolve that there shall not be any new HIV/AIDS cases in our community, then we shall have embarked on the road to eradicating this disease.



Parents, unite to stop deaths
from HIV/AIDS!

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW IF YOU ARE HIV-POSITIVE

- If you are HIV-positive, you are to maintain your regular doses of anti-HIV drugs. Some people quit taking drugs or skip scheduled doses when they begin to feel good. This is risky because without HIV drugs in your system, the virus may mutate and reproduce itself in the millions and become resistant to the drugs when you resume taking them.
- HIV drugs do not prevent you from spreading the virus to others through sexual contact, by sharing needles, or by mothers breast-feeding their infants.
- If you are HIV-positive and are considering getting pregnant, seek the advice of your doctor to minimize the risk of passing on the virus to your baby.
- You may have faith in some “traditional healing medicine,” but before you switch from the dose prescribed by your health provider to an alternative, discuss your intentions with your doctor so that he/she can determine a good therapy plan for you.
- Eat nutritious foods (fruits, vegetables, proteins, grains, dairy, low fats) and take vitamins and mineral supplements.
- Avoid tobacco, caffeine, alcohol, and other drugs.
- Avoid exposing your body to infections. Infections will weaken your immune system:
 - Stay in a clean environment.
 - Avoid staying near people who have the flu, a cold, or other infection that is easy to catch.
 - Avoid unsafe sex and sharing needles.



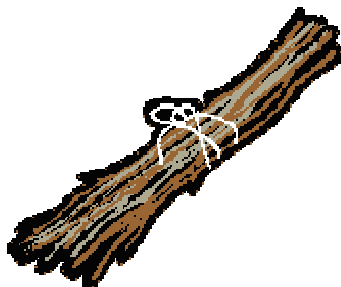
**Message from
Kenyan Community
Leader
Paul Morande**

HIV/AIDS, as we all know, poses a threat to our families, communities, and the nation. Some in our communities have succumbed to this deadly scourge in the face of incredible stigma and enormous suffering over years. To those who suffer with HIV/AIDS, it is our responsibility as a community to offer our support and love. As is the case with other diseases, early detection by a health care provider is key to fighting this epidemic. Earlier detection ensures a timely start of treatment with doctor-prescribed medication to control the severity of the symptoms and decrease morbidity.

In an effort to fight and control the spread of HIV/AIDS in our communities, it is important for everyone to know his or her status. To those infected and affected by HIV, the community needs to respond with care and compassion, crossing the boundaries of fear and prejudice. Our service to the suffering humanity demands that we confront misconceptions about HIV/AIDS head on and stamp out destructive attitudes such as judgment and social stigma and the fear of being labeled and ostracized.

Mr. Morande is chairman of Nyagetinge Umoja, a community-based organization in the Twin Cities that serves Kenyans in Minnesota. The agency is actively involved in promoting HIV awareness and educating the Kenyan community about the disease.

**One hand
alone can't
tie a
bundle!**



A PARABLE

In ancient times, when each of man's limbs and organs did not work together as peacefully as they do these days and each had a will of its own, a struggle occurred. The limbs and organs began to criticize Stomach for enjoying a life of idleness and luxury. "We spend all our time working to feed Stomach while he does nothing for us. Why should we do all the work?" they complained. "Let stomach find his own food."

So the limbs and organs cut off Stomach's supplies. Hands no longer carried food to Mouth, Teeth no longer chewed, and Throat no longer swallowed. They had not followed this scheme for starving Stomach for very long when they all began, one by one, to fail, and the whole body became weak and struggled to live.

Then the limbs and organs realized that Stomach, as useless as he had seemed to them, had an important function. The rest of the body could no more do without Stomach than he could do without them. If they wanted to keep the whole body in a healthy state, they had to work together, each to his or her individual talent, for the greater good of all.

**Moral: Only by working
together can we defeat
HIV/AIDS!**



CLAIMING YOUR RIGHT TO WELLNESS!

By Dr. BraVada
Garrett-Akinsanya

I recently read an article about a thirty-two year old Ugandan woman who tested HIV-positive after her husband died of AIDS. Apparently, before he died, he routinely beat her and forced her to engage in sexual contact with him without the use of a condom. The article pointed out that as a result of violence (or a fear of violence) many women are unable to protect themselves from contracting the disease.

As I read the article, it occurred to me that many cultures teach women that being a good wife means that we must obey our husbands and never deny his sexual advances. Likewise, in many cultures “real men” are taught that they should not have to “negotiate” sexual partnerships. Rather, men are taught that their job is to be “in charge” of their wives and children, and they are discouraged from being a partner with them. Violence is big problem that occurs when men or women are shamed, angry, or hurt. It happens so often that we think that it is a normal part of life. But, violence is NOT an African value. African tradition has always been based on the value of men, women, and children working together (with different jobs and roles in the family).

Violence is generally the result of uncontrolled abuses of power and trauma. Traumas of war and poverty have often left African people thinking that our bodies do not belong to us. Sadly, because of the violence experienced through processes of colonialism, war, and slavery many of us have inter-

nalized the inaccurate belief that others have more control in determining our survival than we do. For example, as immigrants and refugees, “others” may have been in charge of whether we would be granted asylum or a safe place to live as we struggled to escape countries ravaged with war and poverty. Even then, “others” determined what we would wear or eat. Yet, despite life circumstances and conditions, each of us was created from the same source—and wellness is the right of every single human being on this planet!

Wellness is also a community right. As African people we have the right to break the shackles of our conquerors, slave masters, and abusers to claim a victory of wellness. We have the right to break the patterns of poor health and poor health habits. Despite HIV+ status, AIDS, or other disease conditions, we have not only the right, but the

“... embrace the
power of wellness
and life!”

obligation to love ourselves! Loving ourselves does not mean that we stop loving others—it just means that we recognize that we did not create ourselves. In some religions, our bodies are considered “temples” of God and, thus, loving ourselves means that we really consider our bodies to be sacred reflections of our elders and ancestors as well as our Creator. African men and women must learn to honor our existence by accessing the power of *Kujichagulia* (the Swahili word for self-determination). We must realize that we are in charge of what we do with our bodies. While we may not be the ones who caused our problems, we are the ones who are responsible for eradicating them now. By choosing to live our best, most healthy lives, we make each day a new opportunity to **release the pain** of sickness and death in order to **embrace the power** of wellness and life!

BraVada Garrett-Akinsanya, Ph.D., LP, is a licensed psychologist with Brakins Consulting & Psychological Services. She offers counseling for individuals affected and infected by HIV+ disease. Counseling for individuals, families, or couples is available for people with or without insurance. Appointments can be scheduled by calling 612-302-3140.

Living with HIV

By Solomon Berhe

In August 2004 Solomon Berhe visited the SAYFSM office and agreed to be interviewed for Mbiu. Here is the second part of his story:

AFRAID OF REJECTION

When I was first diagnosed with HIV, I lived under severe fear, constantly thinking: What if so and so finds out that I am positive? I was afraid of rejection by family and friends, being left alone, having to withstand their condemnations and judgments. All kinds of thoughts tortured me. To tell you the truth, the secrecy affected me more than the disease. After I spoke out I got relief from all these tortures. I felt free. Many of my old friends left me, but I made new friends who love me and care about me for who I am regardless of my HIV status.

I HAD A GIRLFRIEND

I was afraid to tell my girlfriend that I was infected with HIV. For ten days I kept my status a secret from her, but I knew that I could not go on hiding the truth. I asked her to get tested, which she did, and I was so happy that she was negative. Now I never enter into a relationship without informing my partner of my status and using protection. I am not shy to disclose my condition to anyone anymore. I have learned that living in denial brings other problems: depression, loneliness, and stress, and it can result in infecting others knowingly.

MAKE WISE CHOICES

A lot of people with HIV/AIDS turn to alcohol and gambling. But these are not solutions. Drinking can lead to unprotected sex, and gambling will lead to frustration, which affects our health. As an HIV patient, I know my health is fragile

and I have to take care of myself and avoid activities that may wear me down. So to all my friends living with HIV/AIDS – brothers and sisters, think about what is most important to you and make wise choices.

A choice I have made is to take personal responsibility. I no longer say: Who gave me this disease? Who infected me knowingly? I know nobody wants to say this, but check this out – I have nobody else to blame except myself. I should have taken care of myself, protected myself. Nobody forced me into a relationship. It was my choice at the time. I made wrong choices, so why blame others? Now I focus on acceptance, prayer, treatment, and living positively and healthy. My self-esteem is high and I want to do as much as I can for my people as long as I live. Most important, I am determined that my HIV stops with me forever.

Another choice I have made is to consult my doctor closely about my health and take my medication regularly. A couple of times I took myself off medication because my viral load was undetectable and I felt great. Now I know that going off medication was wrong as my viral load went right up. Therefore I will never again stop my medication without consulting my doctor. Treatment is good in America and I thank God that I live in this country. If I was in my country, I could have died a long time ago.

“. . . I am determined that my HIV stops with me forever.”

REACHING OUT

I reach out to all people who come from Ethiopia, including Amhara, Oromo, Tigre, Gurage, Walaita, and all other ethnic groups, and use every means I can in order to save lives. I want to bring people together to fight the spread of HIV and to increase HIV awareness. We must work for this common goal because we have a common problem: AIDS. What really matters the most should not be who is who, but saving

lives while we can. We must spread the prevention message, as well as hope and encouragement to our brothers and sisters living with HIV.

“MATCHMAKING”

Many from all over the world have contacted me to offer encouragement and support and to tell their stories.

“... (HIV-positive) couples have fallen in love and gotten married.”

I am very pleased that some have decided to dis-

close their status. Some were not receiving treatment but now they are. Some are forming intimate relationships, which they thought they could never have after being infected with HIV. More and more people are asking me to help them find a partner. This “matchmaking” is very necessary as many who act responsibly struggle with loneliness and sadness, believing they will have to go through life without a partner. I have brought together men and women who live in different states. After getting their permission, I connect them over the phone, and we have a three-way conversation.* Some choose to continue talking to each other and a few couples have fallen in love and gotten married. HIV-positive people need to know that they can have relationships, get married, and maybe, God willing and with the support of medication, have children of their own or adopt and raise children who need parents. As we all know, many children in Africa are in need of adoption.

ONLINE SUPPORT GROUPS

I am working to provide Ethiopians living with HIV with online support. Many do not have access to a support group or aren’t ready to join one. Online support through Internet radio will enable people from all over the country to talk to each other about their needs, problems, and concerns, without compromising their identity. We Ethiopians are usually very secretive. We want to act tough and endure hardship no matter what happens. We think we can solve problems

*SAYFSM does not provide matchmaking services.

on our own, but we need each other for support and understanding.

FINAL THOUGHTS

To all my brothers and sisters with HIV/AIDS, I want you to know that there is life after HIV. Live your life positively. Learn to forgive, for forgiveness is the key to true love. Forgive others and accept yourself, enjoy your life, access treatment, consult your doctor regularly about your health. Get in support groups, where you will get emotional help from others who are in the same situation as yourself, and seek counseling on an ongoing basis to help boost your morale. When you are ready, speak out and educate others about the disease.

Mr. Berhe lives in Seattle, WA. He actively promotes HIV awareness and early testing, reaching thousands of people in North America through radio and print interviews and by speaking at churches and events. In 2003 he was interviewed on Voice of America in Washington, D.C., and in 2004 told his story to 20,000 gathered for an international Ethiopian soccer tournament in Seattle. He also appears in the HIV/AIDS film “Who Will Speak for Me?” Mr. Berhe welcomes your comments and invitations to speak. Contact him at ethioaids@yahoo.com or 206-380-3070.

In the next issue of Mbiu . . .
Ugandan refugee Joyce Nalwoga tells her story about living with HIV.



FREE HIV TESTING SITES

- SAYFSM 651-644-3983
- Minnesota AIDS Project
(MAP) AIDSLine 612-373-2437
- Red Door 612-348-6363
- Access Works 612-870-1830
- Room 111 651-266-1352

Please know that tests can be done anonymously or confidentially.

“Knowledge is better than riches.”
Cameroonian proverb

What do you need to know about HIV?

WHAT IS HIV/AIDS?

- HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. It damages the immune system, which is the body’s natural defense mechanism that protects our bodies from diseases and infections.
- After being infected, you can live for several years (5 to 10) without having symptoms or knowing you have HIV and can pass it on to others.
- After being infected with HIV for several years, your immune system is severely damaged and your infection can progress to AIDS.
- AIDS is the last stage of HIV infection.
- Only a doctor can diagnose AIDS.
- There is no vaccine or cure for HIV/AIDS.
- Treatment is available to help most people with HIV infection live healthy and longer lives, even though they can still pass HIV on to others if protection is not used or they share needles.
- In order to benefit from treatments, knowing your HIV status early is crucial. You can know the status of your HIV only by getting tested for HIV.

HIV does not discriminate!

Anyone can get HIV!

Know the facts about HIV and protect yourself!

How Can You Be Infected with HIV?

By exposing yourself to the following *body fluids* of an HIV infected person:

- Semen: the man’s body fluid during sex
- Vaginal fluid: the woman’s body fluid during sex
- Blood: through sharing sharp equipment such as needles, blades, knives, or syringes when injecting medications or drugs, or through tattooing, body piercing, circumcisions, and blood transfusions in a resource-poor setting/country. All blood is tested in the U.S.

You **CANNOT** get HIV by living with someone who has HIV/AIDS.

An infected mother can pass HIV to her baby during pregnancy, delivery, or breast-feeding. Proper medical treatment during pregnancy can greatly reduce the risk of passing HIV on to the baby.

HIV is **NOT** spread by:

Coughs or sneezes
Mosquito or other insect bites
Animals/pets

You **CANNOT** get HIV through casual contact with someone who has HIV/AIDS.

Casual contact includes:

- Eating and drinking together
- Sharing food or drink
- Shaking hands, kissing, or hugging
- Sharing bathrooms and swimming pools
- Social interaction

Sub-Saharan African Youth & Family Services in Minnesota (SAYFSM) is a nonprofit organization created by African-born immigrants in the Land of 10,000 Lakes to provide culturally appropriate services to our people.

What do we do?

- We indiscriminately serve all Africans regardless of their country of origin, religion, ethnicity, or political affiliation.
- We provide free, culturally appropriate HIV-prevention education to African communities and support services to those in need of HIV therapy and counseling.
- We link clients to available service providers to ensure reasonable living conditions for those who have tested HIV-positive.
- We respect the unique needs of groups and individuals while acknowledging that cultural differences exist and have an impact on service delivery.
- We facilitate a spiritual and emotional support group for Africans living with HIV/AIDS that is culturally and linguistically sensitive.

Contact us for:

- HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention presentations
- Prevention intervention and health education for positives
- Emotional and spiritual support groups for Africans living with HIV/AIDS
- Counseling and testing
- Resources and referrals
- Housing, clothing, and food shelf needs
- Sewing and computer classes for women
- Interpreters for some African languages



Contact us with your story! Or send your letters and comments to:

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DONATIONS GLADLY ACCEPTED!

Yes! I would like to contribute to SAYFSM:

\$25 \$10 \$5 other

Please send your donation to:

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