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Fighting to live a whole life with AIDS

The water rains down between the wall and the shower curtain--and between our aroused, melting bodies. "Wait," he says, "I'm positive." The pause that follows seems so packed with things it might explode. OK, don't freak out, I say to myself. Don't let him see what's really going on inside your head. Don't let him see how you're swinging between sympathy and excitement. Most of all, don't let him see the expression in your mind which screams, 'I know. It's OK. I am too.'

The scene was something I had anticipated for a long time. Still, I was shocked when it actually happened a few weeks ago. I was lost among the many issues it raised for me and my love life, my sex life and my life as a person who is HIV-positive. But it happened anyway with a bright, built, beautiful man who, like me, was bursting with affection and passion.

I didn't run out of the shower and the cozy little apartment as I imagine some would. "So?" I said. "That's not a problem. Don't worry." Another pause. "Would you like me to continue?" I said, about to kneel down and indulge in what is generally considered safe (i.e. oral sex, no cumming). "Well, now you know the whole story," he said. "I'd love you to." The pause in our experience had ended. The erotic haze of wet sex continued. Later, almost in gratitude, he reciprocated the favor I had done him.

We spent the rest of that Sunday cuddling in bed, sunning in the park and joking in the Chinese restaurant. It was, at its root, a very normal, private matter.

Did I do right in not telling him about me? He gave me the privilege of his secret. Didn't I owe him the same? It's the kind of question I'd

thrashed around for so long in my head. But this time I was on the receiving end of this delicate information. This guy wasn't anything like AIDS patients or activists I had seen or dealt with. He was muscular, healthy, optimistic and unconcerned with AIDS in his regular conversation. And there on the table as we left his apartment was the familiar blue and white bottle. The lifesaver so many of us--including myself--are counting on: AZT.

If I had told him, could he have used it against me some day? How did I know?

Writing about life with HIV is tough. I spend a lot of time trying to expel thoughts of it. Sometimes I feel rage at having the misfortune to have got it. Other times I feel challenged, as if chosen among others as strong enough to deal with the latest puzzle imposed on humanity. Still other times, alone in my bed with my horny thoughts, I fantasize about what still seems to be the deepest pleasure: making love without a condom.

Living with HIV is tough because all around are signals that mean death. Yet I'm still fine. I still look fine. I'm 25, and I'm fighting a tide that says it's over, a tide that is robbing me of my ancestral right to an immortal youth. My doctor wants me to be the best little boy in the world: safe sex, no drugs, good diet, daily gym, lots of sleep and a good attitude. Hey, no problem, right?

I wonder if I will ever be able to meet someone I really like and live out my days with him and have him know and be comfortable with my situation. I'm not sure. It scares me. In the worst moments, I try to punish myself by deliberately exposing myself and having unsafe sex. Or maybe I'm striking out at the world through an unsuspecting person.

I go to a counselor and a support group to try to deal with my feelings and control my actions. I want to influence the outcome. I think I probably can.

I think about AIDS and what it means to me and others. Sometimes I try to help others understand it--by writing this column, for example.

I admire a sick friend and his lover. They deal with every day as it

The... AIDS. They... living with it. They raise

comes. They are not beaten by AIDS. They are living with it. They raise money for research and care. They are fighting back. They are fighting to live.

So am I.

This was submitted anonymously by a Columbia student.



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