

THE TIE THAT BINDS

SOUTH CAROLINA HIV/AIDS COUNCIL-SPRING/SUMMER 2005

SPECIAL EDITION

WHO WILL MARCH FOR ME?

Bambi Gaddist, DrPH
Executive Director



It was exciting! It was a moment in time that many will remember again and again. There were thousands of women marching...block after block....taking a stand to show their support for breast cancer. It was amazing!!!

As we waited at a downtown traffic light, all kinds of feelings arose....(more so) a feeling of sadness. Why you ask? We discussed how we felt envy. We knew we were "Hatin". We asked ourselves...WHY do we feel this way? Then the silent thoughts became a question.

What would it take for us to get men....women...our community to stand up and support HIV/AIDS prevention? Why are so few willing to march for HIV/AIDS?

This edition of the Tie That Binds is a tribute to **"the fallen."** To the men and women that die in shame and fear! To the families who thought it best... never to tell their children how their parents really died.

We speak to the **"uninfected"**--We caution you... Watch what you say for **YOU** never know who you are talking to or how your tongue will change the course of someone's life.

We speak to those who are **"infected"** with HIV/AIDS— It is Time To Live!!—not run, hide, or suffer alone.

We call on "leaders" in our community, city, county, and state government to seek knowledge and take actions to help



persons, families and children impacted by HIV. They live in your districts and community! They need your support! They are taxpayers and voters.

**South Carolina...
WE ARE LONG OVERDUE!
WE ARE LOOKING FOR
THOSE WHO WILL
MARCH FOR LIFE!**



Bambi Gaddist
Executive Director

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CALLING ALL FOLKS TO THE STIGMA TABLE... ALLFOLKS AND NO....STIGMA is NOT a sorority!



Calling All Church Folks, church leaders, pastors, imams and, heck, even you Folks, who are too mad at, disgusted with, afraid of or bored with church life to remember' the LAST time you ever went to church. I'm even calling you Folks, who NEVER, EVER stepped inside a house of worship ...

Calling ALL folks to the STIGMA Table...

Calling ALL folks to the STIGMA Table...

We've gotta sit down 'round this table and we GOT to start talking! Let me tell you why...

The other day, Reverend Emily shook her head in sadness. She said that she was in a ministers meeting the day before. She told everybody there that she had just done her SIXTH funeral service for someone who died of AIDS.

Pastor "SO" and "SO" puffed himself up and exclaimed, "In 34 years of pastoring and hundreds of funerals... .. I have NEVER done a funeral for someone, who died of AIDS. YOUR folks must not be righteous or Godly."

Now, Folks, you KNOW that in over 20 years of HIV preying on the nation, South Carolina, and us ALWAYS being in the Top 10 states nationwide for new cases of AIDS, SOME of Pastor SO and SO's funerals had to have been for folks, who died of HIV/AIDS.

Trouble is, his "moral blindness" made him not see what is in front of him. His deafness to the Truth about HIV.... and who gets itand how they get itallows him to hear "cancer", "pneumonia", or "broken heart", when he was told the cause of death. What family would ever tell their pastor or anyone else that their loved one died of HIV/AIDS, when STIGMA makes them folks so high and mighty judgmental?

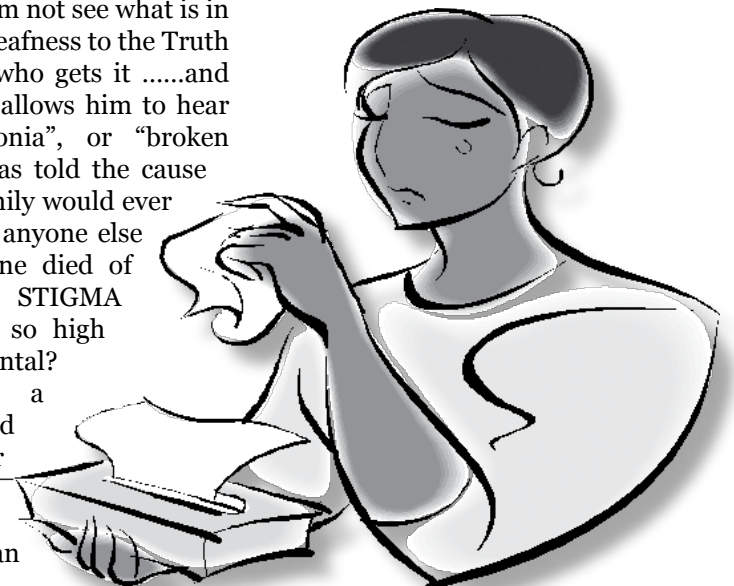
Why, a neighbor lady told me that when her husband died of AIDS, her pastor condemned the man

FROM THE PULPIT!!! That poor lady was so shocked and hurt, she froze, but when the pastor started in on his harsh words again.....at the graveside, she blew up and screamed at him to leave.

Other church folks came up to her, saying, "Why you being so mean to the pastor?" She cried out to them in her pain and anger, "You heard what he said. If you can ASK me that question, you are no friend of mine either. Leave!!!!" And she ran them off too!

What did those ignorant people do that day? This lady was grieving. She had lost her husband and now she lost her church family too. She has not stepped in a church since! THIS is what STIGMA does!

Did I miss something in the Bible? Did Jesus ask sick folks, "What kind of disease you got? If it's not the right kind, I won't heal you." Didn't he just open his arms to sick folks, lay on his hands, and heal?



But don't blame just the pastors. We ALL made this STIGMA mess what it is.....by allowing the LIES and the SILENCE. You know it takes only ONE of us to start unplugging this mess.

Wherever you happen to be, **START TALKING!** You can be the start of something BIG just by opening your mouth and starting an honest conversation. Do it! Today! Right now!

STIGMA is a MONSTER!

HIV STIGMA tells LIES. The LIES whisper in our ears about what kind of people get HIV and how they get it. These LIES let STIGMA grab us by the throat and this MONSTER won't let go.

We choke up and don't talk! STIGMA uses its LIES about HIV to turn us into its second greatest weapon - SILENCE. SILENCE and STIGMA's LIES about HIV are killing us.

STIGMA lets this virus creep among us silently slipping into folk's bodies because nobody wants to talk about it. Or folks are drunk or high on the IGNORANCE that lets them think they are not at risk.

What the heck is this HIV/AIDS STIGMA and how did it get so powerful? Brothers and Sisters, I looked it up in the dictionary:

"it's a mark of shame, discredit, dishonor....."

If you ask me...the only shame, discredit, or dishonor I see is in letting ignorance kill you or someone you love.

**Ignorance
Is Bliss....**



If there is anyone in your life you HAVEN'T talked with about HIV, do it NOW. The TRUTH will set you free!

I can't tell you how frustrated I get when I hear congregation folks saying,

"Pastor isn't talking about HIV/AIDS, so I guess we better not." But those same pastors are saying, "I'd like to talk about HIV and AIDS but the folks in my congregation don't want me to."

WHO is gonna STOP this madness? Folks are dying everyday! Don't let anybody tell you that AIDS is not still killing folks or sometimes

making them so sick, they want to give up. STIGMA spreads the disease of SILENCE. The SILENCE keeps people shackled in fear until they are so sick they end up in the hospital too far gone in the disease for the medicines to do any good.

Folks, stop this SILENCE! We hope folks won't get infected, but if they do they can get into treatment. The bummer is that even if folks get into treatment in time, the SILENCE they suffer, weakens their health as much as the virus itself.

SO WE ARE CALLING ALL FOLKS TO THE STIGMA TABLE MEET US AND LET'S START TALKING!!!!

If you don't know what to talk about, find out! Call the South Carolina HIV/AIDS Council @ (803) 254-6644. or the SCDHEC HIV/STD hotline: (800) 322-AIDS (2437).

Nkosi Johnson, a boy born with HIV in South Africa, died at twelve years old. Before he passed, he spoke bravely and with great wisdom to the International AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa. He said,

"Do all you can with what you have in the time you have in the place you are."



Yours truly,
Mrs. "Hot Under Her Lacy Collar" Eliza Mae Lisk, Outreach Coordinator Church Ladies of the World

HIV/AIDS STIGMA IS EVERYWHERE!



WHAT IS HIV/AIDS STIGMA?

HIV/AIDS stigma is when you discriminate against people, groups, and/or certain communities that are associated with the disease. When people show HIV/AIDS prejudice, their thoughts, beliefs, and actions go beyond the limits of fairness. People who engage in HIV/AIDS stigma are rarely honest enough to admit that they are practicing HIV/AIDS prejudice. In fact they will deny it to their death! (Quite possibly to their own!)

As of 2004, SC data showed that South Carolina ranks 7th in the nation in the rate of AIDS.

"SMILING FACES AND BEAUTIFUL PLACES"

As far as we know, there are about 882 persons who get infected with HIV each year.

Males (66%) make up the greatest number of the new cases. Men and women infected through heterosexual ("man to woman") sex are a large number of new HIV infections. It's now over 50%.

Is It Down Low or Down Under???

WHATEVER!

African Americans make up 30% of South Carolina's community, but make up 78% of all confirmed cases of HIV/AIDS. Rates of HIV infection among black women are soaring, and they now make up about 85% of all cases compared to all other women in the state.

Too many South Carolinians hear about HIV/AIDS and want to believe that HIV/AIDS is not their problem. Too many of us are busy talking about theories of HIV/AIDS like, "Down-Low" brothers and plots to kill off the black race.

STIGMA IS THE REASON WHY...

- People refuse to come in and get medical help even after they know they have HIV/AIDS.
- Families have to lie about the real cause of their family member's death.
- People are kicked out of their church and can't teach Sunday school anymore.
- People are afraid to eat or drink after someone they think has HIV/AIDS.
- People avoid co-workers, or anyone we think has "IT".
- People spread gossip that leads to someone losing their job or "getting their hours cut".
- No one wants to be seen walking for HIV/AIDS issues.
- People refuse to tell their sexual partners they have the virus before they have sex.
- People refuse to give their time or money for the cause of HIV prevention.
- Our political leaders and church are afraid to even say "HIV/AIDS" in public.
- People are afraid to get tested for HIV.

WE GIVE THANKS TO THE
THE FORD FOUNDATION, ACADEMY FOR
EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, PFIZER
PHARMACEUTICALS AND THE
AIDS BENEFIT FOUNDATION OF S.C.
FOR SUPPORTING THE
FIRST NATIONAL ANTI-STIGMA
HIV/AIDS INITIATIVE

LIVING IN FEAR

Why We Can't Stop HIV/AIDS!!!

"A mother hides from her family and her church that both she and her elementary school-age daughter are HIV-positive. She is deeply afraid that the information will get around town. Although by law in South Carolina, the principal and nurse at the elementary school have to be told about her daughter's status, she is always afraid that someone will find out and persecute her daughter."

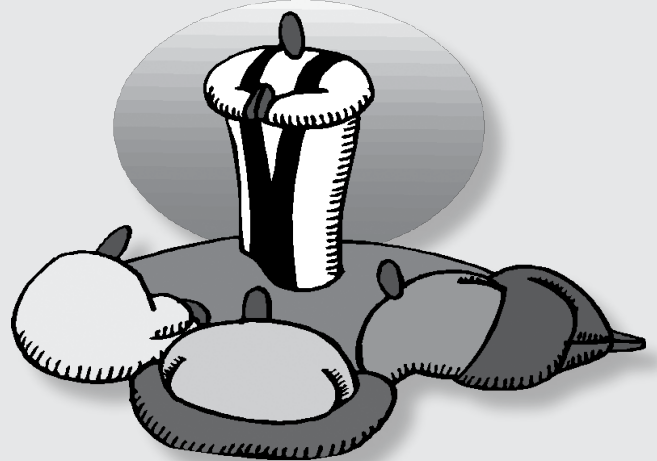




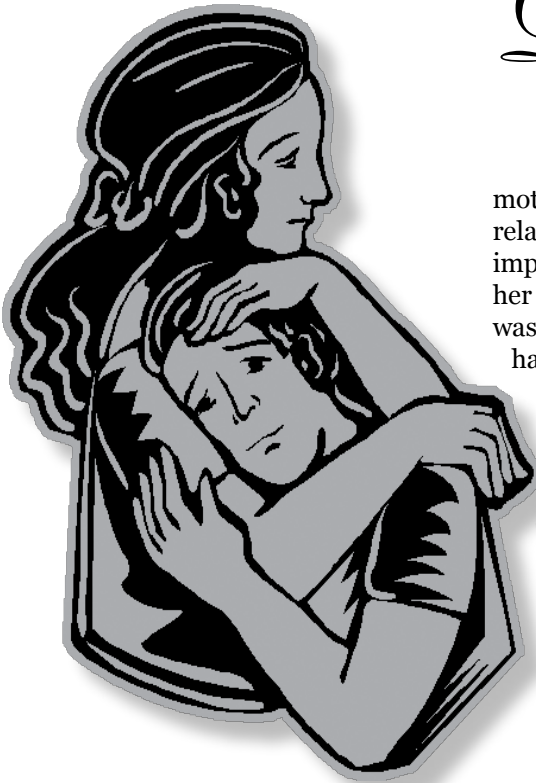
WORDS CAN HURT

"A middle-aged man was just told he is HIV-positive. He is "out" at work about his sexual orientation, but tells no one his HIV status. He heard some co-workers saying that if gay people got HIV or AIDS, they got what they deserved. They talked at length about how they should have known better in this day and time. Although he had heard countless "risky" stories coming from "straight" co-workers, he sometimes believes they are right.

A pastor from a local church that serves over one thousand attendees regularly talks about AIDS as a "curse". He's told the congregation many times that "HIV/AIDS is God's punishment against sinners". So many church goers have heard his message and now repeat it at their jobs, homes, and within their social circles. Most of them refuse to get tested for HIV since they now believe that only "sinners" need to know their HIV status."



Dear Mama



When I was young my mother and I did not have much of a relationship. I really didn't think it was important to have a relationship with her because she was the mother and I was the daughter. So tell me who really has a relationship with their mother at that age anyway?

When I was 16 years old, my mother sat me, my brother, sister, and my stepfather down and told us she was HIV positive. I didn't think much of it at that time because I didn't know what HIV was!

But as I got older, I really started hearing about it in the street. I just started hearing how people who had "IT" died. So all I could think of is when was my

MaMa going to die!

So all that did was make me hate her. For what.....For getting this thing and dying on us!

As I got older and it got more out in the open, more talk started! I heard that if you took care of yourself... you would live!

Now I was 18...and my mother was still alive and I found out that I was pregnant. She was the only one I could talk to at that time. I found out she was the only friend I had.

Before my pregnancy, she was planning to move to South Carolina and she was not planning to take me with her. But my Mom, sister, and I left to meet my stepfather in Camden, South Carolina.

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That is when that “thing” called HIV started to play a part in my life. My mother started getting sick. She was in and out of the hospital all the time.

There were many times, I didn’t think she would make it! But as she was in and out of hospitals, I got to see many more mothers in the same situation as my MaMa.

I saw that many of those Mamas had no one to come see about them! Now, don’t get me wrong, there were women and men in the hospital living with HIV/AIDS. But it took me many times in and out of hospitals and many incidents for me to realize that that was NOT the way I wanted my mother to be ALONE!!

So I made an oath with myself, no matter what she went through, I was going through it with her. No matter what....we are stuck with this “THING” called HIV together!

Love Your Daughter,
Sheila Littleton

ASK MARIA

IT COULD BE YOU!!



Dear Maria,

I’m writing this letter to share my story with your readers. I am a 35 year old black woman living in South Carolina. I learned that I was HIV positive about six (6) years ago. I had been married for almost 10 years when I found out that my husband was having affairs with other people on the side while claiming to love me forever. I left that SORRY, LYING, GOOD FOR NOTHING... Oh!!! Sorry I’m getting off track...

Back to the reason for my letter... I said all of that to talk about a situation I recently experienced. Well, it all started one day when someone I thought was my friend told my boss I was HIV positive. I have worked at the same company for eight (8) years.

I won’t mention any names.. but it was an OKAY job until I was fired. The pink slip was delivered to me one day out of the blue... I DID NOT see it coming at all... especially since I was The Employee of the Year for the past three (3) years.

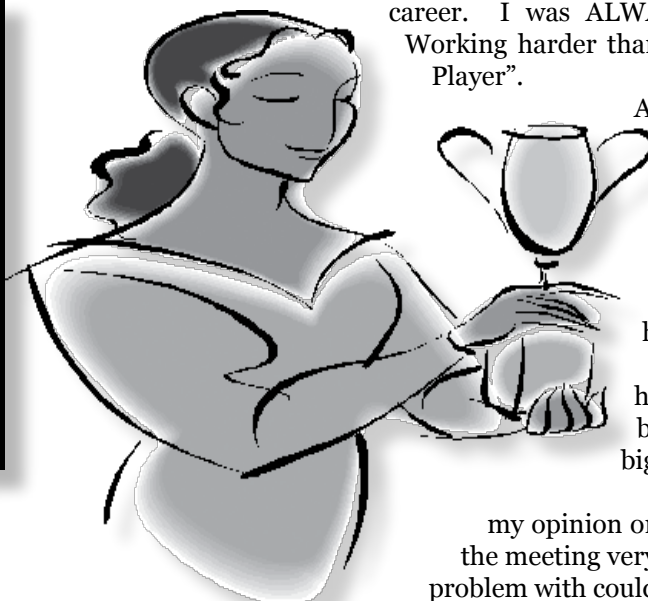
I thought I was in a very strong place in my career. I was ALWAYS on top of my game... Working harder than anyone else, a real “Team Player”.

All of that came crashing down when my boss brought me into his office to discuss a “pressing issue”. At that moment my mind started working overtime trying to think what possible issue did he want to talk to me about?

I knew that it couldn’t have anything to do with me because I had just received a big account for the agency.

Maybe he just needed my opinion on a new project? I went into the meeting very sure that anything he had a problem with could quickly be solved.

Boy was I WRONG!!!





He started the discussion with, "You know that we are very satisfied with your performance here..... but due to "budget cuts" we have to let you go." As I sat there trying to hear the words coming out of his mouth.... my face hit the floor!

WHAT DID HE JUST SAY?

I KNOW THAT HE DIDN'T SAY THEY WERE LETTING ME GO???

What he said just didn't make sense because I knew that two new people were just hired a few weeks ago. I remained calm, looked him in the eye and asked, "What other positions are being eliminated?"

When he began twisting around in his seat and turning a deep red I knew something was up.

He simply answered my question by saying, "I'm not at liberty to discuss that with you." Okay, I thought, what is wrong with this picture... I began to think... why would they fire me?

It couldn't be because I wasn't doing my job or "budget cuts". There was only one reason he would fire me out of the blue. I thought to myself... "OH NO!!! He knows... He knows that I'm HIV positive".

I had been afraid to tell anyone at my job because I had a friend that lost his job after telling his co-workers about his HIV status. His situation wasn't sudden like mine was.

At first people began to act funny around him. Then he was reduced to part-time hours until he was scheduled for only a few hours a week until he had to quit.

Since I had only told two people at my job I knew exactly who had put my business in the street. The three (3) of us were "GIRLS" or so I had thought. I just KNEW that they would never put my business in the street.

We always looked out for each other through the baby daddy drama, bad relationships, and most of life's struggles. We sometimes took care of each others kids and spent holidays together. We have been there for each other through good and bad times.

When I decided to tell them about my HIV status I was going through a very difficult time. But I never thought that they would tell anyone.

When I told them each had a different reaction. One rushed over to me gave me a big hug and began to cry while the other one just looked at me with disgust. As I tried to pull my girl off of me and calm her tears, my other "GIRL" made up some excuse to leave and ran out of the door.



That was three days ago and we haven't spoken since. I knew that she had to be the one who told my boss about my status because after my "TRUE FRIEND" finished crying, we had a long talk about HIV and she supports me.

I never imagined that she would start acting funny and tell anyone else even if she was afraid. THAT TRIFLING HOOCHIE!!! Now that I think about it ...other people in the office have been acting real funny in the office lately. I thought that it was just stress or something. I never thought that they might know that I'm HIV positive.

As I sat there in front of my boss I decided to put my cards on the table. We both knew that he was not firing me because of "budget cuts". Since I know my rights I decided to educate the man before I left his office. I refused to let them stigmatize me because my HIV status. So I calmly laid out the facts.

I said, "Are you aware that I'm HIV positive?" "Yes", he responded. "Did learning about my HIV status influence your decision to fire me?" He began twisting in the seat again and tried to bring up the "budget cuts" thing again.

After he finished I said, "I need to address a few things before I go. "First, I'm not clear how this "budget cuts" issue suddenly came up especially when two people have recently been hired. Secondly, I've been here for 8 years and I have been Employee of the Year for the past 3 years so I'm not clear why I'm being fired.

Lastly, I'm not sure how you found out about my HIV positive status but if you are firing me because I have HIV....then you are breaking the law and violating my rights and I KNOW MY RIGHTS.

"Are you aware that the Americans with Disabilities Act covers people living with HIV? Under this law no employer can discriminate just because someone has HIV.

"You can't fire me unless I pose a direct threat to the health and safety of

others and that is certainly not the case here! There are also resources that this agency can use to educate the staff about HIV in the workplace."

So as you sit there and make decisions based on "budget cuts" I suggest that you think about my time here at your agency and reconsider my employment." When I had finished I was satisfied that I had said my piece as he sat with his mouth open with a look of amazement.

He paused for a minute thinking about what I had said before he responded by saying, "The issues you bring up about the "budget cuts" are good points. It would be a shame to lose such a good employee so I know

that we will reconsider our decision.

As for your HIV status, the company has a great deal to learn regarding the matter. After this discussion we will look into educating the staff about HIV/AIDS in the workplace. Thank you."



As I walked out of his office I thought about how things could have turned out if I didn't know my rights.

There are many people living with HIV that lose their job everyday because they just don't know that they have rights. They don't have to accept stigma and discrimination in the workplace just because they are living with HIV.

Ms. Maria, I wanted to share

my story so that other people living with HIV can know that they have rights. I also want employers to know that they can get the real facts on HIV in the workplace and realize that stigma and discrimination are WRONG!!!

Thank You, Signed

MS. KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

SOLUTIONS... YOU ARE THE KEY!

If you have decided to help in the fight against HIV/AIDS stigma but don't know where to begin, here are a few starter steps for you: Just pick 1 and you will be off to a great start!!

- Educate yourself and become the type of person someone with HIV could talk to intelligently.
- Don't be afraid to attend an HIV/AIDS function.
- Start an AIDS Care Team at your church. (We can train you).
- Visit the website or office (1115 Calhoun Street) for the South Carolina HIV/AIDS Council at www.schivaidsCouncil.org.
- Call SCHAC to volunteer your time for fundraisers or utilize your skills to help the staff, HIV positive clients, or just help out.
- Consider making a tax-deductible.
- GET TESTED!!!! Know your HIV status and your partner (s) HIV status.

MaMa's Grief

by Sharaledon D. Brave



Dis silent prayer fo' muh child
Ain't no help down here
As muh chile lay dyin, Lawd
No one seems tuh care.

I sought console eid muh church
Wanted to gather in yuh name
But 'stead of prayers an' meditation
Dey commenced tuh layin blame.

Pleeze, Lawd, Jus one of em tuh kno'
And Tuh understand' a mama's grief
As I watch muh chile lay dying lawd
Still I stan' in muh belief.

Ya see, Lawd, I believe muh chile
Dun served his purpose here
And going home tuh glory
Where dey ain't nuttin' tuh fear.

Lawd, how in muh belly strong
Dat boy kicked up a storm

Thirty mo years later
You's calling him on home.

Muh chile is just a slippin'
I speck it'll be anyday
But, I'm still standing on yuh promises,
lawd
Dat everything'll be okay

Dis Morning, Lawd, I shook muh child
But Peace wuz on his face
Lawd, I cried out for yuh Mercy
Yet I thank yuh for yuh grace.

You carried him home, Lawd,
And yuh said yuh'll see me through
As others turn to earthly things
I bury muh faith in yuh.

From "What Will I Tell My Children,"
bravevisions@yahoo.com
(803) 553-6376

CHILDREN'S CORNER "OUT OF THE MOUTH OF BABES"

By
Nyheme Sumpter-2nd Grade
Seven Oaks Elementary

How Should We Treat People With HIV/
AIDS, Nyheme?

"The way to treat them is to ask questions
and
take care of them."
"Try not to get any yourself."



SPECIAL THANKS TO THE WRITERS AND EDITORS OF THE 1st ANTI HIV/AIDS STIGMA EDITION

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