

Captions :

HIV POSITIVE: LIVING WITH AIDS

Photography by:
Virginie de GALZAIN
Paris – 2009

Series 1. THE PATIENTS



Photo 01 –

"When I knew I was HIV positive, I wanted to run my car into a wall. This disease is the opposite of life. To be a human living aside is terrifying. Keep on working makes you feel like a human being. But secrecy and silence are important ". (Jean, 50, HIV positive since 1995)



Photo 02 –

- Why do we never see the patients' faces in your photos?
- Because these people want to remain anonymous.
- Why? It can happen to anyone, right?
- Because this disease still scares people. Because many would be rejected if they were recognized. They protect themselves or their families.
- So why is it so important to take these pictures?
- Because it's another way to give voice to those that we do not want to see.



Photo 03 –

"AIDS changes one's life. I have lived all possible side effects over the last years. I went through a serious depression. But now, I'm still here. Life is priceless to me." Jean knew he had HIV after being tested in 1985. His job position includes important responsibilities and never stopped working. He fights to live like everyone else does, but HIV/AIDS regulate his life with its constraints, relapses and hopes. These variations are its illustration.



Photo 04 –

"I have been sick for 20 years. I think about it necessarily because I take my medication every day... There is no way out. The rest of the time I conceal the disease. I work. I have a private life. I'm fine."



Photo 05 –

"When I met the man who would become my husband, I told him I was HIV positive, he didn't have to stay... Since then, we have a 7-month-old baby who is in perfect health as his dad. I think he really loves me. Everything is possible." (Chantal, 35)



Photo 06 –

"I have been sick for more than 15 years. I never was able to start my life over again. The beginning of treatment was horrible. Morally and physically speaking. My body has changed a lot since then. It's very hard for a woman. I fight alone and I still can't talk about it"



Photo 07 –

"You have to understand that even if until today I was lucky enough to resist without medication, I've been living with the disease for 22 years in my mind. With death surrounding me. And I'm still here. I went through all of this. I fear a lot the treatment that I will start, as well as its physical signs, the way people look at you, the way I'll look at myself." (Stefan, 49)



Photo 08 –

AIDS is a mirror of inequality, of a strong economic insecurity, sanitary, social precariousness. In France, more than a quarter of the people living with HIV are recognized as disabled. A situation that can lead to the inability to work, to a partial or total loss of income. Many are those who cannot afford to live in a decent housing. Some live in the street. I met one of them by chance outside near a station. It was a shock to me.



Photo 09 –

"Waiting for the results every three months makes me anxious. We live in constant fear of catching something, of relapsing and undergoing physical degradation. All this without being able to speak to someone. Psychologically, I'm broken."



Photo 10 –

" At the time we told me I had 3 months to live ... The staff of the hospital where I stayed did not want to touch me. I felt like if I was plague-stricken. (...) When my husband and I wanted to adopt a child, we were told: "In your situation, you can only "have" a child with HIV or from Africa". He was speaking of human beings! Our blood ran cold. (Sophie, 43, HIV positive for 20 years)



Photo 11 –

Classified ads pages (Remaides Magazine) and brochure on "How to make a baby" (papamamanbebe.net).

Having a private life ... Building the Future ... Having children ... Having a private life ... Having children ... Just have a life.



Photo 12 –

"I had unprotected sex this summer. I went to the emergency the next day to get tested. It was the only way to know... I just learned of my HIV-negative. I thought for a moment that I'd be sick for the rest of my life! I was very lucky." (Sandra, 19 years)

Series 2. OVERVIEW OF THE CLINICAL CARE AND MONITORING



Photo 13 –

Tell it? Not telling it? How? To protect oneself or one's relatives; fear of rejection and discrimination at work, school, in the family, those question always arise, nearly 30 years after the discovery of AIDS.



Photo 14 –

A regular consultation with a physician is essential to testify the effectiveness of drugs and prevent or slow down the risk of developing other diseases. It is, at the same time, a question of trust, questioning, sharing, and support.



Photo 15 –

Testing is the only way to know if one is contaminated or not. It must be done after each risk-taking: in a hospital, in a laboratory or in an anonymous, free testing center. The earlier the virus is detected, the faster and better it can be treated.



Photo 16 –

HIV-AIDS requires a rigorous monitoring of lifetime treatment: taking doses from one to several times a day, 365 days a year. It is one of the conditions of the efficiency of the treatment that even one short stopping can compromise. Knowing well one's disease, being aware of the role and action of the medicine give better chances.



Photo 17 –

"I have followed HIV since its beginnings. There used to be red stickers on the files. People who did not want to deal with contaminated patients. Who didn't touch them. Today, many patients still lie to their circle of friends, and continue not saying why they are hospitalized. But they know that in the service, the staff really listens to them." (Anne-Marie)



Photo 18 –

"The Immunology department was designed for multidisciplinary care, as comprehensive as possible. It is thus the medical staff that goes to meet the patient, not the other way around. A simplified, qualified monitoring is essential for the patient: it is a long story, a commitment." (Dr. Piketty)



Photo 19 –

Human interaction, professionalism and sincerity allow every patient to feel respected, accepted and loved. Nevertheless, taking care of people affected by HIV and fighting against AIDS is a personal, hard choice on the long run for the medical staff.



Photo 20 –

“I was there before and after highly active antiretroviral therapy (the combination of three different pills) and the improving of treatments. I think the patients enabled us to progress. HIV/AIDS has several impacts on a personal and medical level”. (Dr Batisse)



Photo 21 –

AIDS remains a permanent, mortal sickness. In spite of treatments, AIDS induces to an earlier ageing of the organism which depends on the person. Cancer can therefore appear more often and earlier.



Photo 22 –

« When I arrived in this department of the hospital, I realized that like you and me were HIV-positive. It changes your perception towards this sickness. Being hospitalized is never easy: it is important for every patient to be looked after.” (Anne-Sophie, nurse)



Photo 23 –

« HIV-positive people are as anyone else, with a sickness that is different from any other. They want to live and be considered as part of the society. To be alive is to communicate: we only live through other people's eyes”.



Photo 24 –

Slackening, rising of the risk-takings: HIV-AIDS is spreading dramatically in France with a new discovered case every 90 minutes. Condoms are the only way to protect oneself from HIV and all the others STI (Sexually Transmitted Infections), particularly Hepatitis B and C.