

HIV-positive man lives one day at a time

Karin Redston
Co-Feature Editor

[Editor's note: The following is from an in-person interview.]

Jeff M., 34, lives in Clackamas County, works two jobs driving a bus and is HIV positive. Jeff moved from California to Oregon two years ago and says he will never move back. To him, the best part about Oregon is the trees.

He hopes to work full-time with his one bus driving job in about four months. In two or three years, he hopes to buy a house in the country.

Jeff is now a speaker for Clackamas County AIDS Relief Effort (C.C.A.R.E.). He goes into schools to speak to students and staff about HIV and AIDS. He has been a speaker for a year and a half. When he speaks to children, Jeff talks about himself and how he was just like them while growing up.

"I want to make a difference in HIV," Jeff stated. "If my going into schools and talking to kids will make one kid stop and think before taking a risk sexually, then I've accomplished my goal."

He hopes that by meeting with school staffs, talking to communities and putting on presentations for students, the disease will become less alien and more humanized. Jeff hopes to speak to eight schools this year.

"We don't want children thinking it's okay to take risks and become infected," he said.

The HIV virus happens in stages. The first stage is the initial contact with the virus which is transmitted into the blood by the exchange of bodily fluids which contain blood cells. This is usually by sexual relations or by sharing needles.

The second stage is called seroconversion. This generally causes flu-like symptoms such as fever, nausea, headaches and fatigue, but could include other symptoms.

"Mine lasted three weeks," Jeff said. "I was so sick that I couldn't smoke. I was a smoker for twelve years."

He became so sick that he ended up at the local health de-

partment. The doctors ran test after test, including Hepatitis and HIV, and all came up negative. Jeff had two bags of Saline intravenously, because he became severely dehydrated.

The next stage is asymptomatic HIV. This is the stage where little or no symptoms of AIDS are evident.

After that comes symptomatic HIV. In this stage HIV starts to manifest with flu-like symptoms, weight loss and fatigue, to name a few.

The last major stage is AIDS. Pneumonia and acute infections can set in.

"Even a common cold can kill you," he said.

Although those are the major stages, there are several that HIV goes through. Jeff made clear he could not remember them all.

Discrimination has not been an issue for Jeff. The only setback he has faced is developing a new relationship. He stressed the importance of being honest with a potential partner about having the disease.

Jeff's family has been extremely supportive. He and his mother are close. She has told him, if he became too ill, he could move back to California with her.

Jeff's biggest problem now is fatigue. He says he has been tired ever since he went through the seroconversion.

"It doesn't make any difference whether I get four hours or 12 hours [sleep], I feel the same way," he said. "I never really ever get over being tired."

Jeff was diagnosed in August 1995 with the HIV virus, which he contracted through unsafe sex. His partner of three and a half years had given it to him. His long-range goals have changed to short term, and he takes each day as it comes.

"I wanted to go back to school and get my teaching credentials," he said. "I've changed that. I'm focusing more on the here and now. I'm not panicking; I've just made some adjustments to my goals, and I feel very comfortable with that."

For more information about the speakers bureau at C.C.A.R.E., call Lee Burleson at 653-8738.



Photo by Joel Coreson

Deanna Edlund was recently accepted into the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society.

Student shines on campus

Karin Redston
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Deanna Edlund was a high school drop out who went back to school at Portland Community College to earn her GED; today, she is a full-time student at Clackamas and has been awarded four scholarships.

She continued to work two or more jobs in order to keep things going in her life until her son was born. That wasn't good enough for Edlund. She wanted more.

After her son was born, Edlund enrolled in the college's Life and Career Options Program, a nine-week course. When she completed the program, she enrolled full-time at the college, planning to graduate this spring with an Associates degree in General Studies and a Parts Merchandising

Certification.

Edlund holds a 3.75 grade point average and has been awarded four scholarships. She works for Safeway as a data processor and is a full-time mother.

Her first award was the Portland Swap Meet Endowment Scholarship. She then applied and was awarded a scholarship from the American Business Women's Association Sunnyside Chapter. Her third award was the Angelina and Pete Costanza Scholarship, which was given to her by the Oregon Scholarship Commission. She has also been awarded the Ford Family Scholarship.

"When I enrolled, I didn't think I could earn any scholarships," Edlund remarked. "I'm not an athletic person, and I don't have any

specialized skills that I can use that pertained to this. But I was told 'Dee, you need to try'."

When Edlund enrolled in school and applied for her first scholarship, she was going through a break-up of a six year relationship. She found herself homeless and living in a shelter.

Edlund's son is the number one priority in her life. School has become her main focus.

"I have made myself a priority to do the things I need to do to be a good mom and to be a good student," said Edlund. Edlund has recently been accepted to Phi Theta Kappa. Her philosophy on life is simple.

"Everything I do today is a reflection of what I become tomorrow," Edlund concluded.

"If my going into schools and talking to kids will make one kid stop and think before taking a risk sexually, then I've accomplished my goal."

Jeff M.

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