

LETTER 1

MY NAME IS JOYCE SYLVIA

My name is Joyce Sylvia. I was born on the 25th of August 1972. I started school in my hometown and went on to Soweto in 1986 where I completed my matriculation. I had five children—two girls and three boys. One boy and one girl passed away. I got sick in 1997. In 2003 I went to the doctor, and found out I'm HIV positive. I was very much amazed about the news. The wife of the man I'm involved with passed away because of this sickness, but he didn't tell me. He told me because I told him I'm positive.

LETTER 2

MY NAME IS SOPHIE

My name is Sophie. I was born in Wattville. My mother is a Xhosa by nation. She came from the Western Cape. She was a lady teacher by profession. My father came from Bethal. He didn't go to school. He passed away when I was seven years old. I didn't know him [very well]. My mother passed away last year, 2002. She was a respected mother — good, caring, educated. I always remember her when I've got trouble.

LETTER 3

MY NAME IS LUDI

My name is Ludi. It was on the 18 th of August, when I went for a blood test. The following week I went for the results, only to find out I'm HIV positive. It was a big shock, but I went for counseling. It was very good because I accepted it the very same time. I told myself, "It's like that. Nothing is going to change. I have to live a normal life."

LETTER 4

MY NAME IS MARTHA

My name is Martha. After I found out that I'm HIV positive, I think [about] dying from [this] ruthless disease. I struggle to contain my emotions and fight back the tears. It's because I have [seen so many] people killed by AIDS-related illness. It was the saddest moment of my life. When I see my children—that they are going to lose their mother—like that really broke my heart and I lost hope.

LETTER 5

MY NAME IS NAOMI

My name is Naomi. Sometimes I sit with my children, and tell them how difficult life is outside. When I'm alone I try to figure out—how did I get this disease, from whom? Because I was married at an early age; I stayed with my husband for 21 years until he passed away [in] 2000. If he was still alive, I [would talk with him], ask him the truth. Maybe the answer[s] are with him.

LETTER 6

RULES TO LIVE A HAPPY LIFE

Rules to live a happy life

- Love and respect yourself;
- Believe in yourself;
- Have a vision;
- Be responsible for yourself;
- Think before doing something;
- Do what you think is right;
- Respect everybody and his/her beliefs;
- Always have a time to pray 'cause God has a time to listen to your prayer.

LETTER 7

HERE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ADVICE

Here is the most important advice I would like you to remember when you are older....

Ephraim, my boy, life is difficult. I want you to remember that you don't have a father because of AIDS. So you have to start planning your life and I want you to grow up with the strong feeling of having a bright future. Be a strong man. I trust you when you are older you make it on your own. Be a strong man.

LETTER 8

I LIKE TO PLEA TO MY SON

I like to plea to my son that if I [get] sick or die he must not blame anyone. Everything that he does he must ask the power of God first, to guide, teach and open his ways. I advise my son to take the advice from this Book of Life, [the Bible], and he must not depend on anyone, only depend on God. My son, respect and love everyone so that you also can be respected and be loved.

LETTER 9

I WANT TO SAY

I want to say...People, please try to protect your children. You see that here in the world, other people—they don't respect our children's wishes, so they just destroy their plans by criticizing [and violence]. I want to say to you people, talk to your children about their rights.

LETTER 10

BEING POSITIVE IS NOT A MATTER OF DEATH

Being positive is not a matter of death. Some, or many, think that if they are HIV positive they are only facing death. As I learn about HIV and attend workshops concerning HIV/AIDS, it allows me to be strengthened, not to concentrate on my status, but to aim high.

LETTER 11

I RESPECT AIDS

I respect AIDS. That is why I'm writing a story about it, because I want to tell people about [what] kind of a disease AIDS is. People, AIDS—it kills. In the good days I was living with my mother. We were together, but because of AIDS, now I'm alone. My mother, she's dead because of AIDS. I cried and [said] to God, "Why [are] you doing this to me, Lord?" ... No, it's not about God. It's about you—to say "no" to unprotected sex. We need to work together to fight AIDS.

LETTER 12

I WISH TO BE LIKE OTHER PEOPLE

I wish to be like other people who are HIV positive, to teach people with this disease. But I always ask myself, if I stand in front of the crowd, teach them, when they ask me how did I get this disease, what am I going to tell them? How and when did I get it?

We must know that [we] belong to God. We must not let evil get the upper hand, but conquer evil by doing the good. Don't be weary in prayer, keep at it, watch for God's answers and remember to be thankful when they come.