

ASKING THE CLERGY

**Is it ever OK  
to wish ill  
on others?**

B22



# Act Two

YOUR GUIDE TO RETIREMENT PLANNING AND LIVING

Medical advances  
are helping  
many with HIV  
find life past 50  
B6

Antonio Williams Jr.,  
61, of Hempstead,  
went back to school  
to study massage  
therapy after learning  
he was HIV-positive.

# Defying AIDS

## SIDE ACT TWO

### Two on TV

uesday," the weekly TV companion to night on WLIW / Ch. 21 at tomorrow at 7:30 a.m.)

y and meet four extraordinary people teams without a look back: an icon in the world of philanthropy and respondent

and, legendary jazz pianist in, a founder of the Long Island Islamic

n, baseball legend from the 1969 World im

ny.com

listen to writer Bettina Marks talk about how the Act Two Generation. And are you a Bruce Springsteen? Act Two editor Noel Rubinton talk about Springsteen's world. Go to [www.newsday.com/act2](http://www.newsday.com/act2)

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

# A more hopeful AIDS story

**F**or a long time, AIDS has been a tremendously sad story.

The toll of lives cut short has touched so many people. The impact in the United States and around the world has been terrible.

While not minimizing the devastation of HIV/AIDS, news has gotten a bit more hopeful in recent years. Greater understanding of the disease, coupled with development of powerful new drugs, has led to people with it living much longer.

Today's cover story is, in effect, a result of those medical advances. Whereas, a decade or two ago, people who contracted the disease would too often die in a few years, they are now much more likely to live into their 50s, 60s and beyond.

In the future, more people will likely live with AIDS/HIV into their Act Two years. Tragically, they will be hurt by a disease still without a vaccine or cure. But it is better for people to live longer, more productive lives even with the disease.

Bettina Marks, author of today's cover story, worked hard to define the scope and implications of this slice of the



NOEL RUBINTON

AIDS story. Marks was persistent in finding and gaining the trust of people with HIV/AIDS so she could tell their stories.

When you read about people like Antonio Williams, Peter DiCicco and Lessie Myles, there comes through a determination and a hopefulness fueled by personal strength and medical progress. I think there's much for us to learn from them.

Meanwhile, on a far away subject, I hope you'll indulge me a mention of one of the highlights of my year so far — seeing Bruce Springsteen and his amazing Seeger Sessions band in New Jersey last weekend.

I saw plenty of Act Two meaning in the show, watching the incredible creativity of musicians far from teenage garage band days. I was way back, but I could tell the talent was well aged, starting from Springsteen (56) and stretching through a brilliant brass section that included a tuba star, Art

Baron, also 56. Not to mention that most of the music was from the songbook of legend Pete Seeger, 87 and still going.

Popular music has many prominent older artists these days. Some say it's because there aren't any fresh ideas. Springsteen's tour proves otherwise — the Act Two generation is a font of innovation that influences many others much younger. Speaking of that, the audience wasn't all older folks. There were plenty of hip 20- and 30somethings there.

Lastly for today, let me plug our first ever photo contest again. We have a growing pile of wonderful entries. July 10 is the deadline, and there's a coupon with information on B9.

### LET US HEAR FROM YOU.

We welcome comments, suggestions and letters for possible publication. E-mail [retire@newsday.com](mailto:retire@newsday.com) or write Act Two Editor, Business Desk, Newsday, 235 Pinelawn Rd., Melville, NY 11747-4250. Include name, address, day and night telephone numbers.

# Facing AIDS in life's second half

With good care and a creative soul many are surviving HIV and reshaping their lives

BY BETTINA MARKS  
SPECIAL TO NEWSDAY

**L**essie Myles stood proudly recently as her son received a master's degree in education. It was not a sight she took for granted; she had been diagnosed in 1987 with HIV.

Now 54 and living in Hempstead, Myles says she has worked hard to keep her health as strong as possible, stressing exercise, nutrition and a positive outlook. She's written two books about her experiences living with HIV, and she complains more about menopause symptoms than the side effects of HIV medications she takes.

Antonio Williams, 61, who also lives in Hempstead, carries a Bible with him wherever he goes and quotes long passages from memory. He was diagnosed with HIV in 2001 and has gotten through nine cases of pneumonia. "I was very angry at first," he says, "but now I'm at peace psychologically. When you struggle with a situation, you get stronger."

Peter DiCicco, 55, is retired, living in Bellerose on his pension and Social Security. But he plans to enroll in comedy classes in the fall and take his brand of humor onstage. He was diagnosed with AIDS in 1988.

These are the stories of people living with HIV / AIDS on Long Island and in Queens but with the twist. They are people over 50 who are facing the disease. Such cases remain a relatively small part of the overall population with the disease, but it is a growing group — in large part because medical advances are allowing people with the disease to live longer and reach senior status. In addition, doctors and others say increases in sexual activity among seniors, connected to drugs such as Viagra and the baby boomer expectations as they grow older, are fueling new AIDS cases.

The over-50 group with the disease faces increased longevity than patients had 10 or 20 years ago, but also unusual challenges. General health problems connected with advancing age complicate the treatment and progression of the disease. Socially, seniors with AIDS, particularly those in their 60s and 70s, feel a stigma related to the disease that many younger people do not because their generation handled sexuality, especially the homosexuality often associated with AIDS, so differently.

Dorothy Jackson, a social worker at North Shore University Hospital in Manhasset, says "there still exists the stigma surrounding the disease and the fear in those over 50 who are infected that if their contemporaries, who are not as knowledgeable as younger people about how it is contracted and how it is spread, find out, that they'll be ostracized both socially and professionally."

According to the federal Centers for Disease Control estimates for 2004, the last available year, there were 12,447 people between the ages of 50 and 65 living with HIV / AIDS in the United States, and 14,410 age 65 and older. People over 50 with HIV / AIDS represented about 13 percent of the total cases in the country.

The New York State Department of Health reported 23,081 people over 50 with the disease living in the state in 2004. Long Island's share was estimated at somewhat more than 1,000. But Dr. Joseph McGowan, director of the Center for AIDS Research & Treatment at North Shore University Hospital, says the actual local total could be higher



Lessie Myles, 54, of Hempstead, has written two books about dealing with HIV and says she is physically much better now than she was when she was diagnosed in 1987.

because of a lack of reporting in the suburbs.

#### Emphasis on prevention

A number of organizations have emerged on Long Island over the past several years to focus on educating seniors about the risks of HIV and AIDS, targeting senior centers and other residences.

"Sex in the Suburbs," an informative program created by Positive SPACE, a nonprofit

health group, is an approach to providing seniors a forum for learning about and discussing sexuality and prevention issues. Two years ago, FECS, a nonprofit health and human services agency, started to provide an "AIDS over 50" initiative. "We saw the growing numbers of people becoming infected and the lack of prevention education targeting that group," Positive SPACE director

Maria Mezzatesta says.

In addition, the Long Island Association of AIDS over Fifty — with a staff of seven that goes into the field with programs — was also founded three years ago by Terry Banks, director of Community Development for LIMAC (Long Island Minority AIDS Coalition), and Senda Newman.

The work of these groups calls for a different approach. According to Banks, seniors will often ask questions "for their grandchildren" in order to relieve them of their embarrassment and inability to openly discuss sexual issues. Discussions about the health risks are about subjects often addressed with younger people but tailored to an older audience, including extensive presentations on how to use protection, who is at risk and the importance of being routinely tested.

McGowan also cites another new situation: the increase of cases resulting from the use of Viagra among seniors. That and other new drugs like it has led, in part, to the growth in senior sexual activity and thus increased risks.

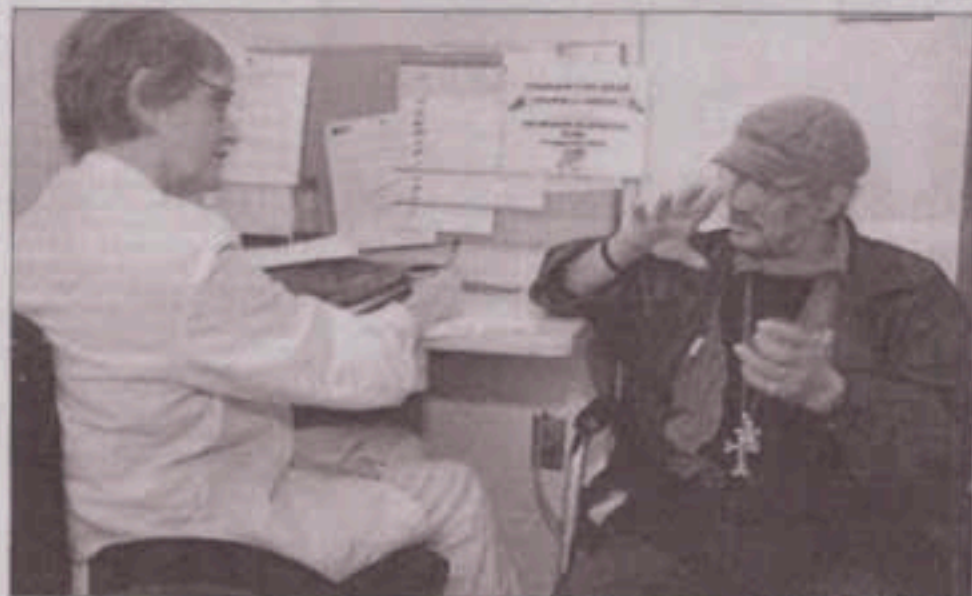
#### Delayed diagnosis

Some issues are different. "Older persons with HIV tend to present later in a more advanced stage," according to McGowan. "There are no routine screenings for older patients, and symptoms can often mimic other illnesses. Memory problems, which may be attributed to aging, can be a sign of HIV's dementia. PCP, a type of pneumonia often associated with HIV-positive people, can mimic congestive heart failure, and weight loss may not be attributed to HIV but to depression or other ailments." Those over 50 are less likely to discuss their sexual lives with their physicians, families and children and are often misdiagnosed.

Fran McDermott, program coordinator at the HIV / AIDS clinic at Nassau University Medical Center in East Meadow, says many older people are in denial about how they may have contracted the virus. Accepting the diagnosis is difficult, and, she says, those with grown, sexually aware children may have a considerable amount of shame if it were sexually transmitted.



Peter DiCicco, 55, of Bellerose, above, found little acceptance after his 1988 diagnosis, but he began to feel peace when he adopted an unwanted dog from a shelter.



Antonio Williams Jr., 61, talks with with nurse Barbara Marshall at Nassau University Medical Center.

According to McGowan, patients over age 50 comprise more than 21 percent of those being treated at North Shore University Hospital's HIV/AIDS clinic. The probable causes of transmission are about the same for older patients as for younger ones at North Shore, as is the racial and ethnic breakdown of the older population, doctors say.

Among those with an identified risk for HIV acquisition, 52 percent are attributed to heterosexual sex, 27 percent used injected drugs at some time, 18 percent were men who had sex with other men and 4 percent had received a

transfusion. The racial and ethnic breakdown among the over-50 patients at North Shore is 49 percent white, 40 percent black, 10 percent Hispanic and 1 percent Asian.

Those over 50 with HIV/AIDS also are a significant group at other Long Island health facilities. Fifteen percent of patients being treated at Stony Brook University Hospital are over 50, and nearly 25 percent of those being treated at Nassau University Medical Center are over 50.

As for those of any age, HIV/AIDS presents some universal challenges to patients. "I don't fear death," says Barry

Stewart, 56, who lives in Jamaica Estates and was diagnosed with full-blown AIDS in 1999. "I fear only how it might happen — I don't want to suffer. The doctors have high expectations, but I don't have the energy that I used to have. . . . I've weak, tired, have diarrhea all the time, and I consistently feel off-balance. I live with the fear that my system will build up an immunity to the medications which have made living with HIV/AIDS manageable."

#### Sexual Identity

Stewart, who is gay, is part of the support group at North Shore University Hospital. He

describes those leading a double life — men who have been married for decades who suddenly find themselves with the virus and have to explain it to their spouses. Both Stewart and Jackson, a social worker at North Shore, say there is a great reluctance for such people to acknowledge homosexual experiences, as they consider themselves heterosexual.

Once a signal maintainer for the New York City Transit Authority, Stewart says he tries to focus his emotions positively by being creative in his home, cooking, baking.

## Where to get help

Here is a list of resources for HIV/AIDS information, counseling and testing.

- Long Island Association of HIV Over Fifty (LIHOV) 631-225-5900

- Long Island Minority AIDS Coalition (LIMAC) 1045 Rte. 109, Suite 101, Linderoom, NY 11757, 631-225-5500, www.limac-ny.org

- New York State HIV/AIDS hot lines:

- English 800-541-AIDS
- Spanish 800-223-5IDA
- Deaf 800-369-AIDS
- Counseling 800-872-2777

- Nassau University Medical Center, Canaan Avenue and Hempstead Turnpike, East Meadow, 516-572-0021

- HIV testing and counseling is available at the Department of Health in Nassau County, 40 Charles Lindbergh Blvd., Uniondale, 516-573-2019.

In Suffolk, call the Department of Health at 631-439-1551 for an appointment to schedule testing at the county health centers.

- The New York State Department of Health also offers testing throughout Suffolk County — call 800-467-6796 to schedule an appointment.

- North Shore University Hospital, Community Drive, Manhasset, Dr. Joseph McGowan, director of HIV/AIDS program, Dorothy Jackson, social worker / AIDS program coordinator, 516-562-3575

- Stony Brook University Medical Center, Stony Brook University, Comprehensive AIDS Center, Division of Infectious Diseases, Dr. Roy T. Strathigal, director, 631-444-3490

- LIARC (Long Island Association for AIDS Care), P.O. Box 2150, Huntington Station, N.Y. 11746, 877-10-LIARC (within Nassau/Suffolk), 631-385-AIDS (outside Nassau/Suffolk), 631-385-2451 (office), 631-385-2452 (fax)

- Positive SPACE, FEGT multi-service HIV/AIDS Program, Maria Mizzanetra, Director, 4900 Jericho Turnpike, Syosset, 516-496-7550, mizzaneta@space.org

- New York State Office on Aging, 800-342-9875

- New York Association on HIV Over Fifty, 202-485-7594

- AARP, Social Outreach and Support, 202-434-2260

- Senior Action is a Gay Environment (SAGE), 202-451-7594

- Nassau County Department of Health HIV Bureau, 516-572-2019

- Catholic Charities of Long Island / Nassau County offers counseling, 333 N. Main St., Freeport, 516-625-7400

- Suffolk Community Support Service of Catholic Charities also provides counseling, 69 W. Main St., Bay Shore, 631-758-0472 — BETTINA MARSH