



## LIVING POSITIVELY

Thirteen years ago Jackie\* and John\* would never have believed that something so unexpected could have brought them together – HIV.

*“We know each other 7 years now, but we married for 3 years. When I first met her I was kinda low ennu. I felt strange going to a support meeting. But then I saw her, she have some nice broad hips and a pretty face, so mi ask the facilitator for her number and a suh we start talk”,* John said.

The year 2000 was a sad year for John. He became a single father to three children after the death of their mother – his girlfriend. *“Is when she dead mi find out ennu. She went out and bring it back in and a she infect me. When mi hear mi have it mi bawl fi bout a month straight. But mi haffi strengthen up ennu, for the children. For a three a dem and a me one now”,* he stated.

His wife Jackie faced a similar struggle in the same year. *“My baby took sick and I carried him to the hospital and that’s how I found out. I went home and screamed the whole night. I didn’t know what to do, I didn’t want to leave the house”,* she said. Her baby eventually died and she was overcome with depression. *“I was so low. I went to the hospital regularly, but I was just so down, then my doctor suggested a support group”.*

Little did she know that she would gain confidence, a new lease on life and a husband from the sessions. The support group was a big move for John who had not gone to the doctor nor taken any medication since he was diagnosed 6 years prior to joining the group. *“Mi used to feel tired when mi a work, but mi neva go doctor or nuttin I was still smoking and drinking. Is when mi meet mi wife now mi*

*start understand what this ting is all about and a suh mi start go doctor and tek medication. Mi stop drink and smoke and start do wah mi fi do. Mi a man weh work hard ennu, so when you first hear dem ting deh yuh fret an dem sumting deh but a 13 years now mi a go”.*

Since their courtship, the couple has drawn closer to God and that has also helped them to live positively. “*When he met me I was in the church and I told him that the only way this can work is if him come to church and he came*”, Jackie said smiling.

*“Yuh know yuh lonely and sometimes you haffi a hide because you have HIV and you nuh want people fi know. Sometimes you just want somebody that can understand your situation ennu. She look nice and she give me good feedback. I was praying about it, so when she said I had to go to church I neva have no problem. Going to church mek mi prosper, people all a wonder how me look fat so,”* he laughed.

The couple has not faced much stigma and discrimination because of their new approach to life. “*They [people in the community] know about me. I was down until 2005 and then in 2007 I made a big change. So mi nuh even know if people still remember seh mi have it*”, she laughed, “*So all those stigma look like dem jus drop off. People even commend me on how I look now*”. John chimed in “*we nuh business again, we just a live*”.

Despite their positive outlook on life, when the couple was seeking to get married 3 years ago their pastor refused to marry two HIV positive persons. “*The pastor said we were going to die, so we shouldn’t get married and seh him not going too marry us*”, Jackie recalls. Determined to get married, they went outside of their church and were married by another pastor, a friend of John who was happy about the union.

*“Many of them that said we were going to die, have gone before us and some who said we shouldn’t get married we look healthier than them and our marriage last longer than theirs”, Jackie laughed. The happy couple agreed that it is better to be with another HIV positive person. “It more comfortable being with someone who has it. It’s just more comfortable and yuh nuh have to hide anything. Some a them out there have it and a hide and go touch a one man and nuh tell the man nuttin because dem fraid and the man gone an nuh know”, John said. “And that nuh right”, they said in unison.*

The secret to their positive outlook on life these days include God, and each other. *“We have a happy marriage in every aspect,” Jackie said chuckling, “you have to know what you’re doing. You just need to protect yourself. I want people to see that HIV is not the end of the world. I want people to use me as a miracle”, Jackie noted.*

