

Twenty-four-year-old Ismail Harerimana has been living with HIV since birth. He narrates his ordeal of how among others he told his friends that he was taking drugs for an eye problem and escape from school to get his ARVs refill.

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About nine years ago, Ismail Harerimana discovered he was HIV positive. Although he has made great strides in living positively, he is still angry with his parents for passing on the virus. This anger has bred fear of starting a family in Harerimana because he is afraid of passing the virus to another person. But his status has always been his most guarded secret. In fact his classmates only learnt about it recently through his Facebook post. "Until the Facebook post, all my classmates and friends believed I was taking medication for my eyes," he says.

Harerimana was born 24 years ago in Bukimbiri Sub-country, Kisoro District. His father succumbed to Aids a few years after he had heard rumours in the neighbourhood that he was HIV positive. Harerimana refuted the claims because he had never seen his father take any medication or talk to him about the sort.

Finding out
Because Harerimana was not delivered from a health facility, he is the only one who is HIV positive among his siblings. "Initially, I would be sickly all the time and my parents would take me to hospital. I get treatment and return home or school. However, while in Senior Two in 2008 my eye got a bad infection. I went to hospital for treatment and the doctor asked me to take an HIV test. I was not given the results but the doctor asked me to return with my father to the hospital the next day. That is when the doctor broke the news that I was HIV positive," the 24-year-old recalls.

2008

THE YEAR ISMAIL HARERIMANA DISCOVERED HE WAS HIV POSITIVE

Harerimana was given ARVs but told it was treatment for the eyes probably because he was young. Two months later, he was retested and also a CD4 count which revealed he had only 10 was taken.

"The truth was difficult for me to take in. Life became very difficult for me since then. I did not disclose to my friends at school but I would take my medicine every 7am and when they asked why I was taking medicine, I told them it was for my eyes and they believed," he recounts.

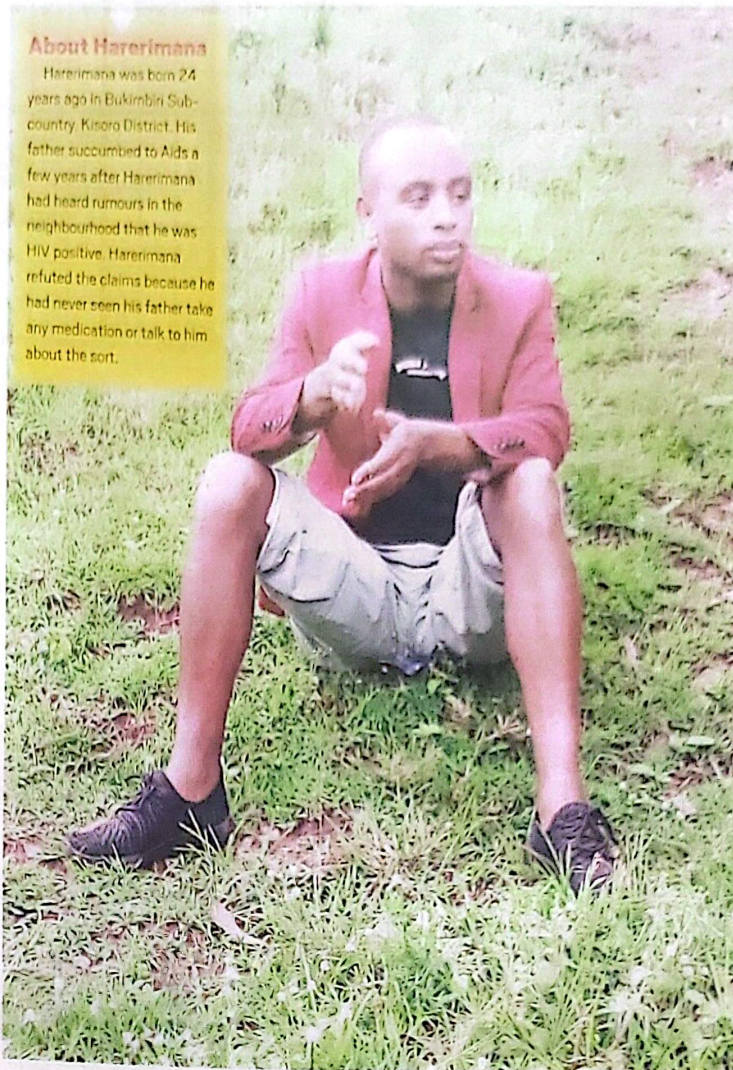
He adds that not even his head teacher knew he was HIV positive. This made getting permission to refill his ARVs difficult causing Harerimana to escape often and get punished.

His academics were not spared. Because he had lost hope, he started performing poorly.

I would escape from school to get my ARVs

About Harerimana

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Ismail Harerimana has been living with HIV for 24 years and is using his status to encourage youth to fight the virus. COURTESY PHOTOS

"I thought I was going to die soon and that I was going to miss my friends. During preps, instead of revising, I would be thinking about what I would tell God and how I was going to miss my friends," Harerimana says.

At every end of the term, he would bid his classmates farewell saying he would not return the next term.

"I used to ask my friends to come for my burial in case they heard I was dead. I would tell them that in my family, we had misfortunes and would perhaps die in motor accidents."

Despite all this, he completed his secondary education and got a job as a receptionist because his is unable to raise university fees.

No family dreams

While in high school, Harerimana never thought about getting into relationships because he feared spreading the virus to other people. In 2015 however, a girl fell for him.

"She said she loves me but I

disclosed my status to her which she could not believe so I went with her to pick my ARVs," Harerimana says.

Although the girl tested negative, she did not break up with him but keeps encouraging him to take his medication and remain strong.

Encouraging others

But Harerimana has since stopped his pity party and has started using his status to encourage others to live positively. In May, he started a group in Kabale Town to bring all young positives together to fight Aids. Kabale Young Positives (KYP) group comprises 30 HIV positive people.

"I lead my group by visiting, supporting and counselling some of the positive youth who are not taking their ARVs well. As part of World Aids Day commemorations, we plan to move around churches, markets, cinema halls teaching people about Aids. I also use my Facebook page, WhatsApp, Instagram and Twitter to talk about fighting HIV," he says.

Meghan is Prince Harry's princess

It's all wedding bells and love at Buckingham palace following the engagement of Prince Harry, 33 and American actress Meghan Markle, 30. The royal engagement was announced on Monday.

Markle's engagement to Prince Harry has been applauded by many people as an up-to-the-minute step of the monarchy. "A divorced, mixed-race, Hollywood actress who attended a Roman Catholic school is to marry the son of the next king," began the lead editorial on Tuesday in *The Daily Telegraph*, a UK newspaper.

Markle will be the first American to marry into the royal family since Wallis Simpson, the divorced socialite, whose relationship with King Edward VIII triggered a constitutional crisis and prompted his abdication in 1936. And it was only in 2013 that the law was amended so that members of the royal family could marry Catholics without losing their place in the line of succession. The royal engagement therefore raises questions of whether this is a symbol of change? Not to mention the fact that she is not Briton or a citizen of Britain. Markle, is a biracial American, whose mother is a black yoga instructor and her father a white cinematographer. She is divorced and two years older than Prince Harry.

On Tuesday, it was announced that Markle would — in addition to joining the Anglican Church — apply for British citizenship after marrying Prince Harry on an unspecified date in May in St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle.

In their first interview since the announcement, with BBC, Markle revealed that she had very little understanding of the British royal family and its significance. "I did not know much about him," adding that the pair had been set up on a blind date by a friend.

Prince Harry is a grandson of Queen Elizabeth II and fifth in line to the throne. He is a son of the heir to the throne. Prince Harry and Markle are expected to be known as the duke and duchess of Sussex after they are married although she may be known informally as Princess Meghan. If Prince Harry were to decline the dukedom, he would remain Prince Henry of Wales — his official name.

Source: *The New York Times*



Prince Harry (left) and Meghan Markle will get married in May 2018. NET PHOTO