

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What inspired you to write *Your Neighbor Has AIDS*?

When I was a chaplain and the Ruth Rothstein CORE Center, I saw how family members and HIV caregivers struggled with addressing the challenges that came from guilt, feelings of isolation, and abandonment which inhibited people living with HIV/AIDS from accessing care, connecting with their family, and finding ways to live healthier lives. There was a gap between people who wanted to support those with HIV/AIDS and people who were living with HIV/AIDS. I decided to address the gap in an easy to read book that would be a bridge between people living with HIV/AIDS and those who sought to support them.

What is the primary message you'd like your readers to take away from *Your Neighbor Has AIDS*?

I want my readers to come away knowing that they are armed with the information they need to be able to talk about HIV/AIDS and address some of the feelings that come with the diagnosis. I want people to know that there is a bridge through which those who are positive can connect with those who are negative.

Once a congregant of mine told me that living with HIV meant she felt she lived in a bubble. This bubble was invisible, but it separated her from everyone else because she could not talk about having HIV except within certain settings. *Your Neighbor Has AIDS* serves as a way to connect the person in the bubble with the people who care about her and the services that are available to her.

What is your favorite part of the book? Why?

The part of *Your Neighbor Has AIDS* that I find the most compelling is the real-life testimonies from individuals living with or touched by HIV/AIDS. This is the *Your Neighbor Speaks* section of my book and I hold this part up because the testimonies bring to life some of the challenges that come when a person learns she/he is HIV positive. These are the stories of real people struggling with real reactions and reading what they have to share takes HIV out of the mental and into the heart which is where we need to address the spread of this disease—from the heart.

What was the most difficult part to write? Why?

The most difficult part for me to write was about my encounter with a young woman while I was at the CORE Center. I was new to CORE at the time, and during my routine intake process, she challenged me about the questions I was asking to fill out the intake document. She wanted to know how filling out the form on my clipboard would take care of her spiritual and emotional needs.

When she asked me questions like: why do I need to know how she was infected with HIV to be her pastor? What difference to her spiritual health did where she lived make?

Why did I have to know if she had children, or was married to minister to her? I stopped short.

Thinking about her questions caused me to change the direction I was heading in my role as minister to people living with HIV/AIDS. I stopped focusing on keeping grant funding and started caring for people. I also started actively looking for other ways that my shortcomings affected my ability to pastor. It was very difficult to write about this experience because I was exposing my bias and how that bias affected my role as minister.

What are you reading right now?

I just finished reading: Personal Village by Marvin Thomas, MSW and I'm now reading Ethics in Ministry by Walter E. Wiest and Elwyn A. Smith.

Who are your favorite authors and who influenced your writing?

For fun I read Stephen King. I truly admire his ability to draw people in with the written word. I also enjoy Paul Tillich, and Carl Jung.

Can you offer a glimpse into your "real life" and share with us a bit of your personal life—Outside of writing, what's important to you (i.e., hobbies, passions, causes, family)?

I am an activist & minister to the core. I have the blessing and (sometimes curse) to be able to see oppression and inequality immediately and this is what moves me to action. I enjoy reading, and find that I don't have enough time to read as much as I like. I try to make time for close friends and enjoy the times we connect and laugh. I take my work seriously, but not myself. I have 4 daughters, three grandchildren, two sons-in-law, and a life-long partner of over 10 years. I live in Chicago, where I attend plays, social functions, and travel for fun when I get the chance. My family is multi-ethnic: German, Korean, American. I am biracial: Irish & African/American.

Tell us something surprising about you and/or something very few people know about you.

Very few people know that I have been married twice and was a young, single mother. I married the first time when I was 19 years old. My first daughter was born when I was 20. I was married to her father for less than a year before we ended in divorce. I was not prepared to fulfill my role as mother in her life. Consequently, my mother raised her. Because of this experience, I understand what many young women today who are facing motherhood for the first time are feeling.

What has been one of your biggest struggles and/or successes (professional/personal) and what have you learned from it?

One of my biggest struggles has been personal. I have struggled to find my place in American society as a biracial person. First, I tried to deny part of my heritage only to find that I was in conflict with myself. Second, I tried to ignore both which meant that I lived a confused and confusing life. Now, I claim both and have made a profession out of

helping people understand that race is a category that was created by people in their efforts to control those who were called *other*.

Have you ever had a nickname? Tell us about it.

Yes. I was called “Dee” when I worked in the operating room. In my other life, I was a surgical assistant who specialized in orthopedics and was often called Debbie, which I did not like. To avoid having to correct people constantly, I decided to take the nickname “Dee.”

Who is your biggest fan?

That’s easy. My partner.

What was the best advice you’ve ever received—do you follow it?

The best advice I’ve ever received is to read the fine print. In other words, read EVERYTHING before I act on a project, proposal, invitation... Yes I follow it.

What is your favorite literary turn-of-phrase / quote / word picture?

A quote that I live by is from my professor at Union Theology Seminary in NY, Robert Seaver: the only sin we commit is the sin of not using our gifts.

What did you learn about yourself while writing *Your Neighbor Has AIDS* that you may not have expected?

While writing this book, I learned that the gift I have not been using to the fullest is my ability to write about complex and often confusing topics in clear easy to access language.

What’s next for you ~ Anything else you’d like to offer?

I’m currently promoting my book *Your Neighbor Has AIDS* through book signings, and public speaking engagements. I am also writing my second book, which will offer more insight into caring for people with HIV/AIDS and will be expanded to include people who are chronically ill. This book will be released in the spring of 09. Right now, I am accepting written and verbal accountings from people who have cared for or who are caring for someone who is chronically ill. Some of the accountings and experiences of caregivers will be included in my next book to give support and encouragement to my readers who are caregivers.

Just-for-Fun. Your preference:

- * Coffee or Tea (coffee)
- * Beach or Mountains (beach)
- * Sensible Shoes or Stilettos (sensible shoes that have style)
- * Stranded on a deserted island you would need. (My partner, computer with Internet, and books)
- * Black or Gray (gray)
- * Speed or Luxury Car (luxury)
- * Pets or No Pets (pets)
- * Designer or Functional (designer)

* Cocktail of Choice single malt Scotch.

Book Excerpt (Max. 250 words)

This is from the testimony section of *Your Neighbor Has AIDS*.

My Neighbor,

**the pastor of a Pentecostal church.
Speaks.**

I can no longer be silent. As a pastor of a church, I have seen several of my members die from AIDS. They were gay and they never talked about who they were. I lost too many people to this disease, and I can't be quiet any longer.

My tradition believes that homosexuality is a sin, but the people that I know who died of AIDS were good people. They were people who tried to do what was right. After we lost them, I made a commitment to learn what I needed to know to take care of them and to help stop this disease from spreading.

It really doesn't matter what two adults do in their bedrooms.

It does matter that we are dying of AIDS, and it doesn't seem to be letting up.

It matters that children are losing their mothers and fathers and parents are losing their sons and daughters.

It matters that wives are getting AIDS from their husbands.

It matters that we are not doing everything we possibly can to stop the spread of AIDS.