

Walking in Darkness, Part 1

by Darryl Walker

Thirty years ago, our country was in the midst of the AIDS pandemic. It was a time of profound darkness for the LGBT community especially. As part of the staff at First MCC of Atlanta and later at All Saints MCC and Christ Covenant MCC, I knew of at least 150 people who succumbed to the complications of AIDS.

Funerals and memorial services were being conducted weekly, sometimes more frequently. Most of the deceased were not close friends of mine, but the list included my first MCC pastor, Rev. Howard Wells, my fifth MCC pastor, Rev. Byron Hilbun and my Gulf Lower Atlantic District Coordinator, Rev. Gil Lincoln.

During this period, my best friend and housemate was Michael Brooks. He was the manager of a Sherwin Williams store and I was an administrator of ET Training and Inventory at the Georgia Department of Labor. We had decided to start a graphics business together that we would call Galaxy Graphics.

Late one afternoon, I arrived at home and saw Michael's car parked in front. I checked the mailbox and there was a letter replying to our request for a business license. I quickly opened it and saw that a business license had been granted. I went inside happily with a big smile on my face to share the good news.



Then, I saw Michael sitting at the dining room table with his head lowered and a despondent look on his face. After walking over to the table and sitting down across from him, I said, "What is wrong?" He didn't respond, so I asked him again. In a voice barely audible, he said that he had been to his doctor and today received a phone call reporting test results showing that he is HIV positive with a low T cell count.

Michael's news was both unexpected and devastating. I recall silently praying: "God, what should I say?" Then, I got up, walked around the table, and sat next to him with my arm around his shoulder. I said "Michael, we will see it through together." I didn't say anything else for some minutes. A pall of fear, anxiety and

uncertainty had descended and both of us reflected in silence.

He took a medical retirement from his job. Michael had both good and really bad days. There were times when I didn't think he would survive another day. Then there were days when he seemed fine again and we could go out together and the pall temporarily lifted. The term for AIDS patients alternating between imminent death and renewed health was called Lazarus Syndrome.

But, as he experienced more challenging days than good days, he needed to have someone with him while I went to work. When the Care Team at Christ Covenant MCC learned of our need, several of

them volunteered as caregivers to come by individually during the day for several hours while I was at work. Later, a couple of them told me that Michael had shared with them the first words I said to him after finding out his diagnosis and how much it meant to him that he would not have to face the disease alone.

(Part 2 continued tomorrow)