

MY STORY: “KATHY, YOU’VE GOT . . .”

They told me I was going to die. My ears burned as Dr. Gazaleh blurted out, “Kathy, your AIDS test...it’s come back positive!” That Wednesday afternoon in May of 1987 would never be forgotten.

As I hung up the phone, a tremor started through my hands, and then it accelerated through the rest of my body.

I was in shock. My worst nightmare had come true. I was a nurse working in the ER during June 1986 when an accident-related trauma patient was wheeled in. We had to crack open his chest to perform internal CPR. My hands had been wrist-deep inside him. But despite our best efforts, he died minutes later.

Later that night, we found out he had AIDS. My own heart skipped a beat as I looked down at my hands and remembered a minor cut on my right index finger. Believe it or not, but back in the mid-80’s we didn’t wear latex gloves to protect us.

Because of the exposure, the doctors decided to test me every three months for a year. After three negative tests, I thought I was home free. I was wrong!

After the dreadful call in May, I rushed to the hospital to meet with the doctors. My head was spinning. I couldn’t think. My hands were shaking; I could barely grip the steering wheel.