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Dear Friend:

"Mark proved to me that AIDS kills people - not fags, junkies, or prostitutes.

"Before listening to his talk, I looked upon people who had the disease with disdain. (After learning about high risk sexual behavior) my life will be radically different than the way I planned.

"Mark put a face on this AIDS virus."

A local college student named Fred wrote that after listening to a talk I gave last April about living with AIDS. I've gone about life in a quiet way, but AIDS has forced me to speak out. I'm grateful for the opportunity that AIDS ACTION, which arranged this talk, has given me to talk openly about this cruel disease to business and school groups like Fred's.

AIDS ACTION is a Boston-based, non-profit organization committed to providing the public, the media, and health care professionals with frank, current information about AIDS, its transmission, and prevention. To date, education is the only prevention we have against AIDS.

AIDS ACTION is also dedicated to comforting and caring for those people affected by AIDS who live in eastern Massachusetts.

I am one whose life is made a little easier because of AIDS ACTION.

I still remember the shock I felt the day I was diagnosed. It just knocked the wind right out of me. As a gay man, I knew about AIDS; but I had fooled myself into thinking that it could never happen to me.

I had spent most of my life in upstate New York until I came to Harvard to pursue graduate study in 1984. In the fall of '86 I went to see my doctor with a flu-like cold that I couldn't shake. He surprised me when he told me that I had pneumonia and that more tests were needed.

When I walked into the hospital lab and saw the technician wearing gloves and a mask, my heart sank.

"What kind of tests are you running," I asked. She started to explain and then her voice trailed off . . .

I knew then that I had AIDS.

That weekend was the lowest point of my life. Even as I write these words, the pain and the confusion come back to me . . . I remember planning for my memorial service . . .

But I also remember watching the sun rise the morning after my diagnosis. "You may have AIDS," I stubbornly said to myself, "but you're alive, and you're not going without a good fight."