And I did. There came a day when I couldn't bear to see my son in pain any longer, even if it meant never seeing him again. I knew I had to let go.

"You know I'm clumsy at doing this," I told Johnny-boy as he lay in bed, his hand in mine, pillows cushioning his thin body weakened by this terrible disease. "But it's time for you to go, Johnny-boy. You've suffered enough. Somehow we'll get by without you, and we'll be together again one day."

He gave me half a wink, a little bit of a smile, and squeezed my hand with all the strength he could muster. He took one last breath, and then he died, quietly.

"I think Johnny-boy's left us," I said to Dad.

It's difficult to describe in words what it's like as a mother to care for your dying son. When he hurts, you hurt -- emotionally and physically. But with AIDS, you also feel the pain caused by ignorance and fear.

Dad and I still have feelings of anger and sadness when we remember the birthday party we threw for Johnny-boy just a month before he died. We invited everyone in our large family, about 110 people in all. Twenty-five of our son's friends came -- but not a single one of our relatives.

They were all afraid that they would catch AIDS if they sent a card or held his hand. They just never took the time to learn the facts -- that you can't catch AIDS from casual contact like sharing a meal or giving a kiss. That hurt Johnny-boy so much. It still hurts us.

AIDS does affect the whole family. That's one reason Dad and I choose to speak out. We hope that people can learn from our experience. And we want people to learn about and support AIDS Action.

Dad and I will never forget AIDS Action and the wonderful men and women who showed Johnny -- and us -- the way to live with AIDS.

Now it's our turn to help AIDS Action.

You can help, too, by sending a gift to AIDS Action today. Dad and I ask you to make as generous a gift as you possibly can, hopefully $50 or more, which will really make a difference. But even a modest gift will help.

Help AIDS Action offer people with AIDS and their families the kind of loving support and day-to-day help we were so lucky to receive. Please mail your gift today.

God bless you,

Josie Politano

Mrs. Josephine Politano

P.S. Whether AIDS Action can help other families to live with AIDS depends on you. Please give as generously as you can.