

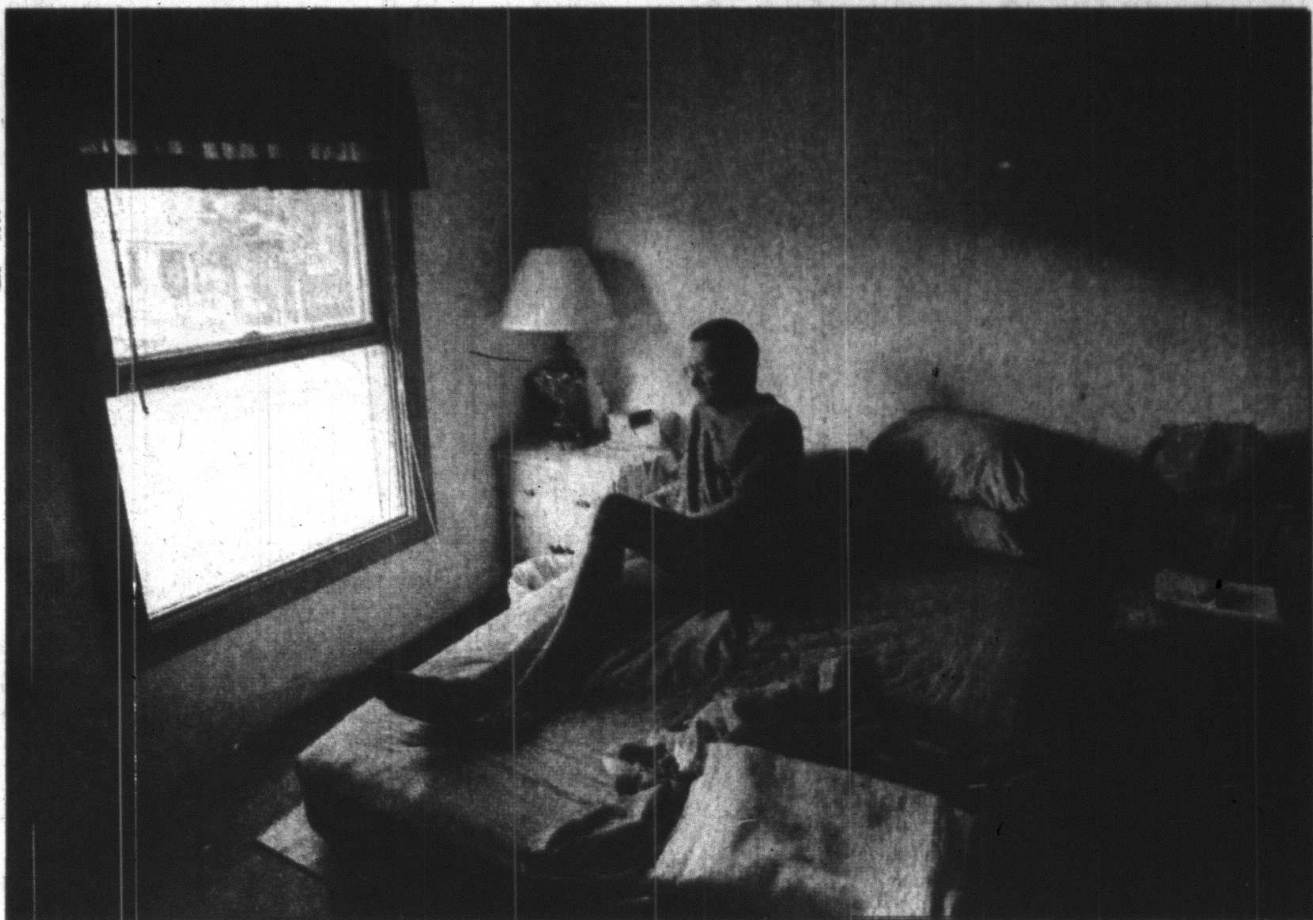
TUESDAY

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Barry Reynolds spends more time at home these days in his battle with AIDS. In recent years, he had worked hard in educating about AIDS and assisting AIDS patients. One of his favorite pastimes now is to watch the birds in the tree outside his bedroom window.



Night of AIDS: Waiting for sunrise

On covering AIDS

This is the first of a series that will detail the life of Barry Reynolds, a Lafayette man who is living with AIDS.

In the coming months, the *Journal and Courier* will update readers on Reynolds' activities, thoughts and feelings.

He agreed to the series in an attempt to continue to educate Greater Lafayette residents about acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

Lafayette man losing battle, but not faith

By JOHN NORBERG
Journal and Courier

At 2 a.m. each day, Barry Reynolds gets up alone, looks out the window of his Union Street apartment and listens to the few sounds of life on the street below.

He waits for birds to wake with the morning.

In the darkness, he sees his future. But he isn't afraid.

"I do the opposite of what most other AIDS patients do," he says. "They're afraid to go to sleep when it's dark so they stay up all night and sleep in the day. I'm wide awake at 2 in the morning. It's real peaceful. It's my time. I watch the sun come up."

Alone and at peace, Reynolds watches the start of each day knowing there won't be many more sunrises in his lifetime. The doctors have told him what to expect. It's jarring knowledge for a man who will turn 35 on Saturday.

He has the feeling of a life only half-fulfilled.

"I feel like I have so much more to offer," Reynolds says softly. "And I'm not going to have a chance."

Sitting in a chair in his apartment on a quiet afternoon, Reynolds holds a tall glass and sips a thick, white drink that looks like a milkshake. It helps him put weight on his thin, frail frame.

At 5 feet, 11 inches, he dropped from 189 to 120 pounds in two weeks this year. He has mycobacterium avium complex. AIDS patients learn many medical terms.

"It's the worst AIDS sickness you

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Reynolds

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can get," Reynolds says. "There's no cure. It eats you from the inside. This is what I have to look forward to."

He smiles. He smiles often.

Reynolds, a McCutcheon High School graduate, talks about anger, but there is no hatred in his voice. His once curly, auburn hair is cut short and straight and the skin on his cheeks is taut.

He enjoys a long talk. Maybe there's therapy in telling his story, wondering aloud.

"I've watched 57 friends die," Reynolds says. "I'm not afraid to die. But it would be nice if someone could tell me what to expect when I get there. I believe in God. But I wonder what's waiting on the other side."

Reynolds has been on a self-described roller coaster ride for eight years since he first tested HIV-positive. He remained relatively healthy until March, when he was diagnosed with full-blown AIDS. All the events that once seemed so distant have occurred in rapid sequence since.

"I got pneumocystis pneumonia and I was in the hospital for a week," he says of his first major illness in March. "I should have stayed in the hospital longer. I talked the doctor into letting me out. I wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible because of my denial. Even though I had been infected for eight years, the day was never going to come when I would get full-blown AIDS."

"Not Barry."

He was a student at Purdue University in 1987 when he was exposed to the AIDS virus.

"In 1987, our mindset in Lafayette was you get AIDS in San

Francisco or New York," he says. "We didn't worry about it. It's an attitude a lot of people still have today. I had been dating for three months and I had just finished having sex on a Sunday afternoon. He told me he had tested positive three times."

It didn't hit Reynolds right away. At first, he really didn't understand what was about to happen to his life.

The news, the anger

He took an AIDS test. It came back positive. He went to bed and stayed there for two weeks.

"I was furious," he says. "I had finally gotten my act together. I was tired of working low-paying jobs and had gone back to school. I had two years under my belt and then I had the AIDS infection."

He took out his anger when he was alone, in his room.

"Where is that guy now? Who knows," Reynolds says of his partner. "I would love to find out. We saw each other for about another month after that, and then he stopped calling me and I stopped calling and then kind of a hatred grew inside me. How could he do this to someone? How could he go out and commit murder? It is murder."

"I'm still mad. I always will be — always. I don't think it's something you ever completely get over."

"Everyone makes mistakes. But to infect someone because of anger ..."

His voice trails off, then he says:

"I've known of people who say, 'I've got AIDS and if I'm going to die, so are as many people as I can infect.' It's anger. It's not right. But it happens."

Reynolds has spent many years working for organizations

that help AIDS patients. He has worked on AIDS education. He still speaks to groups and sends a clear message.

He tells them this is not how you want to die.

"If you want to kill yourself, take a gun," he says. "You don't want to die this way. It's long, drawn out and painful. It's not the death of choice."

Reynolds says some young people have grown up thinking AIDS is the disease of an older generation. They're now finding out it's their disease, too.

Last week he gave a talk in town and greeted people before he talked. They shook his hand, not knowing he had AIDS. When he finished speaking, he asked a woman how she felt having touched the hand of an AIDS patient.

"Years ago, people would look at their hand and say 'Oh, my God,'" Reynolds says. "This woman said, 'It was tough. But I got over it.' I thought that was beautiful. I think more and more people know someone who has AIDS."

That helps them understand, he says.

As he talks, Reynolds lights a Kool cigarette. The smoke swirls around his head. He shrugs off his smoking.

"It's the only thing I can do now," he says.

Losing options

He was taking a cabinet full of pills every day. He has cut that back to about five. He has a lot of physical problems.

"Every time I mention some disease, I get it," he says.

Sometimes he has trouble concentrating. If he's on the telephone in his apartment and his mother comes over, he has trouble keeping everything straight.

"I can handle one thing at a time," he says, and he softly laughs at himself.

He has been in this apartment for about three months. It's clean and freshly painted with light walls. There is an extra bedroom where members of his family sleep. They take turns coming to spend the night with him in case he needs help.

The apartment is at the top of long, steep stairs. He tries to get out at least once a day. The exercise up and down the stairs is good, he says.

He misses doing things. He misses long walks. He loved going out to restaurants. But now he has a problem with vomiting. He never knows when it will happen and it comes on very quickly.

He wanted to set his own timeline. He wanted to be the one who would decide when he would pass from being HIV-positive to having full-blown AIDS. He wasn't ready to get this sick. He wasn't prepared and he has fought it and tried to live his life as he always had before.

"A lot of people had to sit on me," Reynolds says. "They said, 'Barry, you are sick. It's your turn.'"

It's his turn, and he has had to come to terms with that.

"Today, I'm OK," he says. "But the first 10 days after I came out of the hospital, everything made me cry. ... There are things I want to do that aren't even realistic anymore. Everyone in my family is going to Las Vegas in October. They ask if I



Reynolds

want to go. But I might not be able to walk by then.

"I want to play Putt-Putt golf but there's no way I can stand that long. I have to limit myself. It's really hard to say I can't do something. It's even harder to hear someone else say, 'Barry can't do that anymore.'"

A mother's care

Reynolds' mother, Chris, comes by often to help him. It's hard for a mother to watch this happen to a son.

"It's terrible, it's a terrible disease," she says. "I've had eight years to face this, but it's still hard. And I don't know if you ever come to terms with it. You know it's there and you know there's no way out of it. But you always hope."

On good days, she says, her son thinks he can whip the world. But there are so many hard days in between.

Reynolds keeps green plants around his apartment. They're a new hobby. They're healthy and alive. He's set their pots in clusters on the floor in front of windows where the bright sunlight shines.

The doctors say Barry has six months, maybe one year of sunrises left to see.

In his heart, he whispers, he doesn't believe he really has that long.

He sits squarely in his soft chair and faces whatever lies ahead. He has gained strength from where he has been. He has had to face so much already.

If there is one thing you should know about him, Reynolds says firmly, it is this:

"I'm someone who's not ashamed to say that I have AIDS. I'm proud that I'm able to say that."

"And I want you to know — I'm just like everyone else."