

activist, advocate, and Peer Counselor.

Brenda has also had positive experiences with the health care system that deserve mention. There are lab technicians who show their respect by inviting her to direct them to the veins she thinks will allow them access. She has a doctor who ensures that she is actively involved in her own healthcare and treatment. There are healthcare professionals and service providers who acknowledge her skills and value her experiences by seeking her input, advice, and assistance in their efforts to provide healthcare and other services to her, as well as others, who are living with HIV.

Brenda gets a lot of support from the local AIDS service organization, AIDS Prince George (AIDS PG). She initially accessed services at AIDS Prince George at the urging of another Aboriginal woman living with HIV who was connected to the agency. When Brenda first came to AIDS PG she was angry. That anger was, in part, a result of her diagnosis of having HIV/AIDS. Another part of her anger was the result of her struggle to stay clean and to cope with an unknown future in terms of her health. She also finally had to face the pain of her sister's death many years earlier. Her anger was a coping mechanism and a protective shield, a wall she had built to keep her safe in the volatile drug world she had been living in for over a decade. It took her some time before she began to trust that she would be accepted and treated with dignity and respect. Gradually she began to open up and accept the support she was being offered. As she began to get other areas of her life in order, some of her children were returned to her care. She became actively involved in the management of her own health and honed her natural advocacy skills.

Brenda began to volunteer her time to AIDS PG and eventually took part in the peer counselor training. She became the Peer Counselor at AIDS PG and used her advocacy skills to assist others living with HIV as they dealt with their issues around HIV/AIDS, poverty, racism, substance use, and other social determinants of health. As Brenda's confidence grew, so did her skills and abilities. She began to define the role of Peer Counselor at AIDS PG as she became involved in HIV/AIDS work at many levels. Today she provides support and services to people who are living with HIV/AIDS. She models self-advocacy and acts as an advocate. She is also involved in the community education that AIDS PG provides. She is the needle-exchange's positive delegate for the Pacific AIDS Network. She is a member of the Northern Interior Health Region's Partners in HIV committee and she has been involved with the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network. Her involvement in HIV/AIDS work extends from the agency and community level to the national level where she is also a member of the Canadian HIV Trials Network.

As Brenda continues to live with HIV, she wishes her mother was alive to witness her many successes in recent years. She takes great pride in her children's accomplishments as they achieve high grades in school. She knows her stable home life contributes to their successes as well.

She recently began another round of treatment with a new cocktail. She had a severe, potentially fatal reaction to Abacavir and once again had to abandon her treatment regime. She is currently without medications, hoping that a new, effective cocktail will be developed that she will be able to tolerate.

For the most part, Brenda says that contracting HIV has been a blessing in disguise. It forced her to change her life. Those changes have been incredibly beneficial for Brenda, her children, and those who are close to her. Her new and healthier lifestyle is a great benefit for AIDS PG staff and clients. She is an inspiration to others struggling with many of the same issues. While Brenda has come to terms with most of her past, her future is unknown. She thus lives very much in the present, grateful that she has the opportunity to participate fully in the productive life she continually creates for herself.

Catherine Baylis is of mixed Ojibway and Scottish ancestry. She is currently employed with AIDS Prince George as the Client Services Coordinator. She and Brenda work closely together in providing support and services to those infected and affected with HIV. Catherine has spent the past ten years working in Prince George, B.C. in various capacities with Aboriginal people. She recently completed her Master of Education degree at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, B.C. She is combining her love of writing with her passion for issues of feminism, particularly those issues that impact Aboriginal women, by writing and compiling a collection of Aboriginal women's life experiences with oppression and marginalization. Catherine is considering continuing her education to complete a PhD.

Brenda Loyie is a Cree woman. She is the Peer Counselor/ Advocate with AIDS Prince George. She has lived in Prince George for 34 years. She has been clean for four years.

Shirley Adelman

Vanishing

My daughter has disappeared,
not in one full swoop like one
who runs away while on an errand,
but slowly, pound by pound, week by week,
until her face became all eyes and mouth,
like an ancient mask stored far from sunlight.

Shirley Adelman's work has been published in the United States, England, and South Africa, most recently in Lilliput Review and Jewish Affairs.