



AIDS Trip

By Renee Johnson

It all started when Mr. Risley asked our health class who wanted to go on a field trip. Of course everyone said yes, because it would be getting us out of class. Our field trip was to Albany to check out the AIDS quilts.

The bus ride seemed to be taking forever and the radio station wasn't coming in. We arrived at the building and unloaded the bus. I never thought that going on this field trip would actually have an impact on me and what I thought about life. I guess we got there early and had to wait until 10:30 to start our day. Everyone sat on the ground in front of a wall mural. The whole time I was thinking about how rich I would be if I painted a few straight colorful lines on a piece of paper.

Another school was there, so we all mixed in together to listen to our guides inform us why we were there. Questions were asked about what we knew about AIDS and for the most part everything was answered. It wasn't until we were allowed to explore the quilts that it started to affect my feelings on the subject. One twelve foot square quilt consists of eight individual three by six foot panels sewn together. The three by six panels represent a human life lost to AIDS. A panel can be created by the friends or family of the loved one. They usually make it of how they will be remembered. It wasn't until I walked into this room that I felt the remorse of all of these innocent people who had lost their lives to AIDS.

As we walked around, a lady who worked there stopped to ask us what we were feeling. Unbelievably sad and surprised was our answer. We couldn't believe how many people were lost and how many families were and are still affected by this disease. She pointed out that many of the quilts had dates that showed that they died in the nineties. In the nineties nobody had the advancement in technology and medicine to introduce new medicines to extend the life of the afflicted.

We returned to the room we came from, and expressed our feelings on what we had just seen in the previous room. They had introduced a guest speaker. If I remember correctly his name was Max and he began to tell us his story.

Max was born with AIDS. He told us it was after delivery that his mother found out she too had AIDS. When you have this disease, your immune system begins to shut down. Our speaker said in his seventh grade year, he missed seventy five percent of school. He was sick all of the time and the side effects from the medicine he was taking would only make things worse. Various kids asked questions like if he blamed his mother for giving him AIDS. His response was that he has never felt like that because if she knew she had it, she would have known not to have a baby. Not only did it influence him, but he found out who his true friends were. You have to be careful in everything you do, or else something bad could happen. He is extremely cautious in not passing this disease on to any of his significant others. If he decides he would like to have kids, there is medicine that he could take so that the baby would not be contracting AIDS.

Every nine and a half minutes, someone in the United States becomes infected with HIV. As of 2007, UNAIDS estimated that 39.2 million people are living with HIV/AIDS worldwide. At the end of 2009, there were 2.5 million children living with HIV around the world. Now, it being 2010, around 41 million people are infected with AIDS. It is a huge problem that is still under recognized. Getting any disease is 100% preventable.

I learned how serious this issue really is. You can't take it back, so why get it in the first place? Anyone can get AIDS, so discrimination is not the answer. We need to keep spreading the awareness so the number of people dying with AIDS decreases.