

**‘I hold
the key
to curing
HIV.. I
know
what I
must do’**

**- ANDREW STIMPSON
YESTERDAY**

MIRACLE
Fit and healthy
Andrew
yesterday



EXCLUSIVE

By **AIDAN MCGURRAN** and **RON MOORE**
MEDICAL miracle Andrew Stimpson yesterday vowed to do "everything in my power" to give hope to millions of Aids sufferers.

The 25-year-old sandwich maker, thought to be the first person in the world to be cured of HIV, said he felt "blessed".

At first he thought he must have never had the virus. He tried to sue his health authority saying his tests results must be wrong.

But now he is overjoyed to be free of the nightmare that haunted him for 18 months. And his hospital trust wants him back so it can find out why he is clear of the virus.

Andrew said: "I know what I have to do. I realise that something extraordinary has happened to me. Maybe I hold the key to finding a cure."

"I had the initial shock of discovering I was HIV positive then a huge wave of relief when I was told I was clear."

"After all that sunk in I then began to realise that I had a responsibility to the world. It is a weird feeling to think that there is something in me which brings hope to millions of other people."

"I will do everything in my power to help with research into finding a cure. It is a huge responsibility."

Jubilant Andrew added: "I'm not a religious person but I feel completely blessed."

"It's so amazing to think that one day I was staring death in the face and now I am waving it goodbye. I feel special and lucky."

Andrew, openly gay since he was 15, learned he had the virus just weeks after his 22nd birthday. A condom split while he was sleeping with his HIV-positive boyfriend Juan Gomez, 44, in April 2002.

Although he was tested, it was too early to know for certain that he was infected.

But Andrew said: "I had a gut feeling that I had HIV. The virus takes three months to show up in blood tests and I knew I had it even though the results said otherwise."

More tests in August showed that he was HIV-positive. He said: "When the doctor told me it switched from a belief into reality. Suddenly it was there on the table."

"It didn't seem right to be dying of an illness because I never get sick, never catch the flu and never get a cold."

"My lifelong dream is to be an air steward and in a flash that was over because they don't employ people with HIV."

Andrew, originally from Largs, Ayrshire, but who now lives in London, recalls: "My agency for life was lost completely, as if someone had snatched my life away."

He felt alone, unable to confide in anyone except Juan and sister Louise, 20, who works in a call centre in Erskine, near Glasgow.

He could not bring himself to tell his mum Kathy fearing she would not cope. "It was so sad not to be able to tell anyone but I didn't want to be judged or upset people."

"Whenever I visited mum I put on a brave face but it was like she knew. She would say 'if you had HIV, you would tell me wouldn't you?' I felt like I was living a lie."

Andrew even planned the end. He said: "I began researching online the euthanasia company Dignitas and planned how I would die just before I became very ill."

"I didn't want to die in a hospital with tubes sticking out of me so I told Juan I wanted to organise my death, peacefully."

Even knowing there was no cure, he took



FULL OF FUN: Andrew aged three

LITTLE LAD WHO GREW UP TO BEAT THE FEARED KILLER VIRUS



HAPPY: Baking a cake aged 10

a daily cocktail of supplements to stay healthy. Andrew said: "I believed there must be a cure out there. If you think about the Amazon and how many plant species they've not discovered. I was praying for a miracle."

Then a year later the miracle happened. Every two months he had blood tests, liver and heart checks and his immune system was monitored. Then in October 2003, his HIV test was repeated and came back negative.

Andrew said: "It was the last thing I expected. My doctor came into the room saying 'You've cured yourself.' He said, 'This is unbelievable, you're fantastic!'"

"But I was baffled because I couldn't understand how anyone could cure themselves of HIV. I'd read the research, I knew it had never happened before."

"I didn't understand how I could be negative after one year especially because I had been having unprotected sex with my partner believing we had nothing to lose."

"My immune system managed to fight off HIV even though I was in regular contact with it. It's crazy."

Andrew was convinced there had been a mistake and got the Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare NHS Trust to repeat his test twice. Again the results were negative.

He said: "I thought the first test had to be wrong because no one can recover from HIV. I'm still in total disbelief."

"I think has this all been some dream - or some nightmare. My life's gone from one extreme to the other and now it's final - I don't have HIV and it won't come back."

Andrew's legal action against the trust did not get anywhere because an investigation proved all the tests were his.

He received a letter from officials which confirmed he was HIV free which was "exceptional and medically remarkable".

It went on: "Essentially, whilst the circumstances of your positive then negative HIV antibody tests are quite remarkable, there can be no finding of negligence against the trust, and in the circumstances, we are unable to offer compensation to you."

Yesterday Caroline Lord, spokeswoman for the trust, said: "We can categorically state that his first test proved positive and then further tests proved negative. The tests were accurate. It was not a mistake."

"He had HIV and now he hasn't. It is obviously wonderful news for him. But what we do not know is whether he actually cured himself, as has been reported."

"We have offered him further tests to help us investigate and find out why this happened but he hasn't been in."

Andrew is likely to offer his body to medical research in a bid to find a cure for the 34.9million HIV sufferers worldwide.

He said: "I wonder if it's a complete fluke, a mutated gene in my body, but I can't deny that I haven't wondered if my body has the cure for HIV."

Medical experts are baffled. Specialist Dr Andrew Kinghorn said: "The secret seems to lie in the strength of his immune system. What makes him different is tests show he has no virus in his blood and his immune system has stopped making antibodies."

"If we can better understand what happened inside Andrew's body it could prove to be a step towards a breakthrough in beating HIV."

Dr Patrick Dixon, of Aids group Acet, said: "If it's true, it means that his immune system has discovered a weakness in HIV which holds the key to destroying it."

Do you know Andrew? Contact us on 0800 282591 or email mirrornews@mgn.co.uk

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The blood tests undertaken on 15, 20 and 23 August 2002 indicated an antibody positive HIV result. Notably your viral load was exceptionally low however, this is not unusual in patients who have recently contracted the virus. It has been confirmed through DNA testing that the blood taken during the August 2002 tests were your blood. There has been no error in the labelling or testing of the samples, which have been retested and indicate an HIV antibody positive result.

ALL CLEAR: Letter from NHS officials confirming he no longer had HIV and would not get any compensation because there was no mix up

BOY WHO STUNNED MEDICS

GAY Andrew was adopted at the age of 10 and had a quiet upbringing.

Aids had already struck his natural family. He got with touch with estranged relatives in 1994 to learn that his uncle had died from the disease the previous New Year's Eve.

Friends in Largs, Ayrshire, remember him as a shy lad when he attended St Mary's primary school.

One former neighbour said: "A few people round here will remember Andrew but he was really a very quiet person. Seeing him

By **FRANK HURLEY**

on the front of the newspapers was certainly a shock because nobody has heard anything from him since he left some years ago."

His family moved from Largs to Greenock and he became a hairdresser when he left St Columba's high school.

He lived in Amsterdam and moved to London when he was 21.

He writes in his entry on the Friends

Reunited website: "I am currently living in London. I have been here since 2001."

"After leaving school I became a hairdresser. I got bored of hair so I moved to Amsterdam and became a model for various adult magazines."

His mum Kathy could not be contacted at her home yesterday.

A family friend said she had "gone away for the weekend".

His sister Louise, who has supported him through his illness, was also not available.