

I was almost seven when my dad went into hospital in January 1984. He came home for my birthday weekend, then he disappeared until the summer holidays. When we went to visit him, after the months he had been in ITU, he looked like he had shrunk. It was very traumatic to see him like that.

I was told he might cry because he had not seen us for so long. The thing was, I thought I was not allowed to cry because I wasn't the ill person so I held it in. I did not really understand why he was so ill, just that the transplant had not worked. Later, I was told that it might have been an infected kidney and that there was something wrong with his blood. We did not talk about it much.

Eventually, he came home and slowly recovered over the next year. Now I know that my parents were so frightened that he might have HIV and Hepatitis. I did not know about this until much later. But it explains the underlying tension and anxiety in our family.

I remember being told that if I saw any blood, to let my parents know. This made me worry that if he bled, he might die. If he had a nose bleed, I worried. I know now that this was to protect me from any risk of contamination from his blood.

I remember learning about jaundice at school and being so worried because he looked yellow. The hardest thing was not being able to start to put my feelings into words. There was no emotional support at all. If my dad seemed ok, I was ok. If something was going wrong, life was awful. I did not recognise this until after he died in 2004.

It was at this point that I had my own breakdown and had to stop my teaching career. It took me five years of going through counselling and therapy to move forward in my life.

My dad's career finished earlier than he wanted it to. He definitely lost confidence in himself and I know he suffered from depression. Every Sunday, when we were getting ready for school, he would be very down and detached from us. Going to work had been such an important part of his identity.

The impact on our family was enormous. It was a very difficult time for anyone to talk about illnesses such as HIV and Hepatitis. So it was all hidden and secret and this was damaging for all of us. I remember him being very tired and unable to play physical games with us.