

Fifteen months ago Dale wasn't feeling well.

He went to see his doctor, after various tests were run and nothing could be found to be wrong, he was tested for HIV infection. He was told he had AIDS.

"God, it seems like it was ten years ago and yet it seems like it was only yesterday. I was 24 but I felt like I was in a body that belonged to a man of at least 90 years old," says Dale.

Dale was very ill for several months, not only physically but psychologically. He went through a long period of depression compounded by a bad reaction to a prescribed drug.

"It was like being high on acid for five months straight."

When Dale Oxford was first diagnosed with AIDS, he went through stages of denial and anger. His first reaction was "This is a nightmare — wake me up." Then he became angry. "I think for quite sometime I was

between rests. "At 25 years old I shouldn't be exhausted at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, but I am."

Dale is no longer angry at his illness. He has almost a philosophical acceptance of his condition. "I guess I'm a fatalist," he says. "Whatever will happen will happen. Whatever we do to try to change the inevitable, it will still happen." He says he doesn't blame God, nor does he believe, as some people would say, that God is punishing him. "I always kind of chuckle when people say it's the wrath of God, because I know that the one person or entity that has helped me more than anything else is the spiritual side of myself."

Dale says society's attitude toward people with AIDS makes it unique from other terminal illnesses. "Society is very supportive and helpful, even sympathetic to someone with cancer. 'Oh that poor kid, 24 years old with cancer.' The difference

"We all get depressed, but you can always think that things will be better tomorrow. But in my life I know that things will be worse tomorrow. So unless I can find some way of focusing in on a positive attitude and holding that focus, I couldn't get to tomorrow."

— Peter Wood

very angry. I cursed everybody, including God."

Today Dale is feeling much better about his life. Treasurer and co-founder of the Nova Scotia Persons With AIDS Coalition, as well as production manager for The Names Project Foundation of Canada, a memorial to people who have died of AIDS, Dale feels good about what he is trying to accomplish. "I enjoy what I'm doing. The Coalition and the Names Project are the two most beautiful things I've ever been involved in my life. I'm proud to be working on something that not only helps myself, but if I die in 2 to 5 years of this illness, I'll be proud that I've been instrumental in setting up something to help other people."

Born and raised in a small town in Newfoundland and educated at Memorial University in St. John's, Dale is a clothing and textile designer who ran his own studio in St. John's until, as he puts it, "I made my grand mecca to the mainland seeking fame and fortune."

Dale's life is quite different today from what he had pictured it to be a few years ago. An active person by nature, he has found it difficult to accept the fact that he must slow down. "I went to university full time, worked full time, taught piano lessons and practised 2 hours a day myself. Even when I moved to Halifax I worked two jobs and went to school two nights a week, but I can't keep those schedules anymore."

A typical day for Dale now is to sleep until 10 or 11 o'clock, work for 3 or 4 hours at the Coalition, and go home and try to do a little sewing and piano playing in

between my being 24 years old with AIDS is that people will say 'you deserve what you get. If you weren't gay you wouldn't have got it.'"

Dale has encountered this kind of negative reaction on a few occasions. He has had people refuse to shake his hand for fear of catching AIDS. He says that he lost a very good job and has been refused apartments because he has AIDS. When he was very ill, Dale returned to Newfoundland to be with his family, whom he calls very supportive, but while in his home town he encountered some very bad reactions.

"When my mother and I walked into the grocery store people walked out, and one day at the post office I was told to get out of town."

The PWA Coalition has been a great help to Dale in dealing with the negativism surrounding AIDS. "We all help one another. Here it's alright to be angry. We can get angry at government policies, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, or disease discrimination."

The federally funded organization, established last May, was put together in less than six months. "Things happened fairly quickly," says Peter Wood, chair person and co-founder of the Coalition, "largely because we pushed. I have a sense of urgency about everything in my life. I want to get things done, and I intend to badger people in order to make things happen."

And Peter does make things happen. Extremely vibrant, articulate, and quick-witted, Peter is a man who works very hard to make things go his way. Recently his organization, with the help of

Christians Assembled to Respond to AIDS, was instrumental in purchasing a home to house four PWAs who, for various reasons, have nowhere else to go or need the company of other people.

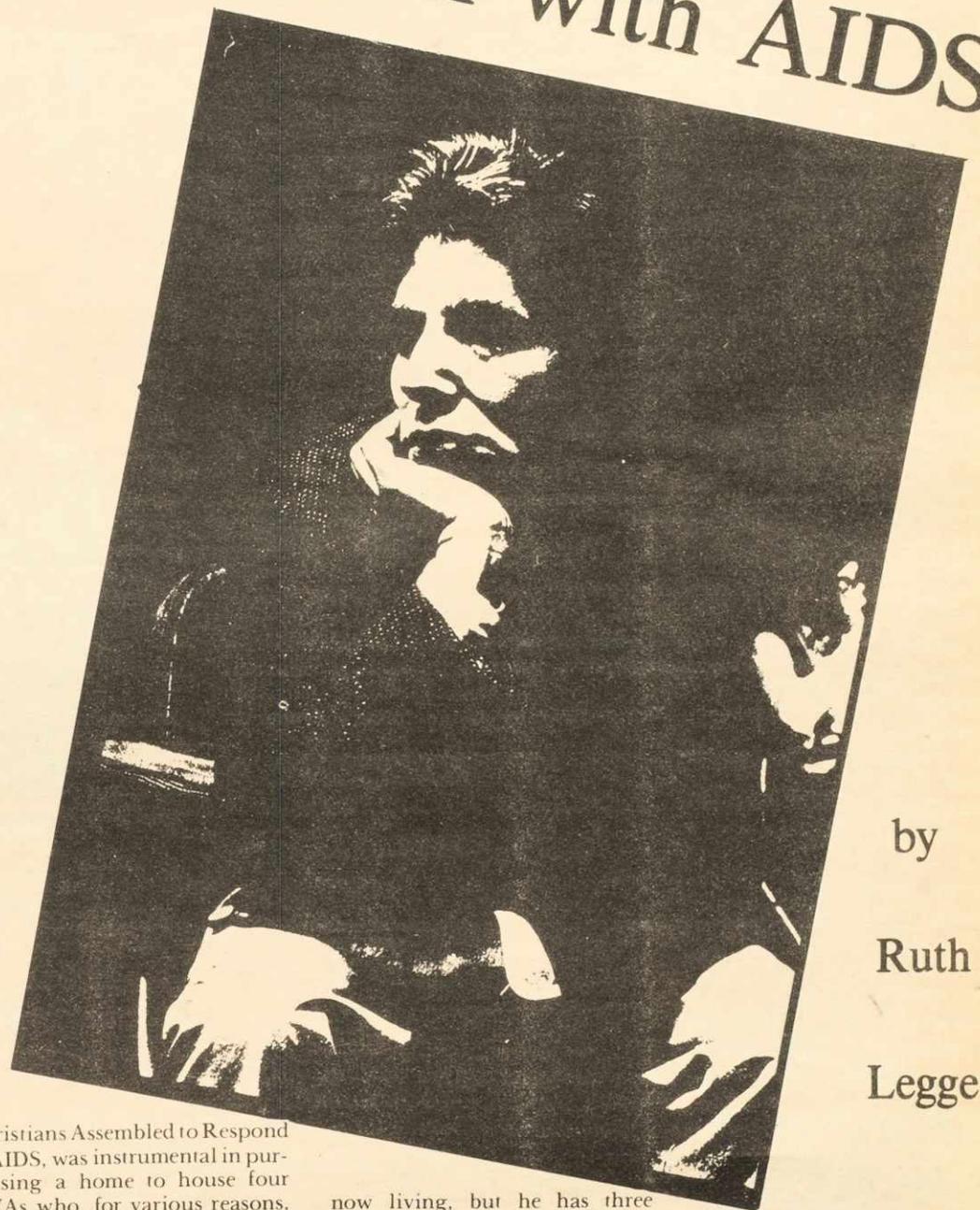
"We do many things in a day," says Peter, "and the things we tend to be seen doing are the advocacy and media things. That's just a very small portion of what we do. What we spend more of our time doing than that is staying with someone in the hospital all night while they die, or finding a place for someone to live."

"These human problems we deal with every day are much more important to us, because really what this whole thing is about is people, and these people that it's about are all dying and they need help."

Until a year ago, when he became too ill to continue his career, Peter worked in the theatre as a set designer, mostly in Ontario with the National Ballet, the National Arts Centre, the Shaw Festival and others, as well as briefly in Halifax.

His work at the Coalition is now a full-time job. His life has changed considerably in the last few years. "When I left Toronto a few years ago I said to my friend Hugh, 'I'm glad I'm leaving Toronto — this AIDS thing is really getting out of hand.'" Hugh died of AIDS two years ago, the same year Peter was diagnosed with the disease.

Neither of Peter's parents are



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