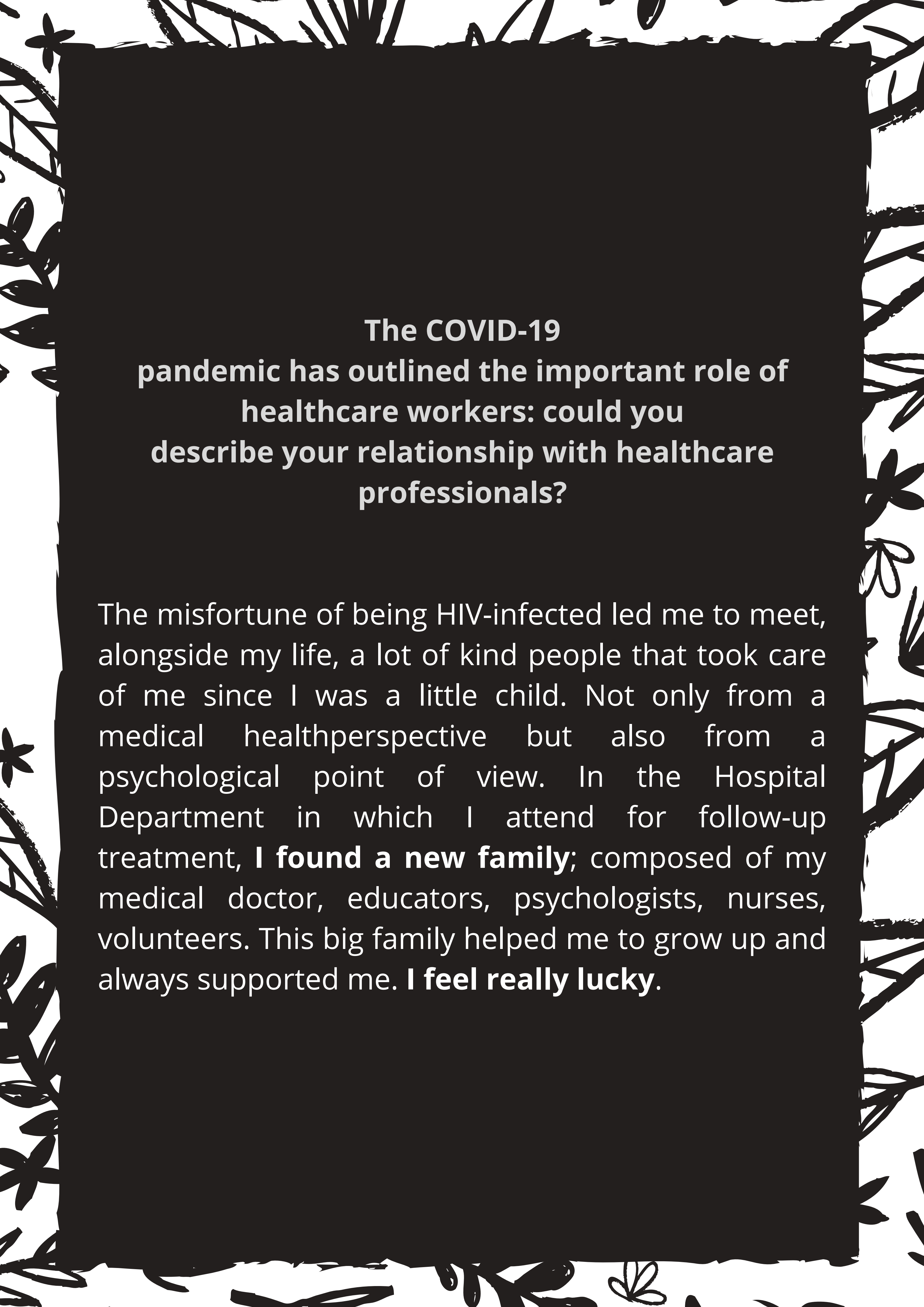


How does it feel to deal every day with a viral infection?

HIV entered my body silently. But, once entered into my cells, it **started make a big noise.**

From the day I received the diagnosis, I started a pathway of information acquisition and acceptance of the disease. It has been a long journey that has **contributed to my development** and building my identity. I'm a 23 year-old woman full of dreams and aspirations, that HIV will not stop. To be honest, in the past, being HIV-infected made me angry and desperate, to the point I refused to take my medication. I hated the virus because I perceived it as an enemy who became stronger as I felt weaker.

But the truth is that **I'm stronger than everything,** and **my infection does not define me, and cannot impede me in becoming who I want to be.** I finally came into accepting the infection. Nowadays, currently available treatments block disease progression into AIDS. It is possible to lead a normal life even if HIV-infected. It is possible to fall in love, to make projects for the future – such as building your own family. **And the virus will not be an obstacle anymore as long as I'm still breathing.**



**The COVID-19
pandemic has outlined the important role of
healthcare workers: could you
describe your relationship with healthcare
professionals?**

The misfortune of being HIV-infected led me to meet, alongside my life, a lot of kind people that took care of me since I was a little child. Not only from a medical healthperspective but also from a psychological point of view. In the Hospital Department in which I attend for follow-up treatment, **I found a new family**; composed of my medical doctor, educators, psychologists, nurses, volunteers. This big family helped me to grow up and always supported me. **I feel really lucky.**