



## “It's time!” ...to make a change: Cat Stevens' commitment to the elimination of tuberculosis



Yusuf Islam, commonly known as Cat Stevens, was a teen idol of the 1960s that grew into one of the most influential singer-songwriters of all time [1].

In 1968 he had a very amazing year touring with Jimi Hendrix and working very hard.

The music industry was pressing him and he was drinking and smoking seriously and sleeping very little. In that year, at the age of nineteen, he contracted a potentially fatal bout of tuberculosis, that threatened to end his life [2]. The initial TB signs came in about February, Cat was pale, underfed and coughing insistently, so Marion Ryan, the mother of Cat's twin partying friends Paul and Barry Ryan, arranged him a visit at the Harley Street Clinic in London. Doctors diagnosed him an advanced strain of pleurisy, so he was immediately hospitalized, isolated and treated with painful lung-draining procedures. At first doctors thought it was pneumonia, but after a week and other exams, they could say Cat was affected by tuberculosis. His agents didn't want to publicize his illness, but it was very hard to do, because he was worried about its consequences. During his hospitalization, he was really bored and depressed, thinking it was more serious than they said and he thought he would die. After three months, he was recovered at the King Edward VII Sanatorium Hospital, in the Sussex countryside near Midhurst. During one year of convalescence, he began a significant process of inner reflection and meditation. His recovery brought him a new perspective of the world, thanks also to a Buddhist text “The Secret Path”, written by Paul Brunton, and sent him by Paul Ryan, and to classical music, that gave him inspiration and strength in order to make fundamental changes to his lifestyle and music. [3] His behavior was shifting, and Cat became aware of his desire to spend his life providing relief to the vulnerable. He remembered his convalescence saying: “The greatest thing that happened to me was when I realized I wasn't the

only person in the world. The thing I really wanted to do was to understand people and to put myself second.” [4]

Tuberculosis had upon his life a transformative effect that permitted him to write more 40 very successful songs, that had a sound more stripped-down and intimate.

Its timeless quality was shown when a cover of his most famous song “Father and Son” became a huge hit in the 1990s [2].

Yusuf's experience is an important example of the positivity that can grow out of the adversity that TB brings.

After his personal experience, he has dedicated considerable time and energy to fighting the stigma that surrounds tuberculosis and pushing for improved detection, treatment and to create greater awareness of tuberculosis [4].

During a recent interview, he declared about tuberculosis:

*“TB awakened me to the need to strengthen my spirit and my attitude to life. It drove me to improve myself both spiritually and physically and gave me inner conviction not to give up.”* [1]

### References

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- [3] Coleman Ray. *Today's sound: a melody maker book*. Hamlyn; 1974.
- [4] Centers for TB Control and Prevention. World TB day Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/tb/worldtbd/default.htm>; 2019, Accessed date: 17 May 2019.

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