Mind Trip

July 1, 2002 By Nina Herzog

“It wasn’t meant for me to go,” Conscious (the name she chose to better reflect -- and conceal -- her identity) says. “I have a bigger purpose.” The former bodyguard to such hip-hop royalty as Busta Rhymes and Missy Elliot, music manager of *The Queen Latifah Show* and talk-show host for the Oxygen Media Network is now the author of a painstakingly told, page-turning memoir, *Getting Unstuck: Girl to Girl, You Can Be Infected Indeed* (check out www.prettytomboys.com). Presented as a dialogue between Conscious and her therapist, this is the raw, rare story of a terrible childhood, a mother who turns her back on her children, incest, an adolescence of dealing and drugging, getting HIV from another woman and finally an epiphany -- a cautionary tale she takes on the road to AIDS groups and high schools. Now, sitting across from me at a West Village cafe’s skimpy table that’s barely able to accommodate her long, athletic legs, she gives me her HIV skinny: positive for nine years, never taken meds, undetectable viral load. Talk about rare.

Equal parts strong and demure, the one-name wonder bears surprisingly few scars from her brutal past. Or perhaps she just hides them expertly. “Dealers tried to kill me at least three times while I was on the street selling,” Conscious says. On the floor of a Harlem crackhouse, with cops closing in, she woke up high one last time to the sound of a voice telling her to get up, she had work to do. “Whether it’s God or an angel, we all get that voice,” Conscious says, “but sometimes we don’t listen.” Conscious’ angel told her that she would get a disease, but that it wouldn’t affect her until her work was done. That week she signed herself into rehab.

At the program in upstate New York, everyone got HIV-tested before being released. "As soon as I found out I was positive, I thought, ’Oh, *that’s* what it is,’“ she recalls. ”They had me on suicide watch -- waiting for a delayed response! But I wasn’t surprised or upset. I just wanted to help everyone else through it."

At 37, this Jill-of-all-trades has ditched her musical exploits to spread the word that lesbians are not magically exempt from HIV. “To become Conscious, I had to go through a lot,” she says. “I was molested, neglected and led astray. This book is to give people hope to make it from there to here.”

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