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October 30, 2015

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Positive since 1998

My journey with HIV has been a personal journey of love and self-discovery. In many ways it's as old as time: A journey that has been shared in similar ways, across many paths, nations, races, colors and creeds. But it is a personal journey that I felt I traveled alone. Like many others before me, it began with me alone in the world, then developed into the knowingness that there is no such thing as being alone in this world. It wasn't until I reached a critical milestone in my journey that I discovered this. I discovered that we were all on this same journey together and that we are all "one."

This journey has not been easy, and there were many times I wanted to end it all. I wanted to end it because I believed in the illusion that I was lacking something and was not worthy of self-love and acceptance. This illusion controlled my life for many years, and yet it brought me to where I am today. I am sharing my story with you, so that you might also break through your illusions to the truths you seek.

My story is the story of millions like me who shared the same feelings about themselves—either because of what society caused them to believe or how they perceived other's thoughts of themselves. Whatever you perceive, it is all part of what I refer to as a soul contract or dharma. Each one of us is put here in this time and place to carry out our soul's desire to grow in love and compassion. It is our soul's desire that all events, sequences, places, people and things happen to each one of us for a higher purpose and a higher calling. It is a calling back to "oneness."

We don't know why things happen the way they do, or how our lives will play out, which is the mystery of life. Yet I believe a master plan or master design exists that is perfectly mapped out for each one of us. And while we are here, we live out that master plan; our choices are significant. Waking up to who we really are and being a tool for God's powerful love is significant.

For me to understand and know this love at a much higher power meant contracting one of the most shame-based illnesses to grace the planet, which stigmatizes millions of people and put the fear of the unknown into millions more. It meant HIV would find its way into my life.

HIV opened many people's eyes to a deadly disease, and it galvanized groups of affected people to seek a cure. It caused people with a lack of understanding to condemn the ill-fated, while HIV caused those who lived with it to ask the question, "Why me?" I believe that HIV/AIDS has a higher purpose. I believe that although many bad things came out of the early days of HIV, many good things developed as well.

For my journey, I was able to uncover and discover my own self-worth, self-love, and acceptance through the most powerful act of love: forgiveness. I needed to learn to forgive others for what I thought were grievances against me. I also needed to learn to forgive myself. Lastly, I needed to learn that the most powerful seed to sprout is the seed of self-love.

Self-love is the love that is often missed and overlooked. It is the first love that needs to be developed within one's own soul. Without it, loving others is difficult. I went through my life, often searching for love from the outside. I missed the love that was ultimately residing within me. I learned this lesson through living with HIV/AIDS.

My journey, like many others, was met with twists and turns, and with many wonderful, challenging sequences and events. Life happens. My life unfolded exactly how my soul contract or dharma had asked it to. And because of that, it taught me the lessons that I needed to learn so that I could go out into the world and help others.

The most powerful lesson to learn is the act of forgiveness. Through forgiveness, one has the choice to love one's self unconditionally. Then and only then can one live the life one was destined to live. In essence, if you love, live and forgive, you will be granted the peace that "oneness" promises.

What three adjectives best describe you?
Charming, determined, courageous

What is your greatest achievement?
I have many achievements. If I had to list one thing, it would be my perseverance in the face of adversity. I just get back up and keep going no matter what happens.

What is your greatest regret?
That I didn't accept my HIV status sooner and realize that no one person or group has the power to undermine who I am or what my purpose is.

What keeps you up at night?
I really have no trouble sleeping. If I did, it would be because of my excitement about what the future holds with my forgiveness workshops.

If you could change one thing about living with HIV, what would it be?
Good question. Probably how society fears it. HIV has no power so there is no need for fear.

What is the best advice you ever received?
Always live in your truth and always be authentic. When you do this, life is so much easier.

What person in the HIV/AIDS community do you most admire?
I admire those who passed on during the early days of the virus. They were the true fighters.

What drives you to do what you do?
I see so many people not living up to their full potential because of the perceived stigma the virus has on society. I just want people to be able to shed that belief and live their lives fully.

What is your motto?
It's how I live my life whenever I need to overcome a challenge. I use this affirmation: "Each and every day and each and every way, I get better and better and better."

If you had to evacuate your house immediately, what is the one thing you would grab on the way out?
My great-grandmother's antique Seth Thomas clock

If you could be any animal, what would you be? And why?
A giraffe. To me, they are the most beautiful animals on the planet.

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