Andre’ Hinds

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Dallas, Texas
Positive since 2010

I was diagnosed HIV positive in September 2010. It has been a difficult road and at first I was filled with frustration, regret and shame. I felt frustration that I let something like this happen to me. I regretted that I wasn’t more careful and was too naive about trusting my partners. And I felt ashamed that I let my parents and myself down.

Weeks after my diagnosis I sank into depression and feared I would probably die before I could achieve my goals in life. I feared I would spend the rest of my life alone, isolated and unaccepted by society, my peers and close family members. I first disclosed my status to both of my parents who took it really hard at first. But since then they have shown me continuous support and love. My father even went with me to my first doctor’s appointment, which allowed my parents to gain understanding and knowledge about my new condition.

Since finding out about my diagnosis, my life has changed tremendously. I’ve gained so much knowledge about treatment and about how the world and people around me have been affected by this disease. It has not only allowed me to value my life, but also value the support I have in my life. This has given me greater understanding of what others like myself are facing.

It’s crazy but since my diagnosis I’ve discovered other friends in my life who have also been diagnosed with HIV. We are all between the ages of 24-30 and African American. It just shows how much this disease has affected our race and even society as a whole.

My friends are outgoing and funny and we sometimes even joke about HIV, which may sound crazy to some. But if you can’t accept yourself, then who else will? Although I don’t wish for anyone to have to deal with this disease, I’m thankful to have moral support from people who understand the daily struggle of what it’s like to live with HIV. No simple task at times.

A typical week for me is waking up each morning and making sure I take my medications and making sure I eat right and exercise. When I go out to the club or go to parties, I have fun but I make sure I do not drink in excess.

Even though I feel I'm very comfortable with myself and who I am, I still have doubts about disclosing my status to people I find myself attracted to, or want a relationship with. Every time you disclose your status it's like you feel that initial shame and fear of not being accepted or fear you might remain alone for the rest of your life. A lot of the people I have disclosed to have accepted it or have tried to accept it. But of course there are those individuals who never will. I feel society has come a long way in the perception of people living with HIV/AIDS but the majority of the people are still in shock when I tell them I'm HIV positive.

This May I will be graduating with a Bachelors of Arts degree in merchandising marketing management and that is what drives me the most—being able to go into a career I love and breaking the stereotype of someone who doesn't fit the mold of someone living with HIV.

I want to encourage others living with HIV to accept themselves and encourage them to never give up. Don't let the world or others around you think that because you have HIV you're only a statistic or you are just someone who is diseased and is going to die. Those are some of the things I thought when I was first diagnosed. Although I'm sometimes still fearful of what people may say if they knew about my status, it doesn't really matter as long as I love myself and I'm supported by others who are willing to go on this journey with me. Family members, friends, doctors, nurses and caseworkers—all of whom want to see us succeed and live the lives we are destined to live.

What three adjectives best describe you?
Ambitious, artistic and courageous

What is your greatest achievement?
Graduating with my associates degree

What is your greatest regret?
Not going to college after high school

What keeps you up at night?
Dreaming about achieving my goals in life

If you could change one thing about living with HIV, what would it be?
I wouldn't change anything; I just wish people would better educate themselves about it.

What is the best advice you ever received?
Find people who support you

What person in the HIV/AIDS community do you most admire?
Jamar Rogers

What drives you to do what you do?
My family members, close friends and my goals.

What is your motto?
Just keep it real and be yourself.

If you had to evacuate your house immediately, what is the one thing you would grab on the way out?
I would take my iPod filled with music.

If you could be any animal, what would you be? And why?
I would be a lion. I’m strong-willed individual that can tackle anything life throws at me because of my will to be the best at whatever I do.

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