Poz Stories: Erin Gingrich

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Growing up in Yuma, Arizona, Erin Gingrich led a seemingly charmed life. A gifted classical pianist, both smart and beautiful, she was crowned Miss Arizona in 1996 and then competed in the Miss America Pageant. Afterward, when she started school in Phoenix, her deep-seated issues of self-worth and depression took hold. The result was addiction and then, in 2010, a stay at an in-patient drug treatment center where she learned she has HIV (Gingrich is also coinfected with the hepatitis C virus). “I thought I was receiving my death sentence,” she recalls. “I now know that was actually the moment I was blessed with a new life.”

Today, Gingrich is proactive about her health; she’s a top fundraiser for AIDS Walk Phoenix; and she speaks openly and honestly about her status. “I believe the more HIV is talked about,” she says, “the more we can chip away at the social stigma attached to it.” During the final night of the Miss Arizona 2012 Pageant, she shared her story as a symbol of hope. What could possibly be more beautiful?

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