



Finding a Reason to Live

I know I can live a long healthy life and I can be a wonderful mother to my child, who is HIV negative.

August 7, 2015

It all started when I was 16 and I got my first job and my first car. I was a very sexually active teen. I partied almost every night and started drinking and smoking too much. I eventually started doing cocaine, which lead me to sleep with multiple men. I never even thought I would contract HIV.

On the morning of my best friend's birthday and I asked him if we could stop at the health department because I wasn't feeling well. I just figured I had a simple infection or maybe I had caught chlamydia again, or it was something I could get rid of.

It took way longer than usual, and they put me in a back room I had never seen before. It took me about 10 minutes before I realized that every poster and pamphlet in the room was about HIV/AIDS. Naturally I flipped out and demanded someone come in and tell me what the hell was going on! My first thought was, "Oh my god! I'm only 17! I haven't gotten to do everything I want and now I'm going to die an awful death."

After the doctor reassured me several times that I wasn't going to die, and that HIV was easier to live with than diabetes, I went home and researched everything there was to know about living with this disease.

I cried and slept and started thinking about love. I thought I would never find it or that I was never going to have a child. I did that for about four days, until I had to go back to the health department to pick up my birth control (just in case!).

I told my nurse my breasts were very sore, and I was tired. I figured it was just something that happens to you when you first become positive. But she gave me a pregnancy test, and when it came back, I found out I was indeed pregnant, which made me even sadder. I thought the best thing to do would be to get an abortion so my child wouldn't have to live with HIV/AIDS or die at a young age. But my wonderful doctor, told me everything was going to be OK with my child and me. I could have a baby like any other woman.

I stopped feeling bad and started being positive about life. I had a reason to live again. My child is

the most wonderful thing that could've happened to me, and what better timing! I now know I can live a long healthy life. I can be a wonderful mother to my child, who is HIV negative.

HIV isn't as bad as people make it out to be. I am almost 20 years old now, I am undetectable, my CD4 cells are absolutely amazing, and my beautiful daughter is as healthy as she can be. We live like any other human being.

What three adjectives best describe you?

Caring, beautiful, passionate

What is your greatest achievement?

Giving birth to my child, who is HIV negative!

What is your greatest regret?

Sleeping with nasty pig men

What keeps you up at night?

Nothing does; I sleep like a baby.

If you could change one thing about living with HIV, what would it be?

The stigma! It's not a hard disease to live with. I am not nasty, and you can't get infected by breathing in the same air as me.

What is the best advice you ever received?

Never trust anyone.

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

All the babies born with HIV who turn out to be beautiful inspiring adults

What drives you to do what you do?

My beautiful, amazing daughter

What is your motto?

Eat!

If you had to evacuate your house immediately, what is the one thing you would grab on the way out?

My toothbrush

If you could be any animal, what would you be?

A bird

