A Mother’s Love

November 11, 2013 By Casey Halter

Sixteen years ago, Florence Ngobeni-Allen, an HIV-positive mother, lost her 5-month-old daughter to complications from AIDS. At the time, antiretrovirals (ARVs) were unavailable for children in her home country of South Africa. The experience motivated her to fight back.

Ngobeni-Allen soon became a counselor for HIV-positive mothers at a hospital near Johannesburg, mainly to those who lost children to perinatal HIV transmission.

As the new millennium brought ARVs and prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) strategies to South Africa, Ngobeni-Allen no longer brought tears at work. “Instead, I would bring smiles by bringing women their child’s HIV-negative diagnosis,” she remembers.

Today, Ngobeni-Allen has two sons, both HIV negative, and is an HIV educator, spokesperson and programs consultant in Johannesburg for the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF). She has met with world leaders—including Presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton—to advocate for HIV/AIDS funding.

We caught up with Ngobeni-Allen to commemorate World AIDS Day, which is held annually December 1.

What three words best describe you?
Determined, optimistic and a dreamer.

If you could change one thing about living with HIV, what would it be?
The amount of medications that I am taking. Due to building resistance to other HIV medications, I have few options. I am taking five antiretroviral medications daily.

What is the best advice you ever received?
Don’t concentrate on the past—focus on the future. Do not give in to fear; try to deal with difficult issues head-on.

What drives you to do what you do?
The change that I see in people, groups, governments and individuals around the world. I feel good when I make a difference in other people’s lives.

What is your motto?
To fight till I drop and never fear death. I try to be positive about life; I smile a lot and have fun without holding back.

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