# Kecia Johnson

April 4, 2014

Las Vegas, Nevada
Positive since 2006

In 2006, I was diagnosed not with HIV, but with AIDS. I had a T cell count of 2.

I woke up one day in November 2006 and didn't feel well. I knew something wasn't right as I had the chills and did not feel like my normal self. After visiting a friend, I took a shower and after about three minutes everything went blank. I remember waking up in an ambulance.

I was in the hospital for two weeks while the doctors struggled to figure out what was wrong. I found myself nearly comatose and severely sick from pneumonia.  In the third week of my hospital stay, a doctor walked in and asked me, "How have you been coping with your AIDS?"

I lay there delirious in disbelief and it felt like I was in a dream. I didn't believe what my ears were hearing and it seemed as though someone should come out from behind the door and say it was all a joke.

Prior to my diagnosis, I had been in a committed relationship for three years. I began the relationship when I was 19 and like many other young women, I fell head over heels in love with someone who I thought would feel the same way.

Over the course of the relationship I knew things were not right and I knew I was not the only one he was sleeping with. But in the midst of the relationship, I lost myself and my self-esteem and started to accept less than what I deserved. After a summer of repeated yeast infections, I knew something was wrong but I continued to ignore the signs. I felt nothing could go wrong because I was in love.

After being diagnosed and being hospitalized for a month, I came out of the hospital not feeling sorry for myself or shedding any tears. As I left the hospital in a wheelchair, I vowed to myself that I was going to educate the world on the importance of self-worth and self-education on the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

I lived in secret for months as I nursed myself back to health by taking my medication consistently and by working out and staying active in the community.

Prior to being diagnosed, I worked in the music industry as a manager and brand specialist and

one day while I was working out, I realized that the key to HIV/AIDS awareness was education through music. I decided to use my knowledge of working in the music industry with notable names as a way to spread awareness through all music genres across the country.

In 2007, I began speaking at high schools and local community events to emphasis the importance of HIV/AIDS awareness. Since then I have traveled nationally, while working for various major record labels, utilizing my platform to educate through the power of music.

Being diagnosed was never a death sentence for me. Not even when the doctor uttered, "You have AIDS."

Having AIDS has allowed me to take responsibility and be the person I am called to be. I have never cried or felt sorry for myself and I never will. Everyone living with HIV/AIDS needs to know that we are on a special, selected journey and we have been called to walk that life. Our walk just happens to be in the color red!

What three adjectives best describe you?
Fabulous, FIERCE and aware

What is your greatest achievement?
Maintaining a healthy mind and positive outlook while living with AIDS

What is your greatest regret?
Not being properly self-educated on the importance of regular testing for HIV/AIDS prior to my diagnosis

What keeps you up at night?
The thoughts of knowing I can contribute more to the world with my story

If you could change one thing about living with HIV, what would it be?
I would change the toll it takes on the skin.

What is the best advice you ever received?
Whatever you do and wherever you go in life, always do it in an AMAZING pair of heels!

What person in the HIV/AIDS community do you most admire?
Rae Lewis-Thornton—her spirit and longevity is truly amazing!

What drives you to do what you do?
The fact that I am still breathing and alive and well and able to share my story eight years after an AIDS diagnosis is all the drive I need to keep me going!

What is your motto?
"Always Live Fashionably Out Loud"

If you had to evacuate your house immediately, what is the one thing you would grab on the way out?
My handbag...it carries my med case, glam shades, a mirror to check my glam and my wallet!

If you could be any animal, what would you be? And why?
An eagle, so that I can soar above all things and look over many and protect them without being in direct sight

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