How Magic Johnson Told His Wife—and Ex-Lovers—He Had HIV

Plus other revelations from Cookie Johnson's new memoir, *Believing in Magic*.

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Earvin "Magic" Johnson revealed to the world in 1991 that he was HIV positive and retiring from the Los Angeles Lakers. Today, he remains one of the most famous people in the world living with the virus.

In her memoir, Believing in Magic: My Story of Love, Overcoming Adversity and Keeping the Faith, Johnson's wife, Cookie, recalls the events of that time period. The book is out later this month, but the Daily Mail reveals details pertaining to Johnson's diagnosis and disclosure.

The couple had not even been married 45 days when Johnson called her to say he was coming home early because he had something to tell her. She feared he had a sports injury or was leaving her, she writes, but when he arrived, "My husband walked toward me, took my hand into his and slowly marched me back into the den...the two of us sat at the foot of our huge chaise lounge and I held my breath."

According to the Daily Mail's account, once Johnson disclosed his diagnosis, the two held each other. He told his wife she could leave him if she wanted, but Cookie had other plans. Declaring that they'd "beat this together," she told him to get on his knees and pray.

Afterward, she writes, Johnson locked himself in a room and called all the women he'd been intimate with—or at least all the women he still had contact with.

Remember that this was 1991, when HIV was considered a death sentence and most people associated the disease with gay white men. It would be another five years before combination therapy—modern antiretrovirals—would alter the course of the epidemic.

Adding to the stress of the disclosure, Cookie writes, was another factor: She was pregnant. "Every morning I would wake up in a panic," she writes, "worried that I too might be HIV positive and die. Or worse, that my baby would be sick and not make it.... The stress coursed through my veins like a poison, occupying practically every moment of my day."

What helped her through the ordeal, she writes, was to "breathe your way through this moment.

And the next. And then each one that follows.”

Her test results came back negative, but another challenge awaited: Johnson’s public announcement that he was living with HIV and retiring from the Lakers.

Before the November 7, 1991, press conference, Cookie writes, she met with AIDS activist Elizabeth Glaser who urged Johnson to be the public face of the disease.

Cookie writes that the biggest challenges they endured during their marriage were not as difficult as those they faced in the 12 years of their relationship before the wedding.

The two remain together today. This month, they celebrated their 25th anniversary.

@thecookiej and I celebrating happiness, love and our 25th Anniversary in Monaco with 100 of our closest family and friends! #EC25

A photo posted by Earvin “Magic” Johnson (@magicjohnson) on Sep 6, 2016 at 3:08pm PDT

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