



My Mom Is a Warrior and My Hero

Erica Lavina is fortunate to have her mom by her side

June 23, 2025 By Erica Lavina

Both of my parents were diagnosed with HIV in 1993. My dad, Bill Lindemann (1953–1993), passed away five months after their diagnoses, leaving my 36-year-old mom, Pam, to navigate her own diagnosis while raising two teenage girls.

My dad insisted he didn't know how he contracted the virus, but after his death, my mom discovered he had been having relationships with men. It breaks my heart that he felt he had to hide this part of himself from those who loved him, but I realize how different things were back then, especially for our suburban middle-class family. My dad took his diagnosis to his grave, with few people, including my sister and me, knowing the truth.

Today, I want to celebrate my mom, a warrior and my hero. She's never complained about the unfair hand life dealt her. When she was diagnosed, the prognosis was grim. For over 30 years, she's lived with the stigma of AIDS, often calling herself "damaged goods."

There have been countless illnesses, hospital stays, doctor visits, blood draws, trials and medications, and I know that sometimes it must have felt easier to give up. Yet she hasn't, and I am grateful for her strength.

A few years ago, she earned both bachelor's and master's degrees. When her private disability coverage ended at 65, she faced the harsh truth that she hadn't saved for retirement, having never expected to live this long. Unfortunately, the sad reality is that she went back to work to cover living expenses and the cost of lifesaving medications, never once complaining.

While I miss my dad deeply, I am grateful for the gift of modern medicine that has kept my mom with us for all these years. I never thought she would be there to see my high school graduation, yet she was there to witness my oldest child graduate last May. So many milestones—graduations, engagements, weddings and the birth of grandchildren—she's been able to experience, and we are lucky to share those moments with her.

In a world where so many have been lost, I consider myself one of the fortunate ones to still have my mom by my side.

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