I Am Not a Victim

Sobrek Meri-Ra helps others through the shame and stigma of HIV.

June 3, 2021 By Sobrek Meri-Ra

At the age of 45, I was diagnosed with HIV. At first, I was told I had syphilis, so I wasn't that worried. I contracted syphilis in 1996, and during my time in the military, I contracted gonorrhea and chlamydia. For five years before my diagnosis, I was getting tested for HIV every three months. When I walked through the doors of the clinic, there was this feeling of bad energy. I began to prepare myself for the worst. I was scared while I was waiting; the room had a dark aura. The doctor walked into the room and told me my results came back positive. After hearing that, I dealt with my fear. I felt the weight of life and death. I made the decision to live, even though I thought I was going to die.

What three words best describe you?

Divine, warrior, energy.

What is your greatest achievement?

To be able to disclose my status and tell my story. To be a Black man who is straight and HIV positive who is helping other men get through the shame and stigma.

What is your greatest regret?

I look at my mistakes as steps to learning. I don't dwell on regrets for long periods. That has a tendency to keep a lot of people in victim mode, and I am not a victim.

What keeps you up at night?

The people who choose not to educate themselves about HIV. In my opinion, they reinforce the fear of HIV and keep people in victim mode.

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

Not to have it, of course.

What is the best advice you ever received?

Hold yourself accountable for shit; the sting only lasts a minute. Passing the buck is a punk move.

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

I admire my queen. My partner is a Black woman who speaks her truth about living and striving with being HIV positive.

What drives you to do what you do?

I am a straight Black man who has HIV. A big part of the African-American community remains ignorant about HIV. I got through the stigma and shame; I am helping others do the same.

What is your motto?

“Ankh udja seneb,” which means life, wellness and strength.

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

Is this a trick question? I am going to grab my HIV meds.

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

I dig cats as pets because they tend to resonate with me. I am not a cat fanatic, but I appreciate the legend of them being guardians to the underworld.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.