# Tammy Bellish

January 16, 2015

Struthers, Ohio
Positive since 1989

My name is Tammy Bellish and I am a 56-year-old grandmother of seven.

I was an IV drug user in the early ’80s. I shared needles and the whole gamut of addiction practices. I was watching the news when they talked about the AIDS epidemic and how quickly it was spreading. As I sat there, I thought, I will probably be one of those that is infected.

In 1989 I was arrested and during booking they asked if I wanted an HIV test. Out of fear I said yes, even though in my heart I already knew I was positive. About two or three weeks later, the health department came to my mother’s house and said they needed to speak to me alone. I had tested positive. It was the scariest time in my entire life.

Today I am still standing. I am married to my soulmate and raising two of my seven grandchildren. My husband is negative and life is good. My viral load is below 20 and my CD4 count is 647. Though this may sound weird to some, HIV saved my life! I made the changes that were required of me so I could live. Today I am going to college to obtain my master’s in social work. I love life and I even love life with HIV. Today I am living the dream!

What three adjectives best describe you?
I am optimistic, determined and not a quitter.

What is your greatest achievement?
Letting go of what was meant to destroy me (my addiction) and learning to live with HIV

What is your greatest regret?
Wasted time

What keeps you up at night?
My grandchildren

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

What is the best advice you ever received?
Keep smiling and keep stepping.

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

What drives you to do what you do?
If if I can save just one person from going through what I have in my lifetime, then I have accomplished something.

What is your motto?
Life isn’t about waiting for the storm to pass; it’s about learning to dance in the rain.

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

If you could be any animal, what would you be? And why?
A dog. They love unconditionally.

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