Tiamat the Dragon Lady Promotes Body Modification and Fights HIV Stigma [VIDEOS]

Her metamorphosis from gay banker to “trans-species reptilian” began after an HIV diagnosis in 1997.

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Tiamat Legion Medusa—a.k.a. Tiamat the Dragon Lady—gets a lot of attention everywhere she goes. That’s no surprise. As the self-proclaimed “most modified transsexual in the world,” Tiamat has altered her body to resemble a “serpent dragon.” What might be unexpected is that Tiamat uses her time in the spotlight to advocate for HIV/AIDS awareness and to fight stigma.

For obvious reasons, the Texas native’s physical transformation garners headlines and clicks. Recently, international publications have picked up on a Tiamat profile by The Wizard of Odd TV that was posted on YouTube (you can watch that video at the top of this story).

And, yes, it is definitely fascinating that her modifications include eight horns, a bifurcated tongue, permanently stained eyes (green, of course), face tattoos, scarification, branding, a reshaped nose and the removal of teeth and ears—adding up to about $60,000 so far.

But the serpent dragon’s story is also one of a long-term survivor of AIDS. “There’s so much stigma out there about being HIV positive,” Tiamat told FOX 10 Phoenix, which profiled her in 2016. “I want to raise awareness and erase the stigma.”

To that end, Tiamat is speaking out not only about body modification but also HIV/AIDS, transgenderism and what she calls trans-speciesism.

On her YouTube channel, Tiamat posted a special message on December 1 last year, titled “Tiamat Medusa The Dragon Lady Being HIV+ World AIDS Day 2017” (see below). She speaks candidly about testing HIV positive in 1997, when she was a gay man working as a successful banker and about her decision to be open about the diagnosis.

After a hard time with early treatments, Tiamat eventually found a regimen in 2009 that worked

for her. She was surprised to learn, however, that because she experienced body wasting early in her diagnosis and saw her CD4 cells drop below 200, she is still considered today to be a person with AIDS, even though she is much healthier.

Another HIV-related surprise Tiamat shares with viewers is news that she herself recently discovered: “It has now been proven that when a person is HIV positive and their viral load is undetectable, that they’re not able to infect their partner.” Among the HIV community, the concept is known as “Undetectable = Untransmittable,” or U=U. Tiamat says that “this is fantastic news for people like me who are lonely, alone and don’t want to get into a relationship because of the fear and prejudice and stigma that I have to live with everyday about living with HIV.”

Watch the videos to learn more about Tiamat’s life story, but here’s a recap: As a child, Tiamat was abandoned on a farm by her parents, who were migrant workers. At that time, she says, she adopted the western diamondback rattlesnake as her new parents. In high school, Tiamat (then Richard Hernandez) was captain of the football and basketball teams, was class president—and openly gay. He was lonely, though, and considered animals to be his best friends.

Tiamat also has a son, who grew up to reject her. “As a kid, [my son] loved dragons and Pokémon,” Tiamat told FOX. “I’m hoping that when he sees me now, he will look at a beautiful dragon instead of seeing his father that made a mistake and was not a perfect dad.”

Tiamat left the banking world after testing HIV positive in 1997. “I left corporate because I was HIV positive and feared I was going to die,” Tiamat explains in the Wizard of Odd video. “But my big thing was, I did not want to die in this world looking like a human. As much awesomeness and goodness as there is in humans, humans compared to other species on this planet are the most destructive and hateful.” And so Tiamat decided to transform into something that doesn’t look human.

Recently, Tiamat was reunited with his twin brother, whom he had been estranged from for 36 years.“I’m glad she’s back in my life,” her brother says in the touching video atop this post. “We’ll stick together forever. I will always be her little brother.”

Throughout all the ups and downs, Tiamat seems hopeful about her own future, noting that she is expected to live a long life despite being HIV positive. And Tiamat says she’s determined to educate and to fight stigma by sharing her own story.

“Humans need to be nicer to one another and accept each other for what they are,” Tiamat says to Fox 10. And on The Wizard of Odd TV, she sums up: “My message is that underneath our skin, we are all the same.”

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