For This Black Woman Living with HIV, Grief Creates Power

January 18, 2021 By Mark S. King

Deirdre Johnson's poem of grief and empowerment, below, begins a series of posts from Black women living with HIV. It's my salute to Positive Women's Network USA's (PWN) upcoming "Celebrate and Honor Black Women in the HIV Movement Day" on March 12, 2021. Be sure to visit their site for more information, to get involved, or to honor women in your community.

"I honestly love to write," Deirdre told me. "I am working on some scripts and plays now." The Virginia-based activist also knows her words can have power beyond the artistic arena. "Bring on the op-eds!" she said. "I've never done one of those before."

Bring it on, indeed, Deirdre.

Today I cried

Today I cried for the men, women, little boys and girls

Today I cried for the doctors and nurses

Today I cried for family and friends

Today I cried because it was the only thing I could think of to do. I have nothing else to give that would be an appropriate source of help or offering of a gift of I'm sorry, I feel your pain, I'm here for you and you are not alone.

Today I cried for ignorance

Today I cried for stigma

Today I cried for the hurt and the shame

Today I cried for those that couldn't cry for themselves simply because they were too fearful of the reviews from family and friends if they share their innermost secrets.

Today I cried because every 9 minutes someone else is diagnosed with HIV. Another soul that will

have every piece of them pulled, pushed and turned upside down in the hail storm of viciousness.

So I will continue to wipe my tears and journey on this path. I will continue to put words together for those who want to remain silent or hidden in their own darkness.

Today I cried for all of the stories that have been unwritten.

Today I cried for the words on this page

Today I cried for those who died

Today I cried for those who live

Today I cried for me

Because I am the face of HIV

Deirdre Johnson
DeirdrejSpeaks@gmail.com
Founder of Deirdre Speaks
Co-founder of Ending Criminalization of HIV and Overincarceration in Virginia (ECHO VA)
2019 Positive Women's Network – Virginia State Lead and 2019 Policy Fellow
2020 HIV is Not A Crime 4 Ambassador

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