The First Person I Called After Testing Positive for HIV

She was always my biggest fan. And she still is.

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I made my way to the elevator, and pushed the button to the ground floor. I remember the chill, not from the air conditioning, but from the news I had just received: I tested positive for HIV.

I felt dehydrated as I stepped outside into the sun and pulled out a cigarette. I lit up that Marlboro Light out of routine. What should I do next?

I was walking down the street, lost and confused. There was a sense of urgency to make a phone call, but to whom? My mom is one of my biggest fans and supporters, and I didn't want to disappoint her with the news. After a moment of consideration, I dialed her number.

Each ring seemed like an eternity, but after she picked up, it seemed like a split second. Why did she have to answer? "Hi Ricky. I'm about to head to the grocery store. Can I call you back later?"

"No mom, I need to talk."

"Can it wait? I have to get this done?"

"No. This is important," the words seemed to just come out, "I just tested positive for HIV."

I was still in shock so I wasn't sure how to feel. I remember when I came out at eleven years old, she said that she was only sad she wouldn't have grand kids from me. That was before I even knew what sex was, so here we were.

There was a brief pause on the line, and time seemed to stand still for minutes. What was she going to say? Why was she being so quiet? I needed her to speak, and as I was about to say something, I heard her voice: "Oh Ricky, oh boy," and she paused again. "It's not a death sentence today. There are medications, and you'll be taken care of." She continued gently, "I love you. Are you okay?"

I don't know why I called her. I cannot explain it. It was a thought that crossed my mind. I'm glad I did. I needed someone to tell me it was going to be okay, because I didn't know what was going to happen. At twenty-two years old, I was still very much a kid. And I had always been a bit of a

mamma’s boy.

I realize that not every parent will say the same thing or be as optimistic or supportive, but to all of the parents out there, realize that mistakes happen. No matter if it was irresponsible behavior or a fluke that led to HIV, it’s important to be as unconditionally loving as possible. I’m grateful that my mother continues to stand by me and support everything I do. She’s an amazing woman, and I’m proud to call her my mother.

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