Going From a Mug Shot to a Master's Degree

It's been a long, hard road—with HIV and PTSD—but I'll never forget what it was like to need help.

September 3, 2019 By Glenna McCarthy

This was my mug shot from almost 20 years ago. I was younger, but my spirit was dying, and I was lost.

I hated being awake, alive, feeling, thinking and caring. Because of post-traumatic stress disorder—PTSD-- I could not process any of this without the illusion of drugs.

Today, I have survived HIV for 29 years. A lot of people assume that I made it this long because I took care of myself, but that is far from the truth. I had no understanding of self-care or love.

I now work as a peer outreach specialist, and I go to all the places others would like to forget, like psych wards, and I see people others would like to ignore: people with addictions, people who are sex offenders, people who are homeless, etc.

I do not play favorites because I am in the human services field. I'm just like a fireman who does not decide which person is worth saving when he is evacuating a building. Also, I know how it feels to be an outsider, so I do not discriminate.

Once again I remind you that I have been HIV positive for almost three decades. I remember when people with the virus were treated like lepers. Because of that and for other factors as well, I gave up.... Well, guess what?

I'm still here, and I have accomplished so much. My next venture is getting my LMSW (licensed master social worker) in a year or so. My point is that although I am happy that I am getting ahead emotionally and finding my future to be financial security, I will never forget the time when I needed genuine help and it wasn't there.

I am not going to repeat that cycle. Peace

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