



# 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](#)

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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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