I Thought the Days of HIV Stigma Were Behind Us...

Then this happened.

November 17, 2017 By Martha Warriner Jarrett

I thought the days of stigma against people with HIV/AIDS were far behind us. That I'd been spared from the pain of such reactions by virtue of the fact that I was only recently diagnosed. That I wouldn't become an untouchable, like Magic Johnson when his team mates were afraid to play with him because he might give them AIDS.

Turns out I was wrong.

I belonged to a sorority when I was in college in the sixties. My pledge class has mostly stayed in touch. We've even had a few reunions in over the years. So when I got a group email from one of my sorority sisters earlier this year, I took advantage of the opportunity to share with my sisters what I've been going through the past few years as an HIV positive woman.

I told everyone that I'd tested positive in late 2014 and had nearly died. I shared that I'd concluded that it had to have come from my late husband, and that I believed that meant that he'd been unfaithful. I also told them I'd written a memoir about my experiences—A Rough Season.

I was really excited to share all of this with the group of around twenty women who I considered to be my sisters. What was their response?

Zero, zip, zilch.

I haven't heard a word from any of them.

So am I being ostracized because of my positive status? Guess I'll never know. It feels like I put myself out there and they kicked me in the face. Kind of like an ice cream cone someone dropped on the sidewalk.

Is there any other explanation?

Again, I guess I'll never know.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.