I’ve Changed My Mind...

July 27, 2014 By Lora René Tucker

I have been out-of-commission for some time...hiv (I don’t capitalize it!) can be an insidious bastard, zapping your strength and hope, working your psyche as much as your body. I found myself thinking I could get back into the “swing” of things, but after 54 years, I began to reflect on that half-empty glass, and fell into an abyss that I almost wasn’t able to climb out. After struggling to keep up with work and my fragile ego, my T-cells started taking a dive and viral load woke up. All because I was not doing what was expected of me. I was not being compliant with my meds. YES, as a social worker, a clinician, I am assisting, cajoling and monitoring others about taking their medications...that does not mean that I am not human... and sometimes troubled. I ended up sitting in my doctor’s office, on more occasions that I want to admit, with him trying to boost my spirits and give me the facts. Finally, the facts caught up to me...

In the middle of a phone conversation with Thomas, my call waiting came on. I looked at the screen and saw it was Dr. Laris, my internist. The week before, I had given about eight tubes of blood for various tests, from typical blood work, to viral load counts, and drug resistance screening. I was told I would see the doctor when all the tests came in, and given a day in the week to call the office. This call came before the assigned day, and when that happens, something urgent came up in the readings. When I saw the name, my body went into auto-drive; my heart began to beat like a Gene Krupa drum solo and the “panic valve” opened up right to that “worry reservoir” in my brain. Being a veteran of this doctor’s office, I knew the drill. I was asked when I could come in; it was Wednesday, and I just started a new job and had psychotherapy clients after work the following day. Friday after work was my only option, I sure as hell was not going to let this go until Monday.

"Remember that special test you took last week? Well, we have to talk about your results. See you Friday."

“OK.” I uttered.

I switched back to my friend, Tommy, who usually hangs up after a count of ten.

"What happened? Are you OK?"

"Yeah, I replied. It was Dr. Laris."

“So you have to go in, you may have to change your meds...”

I know my buddy was trying to help me get out of my head, but the flood already hit, and the tolerance levee broke. All I heard after that was:

"Blah-blah-blah, blah-blah-blah…meds."

Sooner than later, I hung up from Tommy and moved around the house, getting ready for my fourth day of work and the plumbers who will be inspecting the wall under my sink that was ravaged by a water leak…when it rains…

Friday came faster than I anticipated (or maybe I blacked it out like an alcoholic.) I found myself walking out of the "F" train at 23rd Street, with "Happy" playing in my ears; trying to keep my stomach from walking out of my mouth. I made it to the doctor's office, checked in and waited my turn. I always come into the office like Ethel Merman in "Gypsy," but this time, I looked like Don Knotts on downers. It wasn't long until I heard Dr. Laris call my name.

"Dead woman walking…" Went through my head.

The doctor and I have a great relationship; he was the associate of the doctor I entrusted my life to 17 years ago. I knew this was not going to be easy, but I also knew it was not going to be good. He proceeded to let me have it:

"You have to take your medications, Lora…I understand you have been going through something, but I refuse to see another person buried when they didn't have to be…"

He pulled out the paperwork:

"The drug resistance test was not great Lora, you are resistant to a lot of the new meds, and I refuse to give you these unless you are on your death bed."

Death - that was the first time I heard the word in that context…pertaining to me.

"You have to take your meds, when you are happy, sad, f--ed up, crazy, I don't care."

I thought about last year, when I wanted to just leave this planet; no one to love, my mother and I still estranged, no children, no full time job, hustling and still struggling, and feeling (and am) fat…I polished my pity pot with vigor. I was in a dark, dark place and I wanted the "Big Sleep"…but not anymore.

I left the doctor's desk in tears; all the worries and panic rushing out of my tear ducts. I stood in front of the waiting room window tapping out my ducts and my strength. The doctor's husband, who is the office manager, came up to me and gave me a hug and some grounding. I am not alone in this struggle with this dis-ease. Gay, straight, male, female, black, white, and all the colors in between…to "hivers" it was always a matter of living or dying. Now some of us have choices. Millions didn't have a choice. All of the sudden that pity pot disappeared and was replaced by a throne, gold and bejeweled, with a plaque across the top saying: MY LIFE. I slowly tried to kill myself by neglecting my medication regiment, wallowing in a feeling of hopelessness, but now… No one to love, Hell, I will love myself no matter what. No children, What? I have impacted many children, heck, people through my life. I am doing what I love, assisting people live to their potential. Not to mention I can lose weight…

This game of life is the same…but now I've changed my mind; I want to live.

I want to live.

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