More Than AIDS

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I have AIDS.

I say that as not to say I've been in denial all this time but rather, for many years I would never admit I have AIDS. More to the point if asked I responded that I'm living with HIV.

To fully understand my reasoning is to know how AIDS was seen in the early years. Back then the stigma was so strongly attached to the disease along with many other negative aspects of it. In the past AIDS was and still is seen as a death sentence by some. It's a red letter in bold lettering which signifies diseased. It's defined as rejection and a feeling of unworthiness.

I've had AIDS for years but never made that claim. In my HIV status, it was a barometer of how my body was doing. It was a number game as the official definition of a person having AIDS was once your t-cells fell below 200. A number created by the government and not one based on how you felt.

I found out I had AIDS when my number fell below that mark. A few numbers off and it made me part of the A-club. I believe at the time my number was 189. And although I had crossed that line, according to my doctor I couldn't uncross. I was informed once you have an AIDS diagnosis you can never go back to having HIV no matter how high your t-cell went. It sounded like fuzzy numbers.

Numbers took over my life as I wanted to prove to everyone, even myself that I didn't have AIDS. I started to eat right, love right and do the right things for my body and mind. I went to gyms and lifted ton of weights and ran on treadmills like my life depended on it. I ate garden of vegetables and bounty of fruit. Yet although I was at my highest t-cell level of 650, my medical file still listed me as having AIDS.

My mentality for a while was warped around those four letters and my thinking soon followed. It was a 'what the fuck, I have AIDS so why care' way of thinking. My actions soon followed with unhealthy behaviors and a blind eye to what was in my best interest. I no longer cared.

Bu then a moment hit me, I don't know exactly when. But there was that moment when I no longer allowed myself to be defined either by HIV, AIDS or numbers whether it was t-cells or viral load.

Not to say I didn’t monitor them any longer but I had to stop letting it dictate my life and how I saw myself.

I am such much more than an acronym. I’m so much more than a numerical value based on my blood. I’m so much more than what a doctor writes in a file with my name on it. I’m much more than AIDS.

Reclaim.

I reclaimed my life and by doing so reclaim my purpose. I move forward on the notion that I’m defined by my ability to go after my dreams and goals. To not let an A or an I or a D nor a S to bind me. I spoke of reclaiming out loud so those newly diagnosed didn’t follow my same way of thinking.

You, yes you reading this are not define by this disease. Whether you have a diagnosis of HIV or AIDS. You are greater than those words and numbers. Say it, state it, believe it and reclaim your life. You’re more than AIDS.

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