Re-Birthday

October 7, 2014 By Aundaray Guess

I consider it a yearly tradition to reflect on my Re-Birthday. As I write this I have just passed the 28th year mark of living with HIV. There are no balloons or cake with candles, which is okay as I don't need all that glitter. For me the biggest celebration I have is knowing how far I've come despite once believing I would never have this moment.

There have been many lessons for me, countless moments of fear and waves of stigma and ignorance. But all of that has been overshadowed by the show of love and support people have enveloped me with. For every person who has rejected me based on my status, two people have stepped in to fill the void.

I have to give myself credit for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. It wasn't always this way, especially when I learned about my status. I was angry. Angry at the world and mostly myself. My anger came out in self-destructive ways as I simply didn't care. I felt no one would ever love me. I didn't think I could even love myself.

The greatest loss is when I stopped dreaming. Before the virus I had my life all planned out and a long wishlist of things I wanted to do. HIV was nowhere on that list. So when my diagnoses came in like a storm and washed away my goals, I truly felt like I had nothing to live for. It felt like I was a lost ship at sea, floating aimlessly with no direction.

Yet by not giving up I realized I was here for a reason. A purpose I had yet to discover but nonetheless the man upstairs had a plan for me. As I discovered my reason I rediscovered my voice. I was brave enough to tell myself I had HIV instead of pretending the doctors made a mistake or someone like me could never get it. In that hearing of voice I started to share my status with others.

I shared it first with a dear friend who accepted me more. Next it was a support group which showed me I was not alone. Then with family as I found the courage to let the ones I love in on my little secret. And the fears I created in my head never came to life as they accepted me and didn't judge me. Finally I started to tell the world as I laid pen to paper and wrote about my experiences. As an actor I stood on the bare stage and got 'naked' with my truth and opened myself to the audience.

My dreams not only came rushing back, but they also came back in vivid color.

I was gifted with news from my doctor last month, when he reported my T-cells were 622, the highest number they've ever been. My lowest were around 75, a time in my life when the doctor's advice went in one ear and out the other as I felt I knew best. Later learning my doctor was not my

enemy. HIV was my enemy and working together we could fight this disease.

I know for a fact I can’t take all the credit for reaching these 28 years. I owe so much to the people in my life who never saw me simply as a person with HIV but saw me and loved me as Aundaray. It’s that same love I have given myself and my once self-destructive behaviors are a thing of the past as I have learned to embrace the person I’ve become.

It’s my Re-Birthday. 28. And although tomorrows are never promised, I will do everything in my power to remain the true person I am and with self-love, care and removal of negative energies, I will be here for 29 and beyond

Happy Re-Birthday to me

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