# Reflecting On 53!

May 22, 2015 By Rae Lewis-Thornton

I turned 53 today! Honestly, I never imagined me at this age and I'm not quite sure how it should be, so I'm listening to my soul because it always knows what to do.

Of course when I was younger I thought by this age, I would be married with at least one child and a dog. I had it all planned out, so I thought. I would be this big time political organizer working on important electoral campaigns across this country. Back then, I had goals like many young women. I believed with hard work you could achieve anything you want. Yep, my goals were written in gold, so I thought. I would get a PhD in Political Science and I would be the "go to" woman for important matters on the American political scene.

Even after I was diagnosed wit HIV in March 1987 almost four years after becoming infected, I believed that my life would be unchanged by it. The following fall, at age 24, I went on the 1988 campaign trail for the Democratic primaries, by then my second presidential campaign as a senior staff person.  I traveled across the country organizing the youth and student arm for  Jesse Jackson's Presidential Campaign. I even tracked delegates and worked the floor of the Democratic Convention in Atlanta. I was doing that thing, working with some of Black Americas top political players like Alexis Herman, former Secretary of Labor, Dorothy Height, Ernie Green, Mayor Marion Barry, Donna Brazile, Ron Brown and the list goes on and on.

Life was going as plan. But by 1992 I made a transition to AIDS and I literally saw death looking straight at me. Back then the life expectancy for a person with full-blown AIDS was 3 years and I was on that time line. By 1995 my T-Cell count had dropped to an all time low of 8 and I was on my third bout of Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia (PCP). Treatment for HIV was mediocre and I had no hope for a future.

By then, my life purpose was to live each day to the best of my ability. To tell my story to as many people as I could, as many ways as I could before I died. I almost never thought about tomorrow and that meant I never turned down a gig for today. I lived in the right now in everything from spending to speaking. If I wasn't somewhere speaking or conducting an  interview I was in bed resting. The quality of my life had dwindled to nothing. My busy schedule kept dying off my mind. And doing every single thing my doctor asked of me  kept me alive.

Now be clear, you dog gone straight there was a God factor, but if I didn’t have a doctor who was determine to keep me alive or if I missed one beat I would have died.

Even when I was taking 32 pills a day, or drinking 72 ounces a water a day to avoid kidney stones from the medication, or throwing up, or shitting on myself I always followed the rules. The side-effects were so vicious that there were days I couldn’t hold my body up. Between the combination of my compromised immune system not being able to fight off infections and the side-effects from the HIV medications, most days I didn’t know if I was going or coming.

In the end, it all worked out. By 1998 new medications were on the horizon and my doctor never missed a beat. She dished out new medications as they came and I complied with her instructions. We were in sic every step of the way.

I started to see concrete improvements in my health by 2000 as did most of the HIV landscape. HIV/AIDS was becoming a chronic illness, rather than a death sentence. But only if a person was diagnosed early, got in treatment and remained in treatment, they could live many more years.

So here I am, living many more years then anyone ever imagined. For sure the damage that has been done to my immune system cannot be repaired, and I find myself having more complications than the average newly diagnosed person living with HIV today.

Something as small as getting a tooth pulled, often ends up with an infection and antibiotic on one end, and on the other, it still takes me more than two weeks to heal over the average person with HIV. But these struggles are small in the scheme of my journey.

I continue to take my medication and my doctor has said that I have many more years ahead of me.

I've been muddling through these last 5 years or so. I've adjusted to the good things about my health and I've also adjusted to the changes all of this has had on my speaking career. HIV/AIDS

isn't the sexy topic that it use to be. And when organizations do bring speakers, they tend to draw from the younger activist, rather than the seasoned activist like me. It has hurt my pocket for sure. This year has been the worst of all. I made less money this past year then I did when I was 17 years old, for real, for real. But thanks be to God, I have a roof over my head and food to eat. But lack of gigs has not stopped me one bit. I continue doing what I do wherever, whenever, and however I can. About five years ago I added blogging, tweeting and all things Social Media as a way for me to continue to do the work. I know that I'm alive for a reason, a purpose and I do the best that I can with what I have.

At 53 I embrace my journey even more than ever. I acknowledge that God has more work for me. My memoir Unprotected is on the Horizon. This story, my story, my full story needs to be told. I will spend the summer finishing up the edits. Yep, there's still more work to be done with editing, layout, book cover and all things that make a book. But hold tight, World AIDS Day, December 1, 2015 is the final release date. You can pre-order HERE.

I want to help people one on one. It's time to get my Life Coaching ministry back up. I've had a few clients in the last couple of years but I've not put any energy into getting new clients. I'm changing that today. I feel that call and I've got to answer it loud and clear. I didn't go to seminary for nothing.

God has gifted me with the ability to help people get to next. To not use my gifts in all possible

ways is to squander that gift. By the way, if you are interesting in hiring me as your Life Coach email me at raelewisthornton@gmail.com

I'm alive! The gratitude that I have for my life and ministry are beyond words. Honestly, I wouldn't give anything for my journey. With the help of God, I have done some pretty amazing things with my adult life. I'm grateful for everyone who has supported me in all the ways you have supported me, especially your prayers! God has answered your prayers.

It's never to late to plan, but planning without action is futile. I'm excited about this next phase of my life. After coming out of that depression  these last six months, I feel like I have been reborn. God has a way of giving you clarity even at the darkest moments of your life.

I'm thankful for every step of my journey.  Happy Birthday to me!

Post Script: In honor of my birthday  RLT Collection is 53% off. The coupon code at checkout: birthday. SHOP HERE

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