Remembering Aaron

October 11, 2013 By Aundaray Guess

Aaron Burks represented many things to different people. For some he was that soulful voice that he shared with others as he sang in choirs sharing God's words in song. For some he was that HIV specialist who let those affected and infected by the virus know that there are many more tomorrows and that they are not alone. For some he was the father who raised beautiful children and gave them lessons that said you can do anything and everything you want to in this world. For me he was a dear friend who showed me that no barrier was too high to climb or overcome and any obstacle can be moved out of your way.

Aaron Burks left us this past August from a rare blood disorder and a huge hole has been left in his absence. I had met Aaron so many long years ago. When you met Aaron the first thing you saw was his smile and his Hollywood dimples. You couldn't

help but smile yourself as he radiated warmth of friendliness and confidence. You couldn't help not to be drawn in by the friendly spirit he exuded. It was a genuine love that radiated from him.

My admiration of Aaron of course goes beyond his physical aspects. Looking back over his life he silenced those who said 'you'll never be able to do that' as he did it. Aaron like me was HIV positive. So he was familiar with the stigma and the shame of having this disease. He knew about compromised immune systems as he sometimes fell in the danger zone with his health numbers simply because that was the hand he was dealt. But still that didn't stop him.

He also faced another demon as he had an addiction to drugs. This was a hard battle especially having HIV and one not often discussed when we're talking about the virus. As I had to learn his addiction was not one of choice but a circumstance that was in his life that wasn't in the norm. Even as a friend I sometimes felt helpless not feeling I could help with this battle. Mostly because I didn't understand his battle or the shoes he walked in. Most people would sit back and judge Aaron's life but not understand completely the process of addiction. I thankfully never judged but took my turn along with others to let him know that when he was through the storm we were going to be there waiting for him. But even having the addiction didn't stop him.

You would think Aaron had enough to go through but he faced another wall when he was incarcerated. He again represented untold stories of those having HIV and living a life behind bars. I was very worried at this time as it was hard enough to live with HIV in open society and now to be in a place where you're locked away from valuable supportive resources and limited access to exceptional health care. Not to mention contained homophobia and stigma that had the ingredients to lead to physical harm. Those moments my prayers went to Aaron and thankful God

gathered the many prayers for Aaron that his loved ones sent and shielded him until he was with us again. You would think that facing so many tests Aaron would fold and crawl in the darkness. You would think wrong as even that didn't stop him.

To have his life of imperfections Aaron was not stopped by it as he took all the misfortunes that were handed to him and flipped the script on it. He fought back the forces that lead him to addiction and walked a different path. He looked in the mirror and didn't say, "because of my former jailed life I will have limited opportunities". Instead he made his opportunities and removed any fear and established a new career with a great nonprofit in Minneapolis called the African American AIDS Task Force, where he shared his life and experience of living with HIV and helped others, eventually working for the State of Minnesota helping even more. He did this not to settle but he knew it was his calling and he answered it. With the love of God he accepted his life and mission and gave examples that despite what circumstances one has endured, it is for a reason. A reason we may not understand or see at that moment but God does have a plan. Don't give up and don't give in. Aaron did neither. He refused to let HIV and other factors excuse him from having a blessed life.

Aaron found true love with another great soul as they found each other in this crazy thing we call life. His name was Michael and you can say Michael was an angel in disguise because he promoted the love they had for each other and made it into a new life for them both, eventually sharing a new life together where Aaron moved thousand miles away to New York City to begin another chapter. Let me just say most people I know are scared to move to the next block and some are scared to move from that mental space but Aaron showed no fear. Even that didn't stop him.

In his recent passing it has made me look at my own life and what excuses have I made for myself for not living my full potential. Living with HIV have I told myself I can't do this or that because of my state of mind? Yes Aaron was in prison but he was still free. Some of us are free but still are in prison. Looking at our life beyond the bars of which we hold the key. Aaron has shown how easy it is to unlock your true potential and yes brother even in your passing I have to say that you will continue to be that motivator for life and your song and beautiful voice will continue to guide many, including me. And despite your death I can say you are the impossible as even that won't stop you.

Love you dearly

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