



We Don't Survive Quietly — We Burn Brighter Than the Wreckage

A survivor's truth. A community's warning. A fire that will not die. From wreckage to testimony, from survival to purpose — this is our call to rise and protect what was built in blood, courage, and memory.

December 2, 2025 By [The Well Project](#)

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Some stories drag you backward before they ever push you forward. Mine has done both. I've held numbers in my hands that tried to prophesy my ending. I've woken up to diagnoses that didn't make sense yet somehow explained everything. I've stared into the mirror and met both the woman who almost didn't make it... and the one who refused to disappear.

There are parts of my story I used to tiptoe around — not because I was ashamed, but because I didn't think people could handle the truth of it. The kind of truth that rips out the floorboards and exposes what's been rotting underneath.

But I'm not in the business of softening myself anymore.

Not after everything I've survived.

Not after everything I've had to rebuild with the same hands that once trembled with fear.

So let me tell it plain.

When I was diagnosed — no, when I woke up from life support to a word I didn't even understand — the world didn't just shift. It jolted. It cracked. It rearranged itself with no warning, no mercy. I was handed "HIV3" like it was a label and not a death sentence someone forgot to whisper. I had to learn on my own that this meant AIDS. I had to process that my viral load was one of the highest my clinic had ever seen at the time.

And in that moment, I wasn't thinking about stigma, advocacy, or systems.
I was thinking about breathing.
About living long enough to get out of that bed.
About surviving a life I didn't recognize anymore.

But here's what nobody tells you:
Surviving the diagnosis is one thing.
Surviving people is another.

You'd be shocked how quickly some folks evaporate the moment your truth becomes inconvenient. The silence hits first — sharp, cold, rude. Then the distance. Then the pretending. Then the sudden amnesia from people who used to swear they loved you.

It's funny how fast "I'm here for anything" turns into "I never got your message."
Mmm-hmm. Heard.

There were days I felt like I was grieving people who were still breathing.
Days where the loneliness burned hotter than the virus ever did.
Days where getting up felt like stepping back into a world unsure if it still wanted me.

But something happened in that darkness — something I didn't expect:

I met myself.
The real me.
The woman underneath all of it.

Not the version molded by trauma or survival or other people's opinions — but the woman who refused to die, even when the world made it easy to stop trying.

That woman created Wreckage & Rebirth and [Positively Medicated](#).
That woman speaks loudly, openly, without apology.
That woman finally understands her life was never fragile — only other people's loyalty was.

And now... I'm facing a different kind of fear.
Not fear of dying — I already stared that down.
Not fear of stigma — I burned that off years ago.

This fear is quieter, heavier, more dangerous.
Because now the threat isn't a diagnosis.
It's the world around it.

Policies shifting.

Funding slipping.

People in power making decisions without knowing our names, our histories, our battles, our families, our bills, our bodies.

Trying to decide what care we deserve — and what survival should cost.

I'm undetectable, alive, thriving, proud — but not naïve.
I know how fragile stability becomes when the wrong people feel comfortable.

When access becomes a privilege instead of a right.
When treatment becomes a luxury instead of a lifeline.
When our community gets spoken about in the past tense like we aren't still here fighting for air.

And I refuse — with every rebirthed bone in my body — to let anyone rewrite us into extinction.

I may not be a long-term survivor — not yet — but
I survived six years without a diagnosis and now almost seven and a half with one — thirteen years of living with HIV before I even knew how loud my voice could be. I know exactly whose shoulders I stand on. The people who fought before me, who buried friends, who marched, who demanded dignity when the world refused to see them... they carried the weight so people like me could step into the light.
So even if I arrived later, I arrived ready.
And now it's my job — our job — to carry the torch forward, to protect what they built, and to make sure the fire never goes out.

And there's something I need to name, especially as a white woman in this fight: I know the weight of this epidemic has never been carried evenly. Women of color — especially Black women — have been the backbone of HIV advocacy and survival for decades. They've faced the highest burdens with the least support, navigating stigma, silence, and systemic barriers that I will never fully know. Yet they've held their families, their communities, and this entire movement with a strength that has shaped the path I now walk.

And the numbers don't lie: women make up nearly a quarter of people living with HIV in the U.S., yet Black women alone account for over half of new infections among women.
Latina women make up almost another quarter.

And still, women are less likely to be retained in care, less likely to be virally suppressed, and more likely to be diagnosed late — often at the point of AIDS, like I was.

These aren't just statistics.

They are warnings. They are stories. They are people.

So when I speak, it's not to overshadow — it's to stand beside. To use whatever access or privilege I have to push in the same direction they've been pushing all along. My voice is not the center of this story, but it is part of the chorus, lifted in solidarity with the women who have carried this fight long before I found my place in it.

We didn't claw our way out of the wreckage just to be dragged back under.
We didn't survive death, abandonment, stigma, and government indifference just to whisper now.
We didn't build community from ashes just to let it crumble because someone else got bored of caring.

No.
Absolutely not.

I am fire-born.
Truth-heavy.
Loud with purpose.
Soft where it matters and steel where it doesn't.
And I know damn well what I'm fighting for.

I'm fighting for the ones still learning how to say "positive" without their voices shaking.
For the ones too tired to advocate today.
For the ones without access, without support, without a system that sees them as human.
For the ones someone fought for long before they even knew they'd need it.

This is bigger than me.
Bigger than my story.
Bigger than the day I rose back up from the dead.

My story isn't the exception — it's the warning flare.

This is for every person who has been told their life depends on a pill — then made to feel guilty for needing it.
For every person who's had to justify their existence to people who wouldn't survive a week in their skin.
For every person who refuses to let silence dictate their destiny.

We are still here.
Still rising.
Still refusing to die quietly.

And as long as I have breath, I will keep writing, keep fighting, keep turning every piece of wreckage into something worth living inside of.

Because I did not survive all of this just to survive.

I survived to live.

To speak.

To serve.

To create.

To rage gracefully.

To love loudly.

To remind the world that we are not fragile — we are forged.

And we are not going anywhere.

The Well Project is a non-profit organization whose mission is to change the course of the HIV/AIDS pandemic through a unique and comprehensive focus on women and girls across the gender spectrum. Visit their website, www.thewellproject.org, to access fact sheets (English and Spanish), blogs, and advocacy tools, and to join a global community of women living with HIV.

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