My Life Changed Forever on World AIDS Day 2014

I spent four days in a coma. Since then, a lot has changed. Amazingly, most of it for the better.

November 28, 2017 By Martha Warriner Jarrett

Friday, December 1, is World AIDS Day. In the words of a long-ago Virginia Slims cigarette ad, “We’ve come a long way, baby.” That couldn’t be more true. In the early years of the 1980s, there was no hope.

Yet out of that despair there emerged a social/political/civil rights movement that brought HIV/AIDS into our consciousness and forever changed the way we regard members of the LGBTQ+ community. And hope? It followed.

On Friday, our community will mark the long struggle on World AIDS Day, a moment to reflect on the toll around the globe. In many cities—even in the conservative strong-hold of Kern County, CA, where I live—there will be free, confidential HIV testing, and doctors, patients and those who work in the field will share information about where we are now in the epidemic.

But I can’t help but think back to World AIDS Day in 2014. I have absolutely no memory of the day. It’s the day I was rushed to the hospital with critically high blood pressure and acute respiratory failure. It’s the day I was put on a ventilator. Nobody knew whether I would wake up or not. But most importantly, it’s the day that changed my life forever. It’s the day they tested me for HIV/AIDS. It’s the day I tested positive.

I lot has changed for me in the last three years. Amazingly, most of it for the better. Yes, after 4 days in a coma and another week in the hospital/rehabilitation, I couldn’t walk on my own. I couldn’t even get in and out of the bathtub by myself. And there was denial, and many tears. But at the end of the day, I made it.

With the advances in treatment, I look forward to a happy, relatively healthy life. Yes, there is still that one pill a day. And while there is promise of a cure for HIV/AIDS, it will probably not come soon enough for me. I turn 73 in January.

But I don’t see World AIDS Day as the time for recriminations and what ifs. Yes, had there been more funding for research, there would probably be a cure by now. Instead, I am thankful for the progress that has been made. Because of what’s been accomplished, I’m still alive. Now, however, that progress has become somewhat of a double-edged sword. Young people today don’t know

much about the disease. They didn’t live through the awful 80s. They haven’t seen the bodies of so many beautiful young men ravaged by AIDS. They think of HIV/AIDS as a manageable disease. No big deal. But the current statistics are still devastating. On a worldwide basis, 1.8 million people became newly infected with HIV/AIDS in 2016, and 1 million died. Twenty million people are living with untreated HIV/AIDS.

Our job on World AIDS Day 2017 is to make sure that everyone knows that the epidemic isn’t over, and that everyone gets tested, whether or not they think they’re at risk.

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/world-aids-day-three-years-later