



# In My Youth, I Laughed at Jokes About AIDS

Now I've experienced—and written about—growth in hardships.

July 24, 2017 By [Glenna McCarthy](#)

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As a child, I felt so uncomfortable and out of sync with the world around me and had no clue why. But once I learned to laugh and joke as children do, I became addicted to pranks and laughter as an escape. Being uncomfortable within can lead to being self-absorbed and assuming that everyone else is free game. The jokes even included laughing at someone for being “toothless” as well as having HIV/AIDS (because it was so mysterious in its origin).

The point I am making is that when a lot of labels and stigmas came knocking on my door, I was mortified that now I was part of those populations I used to laugh at. I already knew what feeling overwhelmed and uncomfortable was as a child, but now my problems were documented and there was no way to hide behind shallow jokes and games.

Mind you, I was a teen when I was going through my rebellious stage—but that stage continued into a downward spiral for over 25 years. My life has been a rough ride, but I am happy that I learned to have a real sense of compassion and empathy.

I was walking to work today and rushing like usual trying to bob and weave around people whom, because of my anxiety, I consider obstacles. I finally said to myself, “You don't have to run anymore. You can slow down and feel your body, and not just the aches and pains but the spirit that is starting to glow again.”