



Why Would God Give Me HIV?

After being in denial for years, Vicky Wiggins learned to live with the virus.

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I contracted HIV from my oldest kid's father. He pursued me; I got pregnant. My first child had Rh factor blood, so my baby had to get a blood transfusion from a donor. I got scared because the doctor said my baby might have HIV. I prayed to God, and to my relief, she was negative.

The doctor said my partner had AIDS, but my partner told me there was a mix-up and that someone had stolen his medical card, so I shrugged it off. I was only 19, so I believed him. One time, I saw him get out of the shower, and he was bone skinny. But I didn't make the connection in my head.

Then one day, he came home and told me I'd better get tested—and the kids too—because he was HIV positive. The kids were tested, and they were fine. I had to go to the clinic for my results. When my name was called, the woman came in and said, "I'm sorry, but you are HIV positive."

I cried, screamed and yelled. I cried all the way home. But then I wiped my tears and got myself together because I could not let my two young kids see me cry. I tried to cope the best way I could.

After my kid's father was diagnosed, his mother pushed me to become his caregiver, so I wasn't able to process my own hurt, anger or the reality that I was positive. I remember going to appointments with him. The doctors would come into the room wearing these space suits and talk about his condition where other people could overhear what they were saying.

I'd always think, why would God give me HIV? Why would he give me such an awful disease after I had grown up with a mother who only had me to get back at my father? I was whipped for things I did and didn't do. I was called ugly, and I was told I would never amount to anything. I also had to deal with my mother's paranoia. She would accuse me and my sister of poisoning her. She'd pull out a Bible and make us swear we hadn't. Why would God create me just to endure years of pain? And then give me a lifelong disease?

My kid's father ended up moving in with his mom. It was crazy because before she found out that her son had AIDS, her best friend would come over with her son who had AIDS, and when he used any of her dishes, she would throw them out.

I was used to seeing and hearing nothing but negative reactions toward people living with HIV. I made myself believe I had been mistaken about my positive diagnosis, telling myself that God couldn't be that cruel. I was a big girl—there was nothing small about me—and I didn't look sick, so mentally I went on with my life. I had two more kids that were HIV negative, so I figured my HIV results were wrong.<

Yet I was living a lie. Eventually, I received the call that took my breath away: His mother called to say he had died. I wanted to make sure my kids didn't see me cry.

I was in denial for years. There were times I would disclose my status to men and women, but I couldn't say the word HIV to my kids.

But then in December 2001, I caught [pneumocystis] pneumonia [PCP] and almost died. At the time, I was married to a woman who knew I had HIV, but I still couldn't accept it.

I survived and finally started seeing a therapist who tried to work with me on confronting my fears of HIV and the stigma attached to that word. I went from therapist to therapist and finally ended up with one who became my friend. She would give me money to help with food for my kids, and she helped out when my dog needed surgery. I felt special and didn't want to disappoint her, so I never told her how mental I felt deep down.

Today, I am 54 years old. I have four adult kids and two grandkids. I want to share my story with others.

What are some of your achievements?

I raised four kids, and I have a kind heart. I don't drink or pop pills to get away from my truth. I am sober, even though I use to be very suicidal. Now, I appreciate life.

What do you regret?

Not being strong enough. Being a pill popper and an alcoholic and being depressed for years.

What keeps you up at night?

Fears of someone coming back from my past.

If you could change one thing about living with HIV, what would it be?

That stigma be lifted from our society.

What person in the HIV community do you most admire?

Myself because of all I have been through. I am still here.

What drives you to do what you do?

My family. I wouldn't be here without my kids. They opened my eyes to me being a person living with HIV.

What is your motto?

Be safe and remember to be strong. Always get tested—you and your partner.

If you had to evacuate your house immediately, what is the one thing you would grab on the way out?

My kids and my pets.

If you could be any animal, what would you be? And why?

A lion because I am stronger than I used to be.

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