

## **A Letter to My Younger Self**

By: Melissa McCall

If I could go back in time and talk to myself the days and weeks after learning my status. what would I say?

I think that I have so many things to tell myself that I can't possibly write them all down. So I'm going to limit the list to the simplest words of advice that I think will help:

Right now you are absolutely terrified, upset, and hysterical; every emotion is flooding your senses. Your world has been turned upside down, inside out, and sideways.

I know, I promise you, I know, I have been there.

In the span of three short months, you went from understanding little about AIDS, to being thrown full force into an epidemic. You have been bombarded with so much information that all you want to do is crawl into a hole, cover yourself up, and stay there.

You, your husband, and your little girl were all diagnosed HIV positive. Your husband dies just four months later.

It is and will be complete and utter chaos. I know that you are feeling this right now.

But if I can tell you one thing, it's that you will be okay.

The path you are traveling on right now may seem lonely, but it is well-traveled and you are not as alone as you may think.

You will be okay.

You are going to live a normal life. To do this you need to surround yourself with your support system of family and friends. Disclose to who you want to, but always do it alone.

You will be okay.

You have nothing – absolutely nothing -- to be ashamed or embarrassed about. Ever. You didn't do anything wrong; you aren't being punished for some personal past transgression. Life happens, and life happens every day.

You will be okay.

I know that right now you feel as if your world has ended. As a 20+ year survivor, I will tell you that life does indeed go on. So take a moment, breathe, and think. "what is best for me?" Then go do what is best for you. Time is your friend, every day that you live, is a day closer to a cure.

You will be okay.

The most important piece of advice is so very personal. Take a look deep inside yourself, find that hidden strength that lies within you and pull it to the surface. I have wasted so many years at being very angry at the injustice of it all. All of those wasted years living in complete turmoil. Don't be like me, Be better instead. Take that strength, take your status, get up, get out, get involved, and remember, you will be okay.

With Love, Your Future Self