

The first time I dressed as a woman I felt I was another person. My gestures no longer provoked laughter. I don't care any longer about the way others react. I am a person who matters.

– **Ilsa, Mexico City, Mexico, 2008**

Obviously I don't like having the virus. But I am alive. I go running, I go to the movies, to the theatre. The main problem is the prejudice, but I go on living my life.

– **Cleverson, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2009**

I want to tell other people who are HIV-positive to live their lives openly. Don't care about anybody else. Just live your positive life. You will become stronger and stronger and stronger again.

– **Gugu, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2010**

One day, I realized I wasn't dying, and that something needed to change in me. All those negative feelings started disappearing. I decided I had to forgive myself.

– **Jose, Los Angeles, California, 2011**

With my pictures, I am trying to make a statement that everyday life can be beautiful, that the things around you can be awesome. Capturing beautiful things and moments in time is priceless.

–John, Washington, D.C., 2012

To people who are HIV-positive: If you are depressed about something, look at me and live happily. My life is hard, but I am still living with joy and so should you.

–Raju, Mumbai, India, 2013

Even though I'm HIV-infected, it doesn't mean I don't care about my personal beauty. I can make myself look good. I don't want society to see HIV as something pathetic.

–Aoy, Bangkok, Thailand, 2013

I started sex work when I was 16 years old. I felt trapped. It was hard, but I got used to the job. From the moment I found out I was pregnant, I stopped doing it.

–Wideline, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 2014

I made a commitment to myself this year to reconnect with my own creativity. Creating order in chaos has been a long-term project of mine. It's really important for me to quiet my head.

–**Gordon, London, United Kingdom, 2015**

As a kid I was quite beautiful. I was big-boned, which resulted in me attracting older guys. My first boyfriend did everything for me. He played a fatherly role. He was my “blesser,” my sugar daddy.

–Xoli, Durban, South Africa, 2016



When I told my husband that I am HIV-positive, he said, “How have you contracted HIV? Who have you been with?” And with these words, he left me. As soon as my parents heard about my illness, they abandoned me. I have four children, and they left me as well. People used to call me names. “She is diseased. Don’t go near her.” It was then that a lady came to me wanting to sell her goat, and I bought it for 2000 rupees [less than \$30]. I decided I would look after animals. The lady who sold me the goat didn’t realize it was pregnant and, six months later, it had a kid. Now I have three animals with me: Julie, Mariye, and Shera. The four of us, we live as a family. My animals are my human beings. My family, my husband, my children have all betrayed me, but these animals have not. I was very nervous about taking photographs. I had never held a camera in my life. I remembered what they told me about the self-timer, so I thought I’d give it a go. I set up the tripod, attached the camera, and set up the 10-minute timer. I went to lay my head on the pillow. Julie came to me, nudging me, and fell asleep in my arms. I held her. She pushed her head up and the timer went off.

—**Priya, Mumbai, India, 2013**



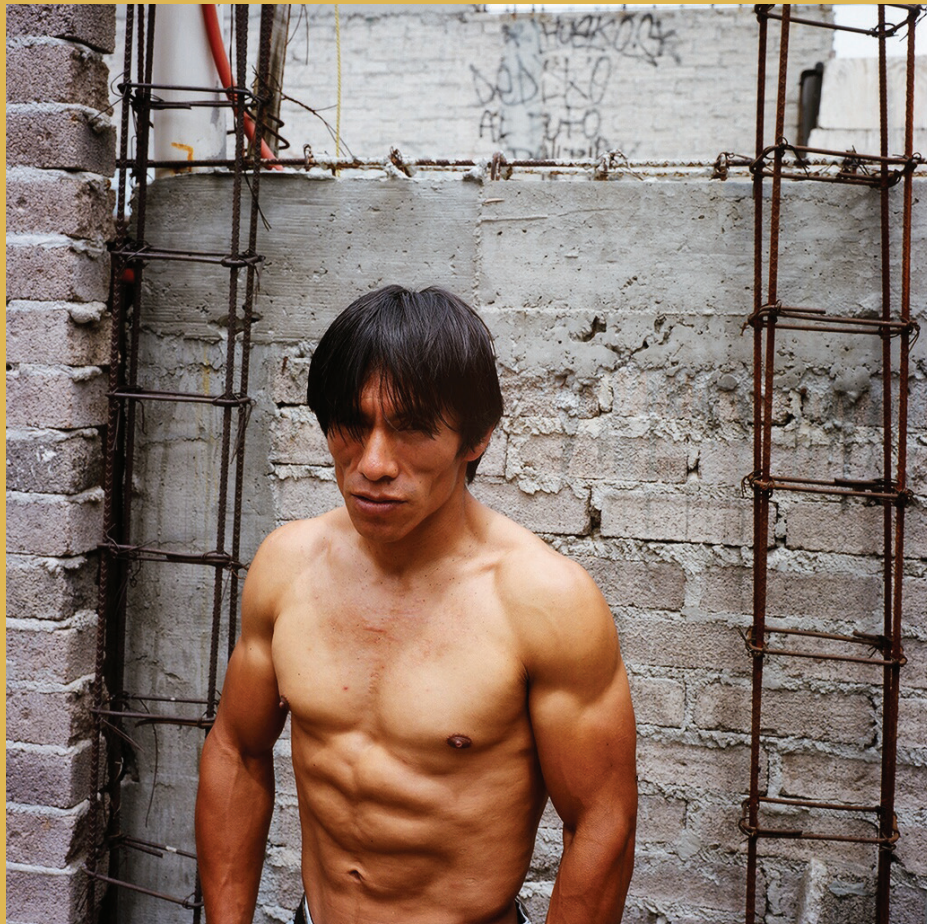
When I was seven years old, my sister told me I was positive. I ran into the kitchen crying and asked my mom why she hadn't told me I was going to die. My mom said that as long as I saw her getting herself together every day, taking care of me and my three siblings, I didn't have to worry about dying. Because she had AIDS, and as long as she was still here, I didn't have anything to worry about. I still look at my mom and see her working two jobs and taking care of me, at twenty-six, and my older sister and my older brother and my little brother. It gives me strength to see my mom living with AIDS for as long as I've been living with HIV. And she's still going on.

—Lynnea, Los Angeles, United States, 2011



I became HIV-positive by having great condom-less sex with somebody who was positive. Nothing more, nothing less. I just want to say to everybody out there, if you have preconceived ideas about positive people, just forget them. We are sexual beings with rights. I choose not to be stigmatized. I say pants-in-the-mouth to stigma. I take 29 tablets a day as a result of being HIV-positive. I have a very difficult relationship with medication, but I'm also very grateful. I struggle with the fact that, as a spoiled westerner, I have access to medication and some people in the world don't. I wish that, along my journey as a young person, somebody would have spoken to me about being able to negotiate sex. Being positive has changed my life. I love the fact that I'm an openly HIV-positive man who doesn't care what people think about my status.

—Isaac, London, United Kingdom, 2015



I am an electrician and I have been living with HIV for the past fifteen years. That afternoon when I got the news, I was in shock. I left the doctor's office and wandered aimlessly along the streets, all night long. When I finally came to my senses, it was dawn. I decided to fight to remain in the best physical, emotional, and psychological condition I could during the time I had left on this planet. I promised myself that the virus would never defeat me. I decided to be tough. It doesn't matter if the virus came to my life or if I went out looking for it. I just live like anybody else. I love to exercise, not only because it is good for my health, but also because I always wanted to have the body of a wrestler. The years I have spent living with HIV have taught me to be more humble, respectful, and humane. My greatest satisfaction now is to help other people get medical care. We who live with HIV do not ask for special privileges, only that our rights be respected.

—Alejandro, Mexico City, Mexico, 2008



I was born with HIV 23 years ago. At the time my mother and father got together, my father was doing drugs. He contracted HIV, and I was born with it. I didn't really know what the sickness was, I just had to live my life and keep taking my medicine. That's still how I see it now.

—John, Washington, D.C., U.S.A., 2012



About 10 years ago, my life imploded and I felt completely out of control. I was in a relationship that was killing me. My friends were telling me that I was going to die and I could not see it. He pushed me into the bath. My head hit off the taps. He was standing above me and there was blood running off his hands.

—Gordon, London, United Kingdom, 2015



Each of my images depicts a footprint in time, a mark left by the environment or by society. Each of our actions leaves a mark, sometimes on ourselves, sometimes on others. If I can influence at least one person to change his or her perspective about HIV, then I also will have left my mark.

—Martin, Mexico City, Mexico, 2008



I have become an activist, helping people at the hospital. I work more with women, building on my own experience. I am a bold fighting woman. When I negotiate with authorities at the hospital, I often tell them: “Either you stick to your word or I’ll sue you.” That is what gives me strength, fighting for the rights of people living with HIV.

—**Silvia, Mexico City, Mexico, 2008**



I was kicked out of my house. I have family here in Rio de Janeiro, but they have renounced me, because I am HIV-positive. I am speaking from the place where I was attacked yesterday. I have a broken arm, but that's not going to stop me from fighting. Prejudice against homosexuals is a terrible thing. I am fallen, psychologically, mentally. I have nothing else to say.

—Francisco, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2009



The day we came back from the hospital, Tshegofatso was a big healthy baby. He grew nicely and was fat, and he looked like his father. He was always laughing. But when he got ill, he was always frowning, and he didn't laugh anymore. At six months, he just died in my hands. I realized then that he had HIV.

—Annah, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2010



I am especially fascinated by fire, which is important in traditional medicine ceremonies. There is a lot of good that comes from fire and a lot of sadness too. In that way, fire is like sex. People glorify sex as a sacred thing because it creates life. But some people, like me, become HIV-positive from sex. It's both.

—Mlungisi, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2010



After I found out my HIV status, I said, “You know what? Though I’m HIV-positive, I will never get sick. I won’t change. In fact, I will be even more beautiful. I will grow. I will take care of myself. I will make sure I don’t repeat all the wrongs I have done or have been done to me.”

—Zandile, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2010



My father humiliated me in my own house. Worst of all, he did not even do it face-to-face. He called me on the phone and said: “Don’t call me again. All I owe you now is a coffin.” And from that day on, I never spoke with my dad again. The stigma that we are subject to within our families is the hardest.

—**Gaston, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 2014**



Soon after I was diagnosed, my mom told me she and my stepdad had been diagnosed HIV-positive three months before. She just didn't know how to tell anybody. We became really good friends and just went through it together, until she passed. I wish we had bonded earlier in life, but it was so good to have that family relationship at that time.

—Christian, Washington, D.C., United States, 2012



I was born HIV-positive. My biological mother passed away of complications from AIDS. I really felt abandoned. I went through a period where I hated my birth mother, because I felt like, “You just going to leave me here with HIV?” But I loved her at the same time. It was very confusing. A lot of my poetry has to do with my mom and her absence in my life.

—Mary, Washington, D.C., 2012



I had never operated a camera before this project so I was worried. I didn't know what to do or which buttons to press. In one picture, I fixed the tripod and have my hands folded in prayer to God. This is about how I am alone. I don't have a partner, so I fold my hands and accept this. This is life, and life will go on.

—Sudesh, Mumbai, India, 2013



I've had doctors say, "Well, isn't this like diabetes?" But it isn't. As far as I know, I've never come across a diabetic who was reluctant to tell his mother and father that he's diabetic, who can lose a job because he's diabetic, who doesn't know how to tell a prospective girlfriend that he's diabetic. We humans, we're full of fear. But I'm not frightened anymore.

— **Chris, London, United Kingdom, 2015**



Because I was born HIV-positive, a lot of times people give me more sympathy than they give someone who has contracted HIV through drug use or sexual activities. They say it's not my fault and I didn't ask for it. But who asks for HIV? The only difference between me and other HIV-positive people is that I don't know life without it.

— **Lynnea, Los Angeles, United States, 2011**



The father of my children died from HIV, and that gave me a lot of problems. I cried. There are still people who stay away. They say I have HIV and that I can't live next to them. They are afraid and they talk amongst themselves, always pointing their fingers at me. But that does not trouble me anymore. Life is still beautiful. I will continue to drink my medication.

—**Dina, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 2014**



I decided to disclose my status to my partner. But he didn't take it well. He blamed me. And we fought, a lot. I took a decision then to use a rope to take my life, but God was there for me. I didn't do it. I decided to go to my grandmother and disclose my status to her. After that, I started my life afresh.

—Jennifer, Durban, South Africa, 2016



When I was very young, my father signed me up to a wrestling team. After becoming HIV-positive, I restarted my passion. I began my life for the second time, exercising and playing games. The people who were wary of me since contracting HIV—who didn't talk to me, or invite me to their weddings—these people began to accept me.

—Hari, Mumbai, India, 2013



Each medicine has a different side effect. As a result, my body has changed. I do exercises every morning to help get a better shape. Before, I had the normal curves. Now, I have a hump on the back, and I have a distended tummy. Nobody else knows it. But I know it, and I feel it.

—Aoy, Bangkok, Thailand, 2013



The gay parade where I was on Sunday—it's glamorous, and there's a crowd, glitter, beautiful people. At first I was a little tense, but then I started to loosen up, seeing all these people, gay and straight, supporting equality. They have such a glow. Of course we see nudity, seduction, beauty, but my focus is on activism.

—Albany, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2009



When my husband found out that he had AIDS, his doctors advised that my three-year-old son and I would need to be tested too. I was breastfeeding my son and was told to stop. Before going to get tested, I went to the church to pray and we got the bottles blessed by the priest. I tested HIV-positive. Luckily my son was negative.

—Fatima, Mumbai, India, 2013



I was a bad boy when I was in my teens. I tried all kinds of drugs. I shared needles with others without knowing what a bad idea that was. Possession of needles was against the law. Fear of the healthcare system has caused many HIV-infected people to die needlessly. As long as we open ourselves up and get into the treatment process, no one has to die. I am still alive!

—Jo, Bangkok, Thailand, 2013



The left side of my body is partially paralyzed due to an HIV-related infection in the brain. If I could walk like normal, everything would be perfect. Although my body is not the same on both sides, I can still do things. I can take care of myself. I don't need to be a burden to anybody. Plus my disability doesn't affect the beauty of my soul.

—Joe, Bangkok, Thailand, 2013



I'm an outgoing person. I love ice cream. I love to dress up. I love high heels. I love to dance. And I am HIV-positive. At birth, I was taken away from my mother, due to the fact that she was mentally unstable. I grew up in group homes. At quiet moments, I used to stare out the window and think where I'll be in the next five or 10 years' time.

—Elizabeth, Durban, South Africa, 2016



At school one day, the teachers set the children an assignment, “Who is your hero?” When I was checking my daughter’s books, I saw that she had written about me, not Nelson Mandela. That’s why I love her so much. Sometimes I tell my daughter, “I will not die until you finish your school and your university.” In the meantime, I will stay strong. I’m not the dying type.

—Gugu, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2010



Three days after I found out about my status, I met my partner, Guilherme, on the Internet, in a chat room for people living with HIV/AIDS. He invited me to visit him. I got to know more about HIV and things changed. The fear I had from the stigma associated with the disease—that I was going to get thinner, wane, and die—suddenly dissipated.

—Cleverson, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2009



I was in a lot of pain after all those years of drug and alcohol abuse. But I found a great sense of calm, of serenity and peace, when I started doing yoga. “Be here now.” That could be the best mantra ever. It keeps me from worrying about the future or feeling shameful about the past. I fall out of poses, but I’ve learned how to fall gracefully.

—Rodney, Los Angeles, United States, 2011



I come from Zimbabwe, but now I live in London and I'm British. People used to think someone HIV-positive should be skinny and miserable. No, no, no, things have changed. Now we're looking good. No matter how late I am, I run and peer into the mirror and see how I look. I always tell people, we can do everything—except donate blood.

—Maureen, London, United Kingdom, 2015



One day, a neighbor who used to stigmatize me, she called and asked me to visit because she was sick. On my arrival at her place, she took out a piece of paper from her bag and, guess what? It was the result of her HIV test, showing the HIV-positive result. And then I laughed, I don't want to lie. I laughed until I was done. Then I counselled her.

—Gogo, Durban, South Africa, 2016



I went to the top of a building to commit suicide. Then I stopped and said no, there must be thousands of people like me. I thought: let it go. A new life has started for me now. That's what this photo is about: 10 sprouts—one for each year I have been living with HIV.

—Raju, Mumbai, India, 2013



Now that I'm 18 years old, I feel empowered and my decisions are legally recognized. What I want is to feel fulfilled and productive in order to take the next step toward becoming a transgendered woman. To my family it was harder to learn that I had HIV than to learn that I was trans, although they think that one thing led to the other.

—Ilsa, Mexico City, Mexico, 2008



I go to the hospital every month, they give me my medicine, and they also give me other medication because I am pregnant. What I want is for the baby to be born healthy. They say that if I take all the medicine, the baby has a good chance of not having HIV in her blood.

—Wideline, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 2014



At school, it was really therapeutic to tell people I was positive and see that nothing had changed. They would still shake my hand after class, and a lot of them sent me cool letters. It was such a relief to finally tell somebody. After I told some friends and they were OK with it, I felt brave enough to tell other people.

—Jose, Los Angeles, United States, 2011



I did not know that having a camera in my hand would prove lethally orgasmic for me. But through photography I discovered new things and saw them from a completely different perspective. In general, I don't like to take pictures of myself, but it was a wonderful experience to try and find the best angle.

—Magda, Mexico City, Mexico, 2008



I am a happy person, but it hasn't always been so. I was rebellious. I didn't want to take the medication. I was sick with AIDS, bedridden, in a wheelchair. I almost died but didn't, thanks to my will to live and the medications. HIV demands that you live intensely. It leaves us so sensitive. You start to see life in a special way.

—Aninha, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2009



In 1981, the summer that HIV arrived, I moved to New York City and partied on Fire Island. Because I've now been living with HIV for so long—30 years—my whole life is a reaction to health issues. It has completely altered my viewpoint, from being a very casual, happy-go-lucky, try-anything kind of a personality, to a very careful personality. Surviving HIV requires that kind of focus.

— **Mark, Los Angeles, United States, 2011**



I have been clean a year. I'm working towards getting myself back on the right track, because my parents didn't raise me up to be sleeping on someone's couch. I plan to get my GED [high school diploma]. I plan to have a stable roof over my head. I would like to travel. I really would love to go to Paris, to see the Eiffel Tower.

— **Ericka, Washington, D.C., United States, 2012**



Before I began taking my HIV medication, I looked very sick. My weight was 42 kilograms [92 pounds]. Now I look so much better. I can go out and work, selling jewelry, without having to worry. And I like dressing up. I dress to impress passersby when I sell in the market. If someone stops to talk with me, that makes me happy, even if they don't buy.

— **Aoi, Bangkok, Thailand, 2013**



I feel happy and joyful when I take photos. I used to look at the world like I was not part of it. It's like I was living in another world, with no hope. But after I took control, I realized that I was just like anyone who is alive. Stop stigmatization against people with HIV. We all belong to one society.

— **Mideline, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 2014**



In the early days of my diagnosis, I was afraid of transmitting the virus to partners. Sex was overshadowed by risk, the body a vessel for fear rather than joy. The photos I take are indicative of my desire to represent my HIV within a broader context of human intimacy, as healthy, erotic, and sensual, as playful and loving, as sacred and nurturing, because I am all of those things.

— **James, London, United Kingdom, 2015**



I started my ARV's, not because I was sick, but because I wanted to have a child. I have three beautiful children. I call them my Nevirapines because I had to take the drug Nevirapine in order for them to be HIV-negative. Imagine, now I have a husband and three kids. They're all negative. I'm the only one who's positive. They give me all the support that I need.

— **Xoli, Durban, South Africa, 2016**