

**A LIVING
WOMEN'S
HISTORY
OF HIV
IN THE
UNITED STATES**

**I'm still
surviving**

CHICAGO

**AN ORAL HISTORY OF
CHICAGO WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV**

**HISTORY
MOVES**

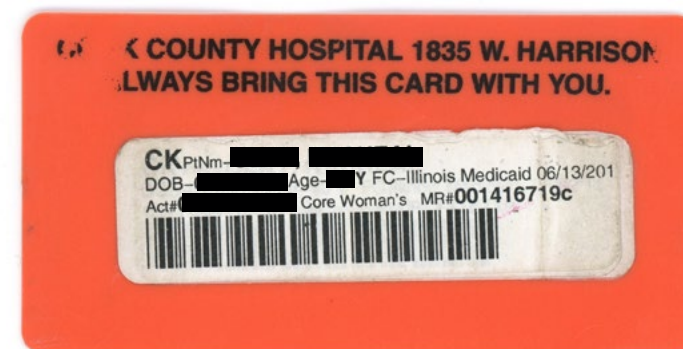
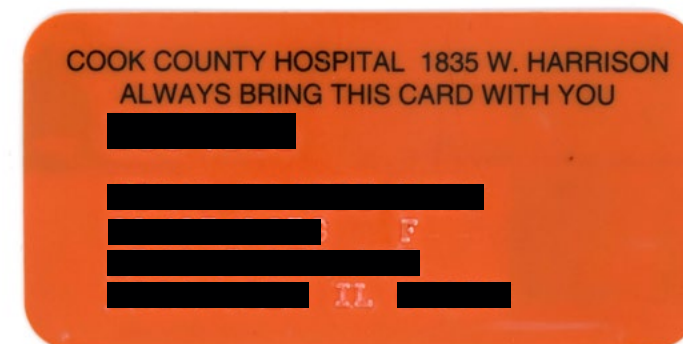
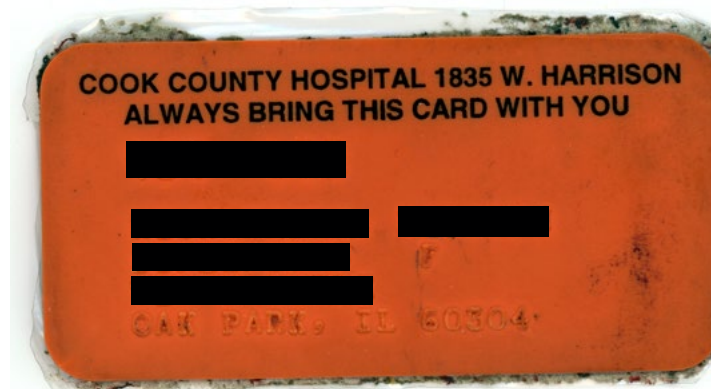


**WIHS
CHICAGO**

It don't matter where
we're from. It don't
matter if you were born
on the South Side, the
North Side, Cicero,
whatever. We all have
a lot in common.

OPPOSITE

Identification cards from Cook County Hospital. Numerous women in this project had these orange cards, printed long before the hospital was renamed John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital of Cook County in 2001, in their wallets.



I'm still surviving is a collaboration between the Chicago Women's Interagency HIV Study and History Moves, a public history initiative at the University of Illinois-Chicago and the University of Cincinnati.

As an initiative at the intersections of history and design, History Moves makes public history accessible and meaningful by collaborating with community organizations and residents to recount how they have changed the course of history. We believe that history, when created, curated, and shared with community members, has the power to change the way we see our city in the present.

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I'm still surviving

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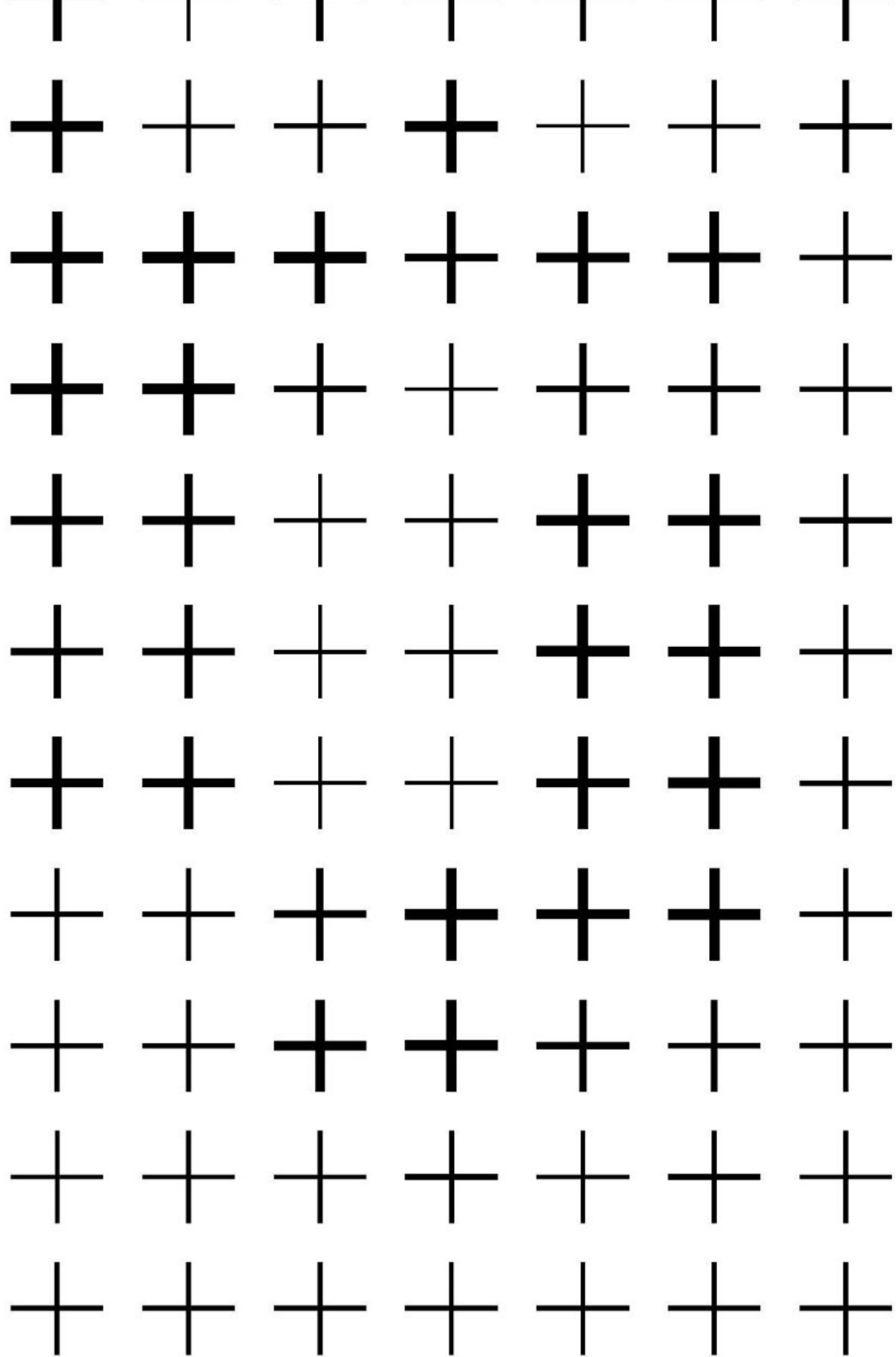
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INTRODUCTION

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Women living with HIV have moved from the margins of a once-deadly epidemic to the center of the narrative, becoming survivors, storytellers, and history makers. In November of 2014, a group of fourteen women with HIV met with a team of public historians and designers who make up History Moves to think about ways to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Women's Interagency HIV Study in Chicago. There were nine Black women, two Latinas, and three white women, who came from neighborhoods across Chicago, including Cicero, Rogers Park, Back-of-the-Yards, Englewood, and the near West Side. Some were childless, others were mothers and grandmothers; some were lesbians, others were divorced from their husbands and still looking for male partners.

The Women's Interagency HIV Study (WIHS, pronounced "wise") is the longest running longitudinal study of women with and at risk for contracting HIV in the United States. For the last two and a half decades women from around the metropolitan area have come to the WIHS clinic twice a year, every year, to spend half a day with WIHS staff for a "research visit." This means they take part in a detailed psychosocial and medical interview about their daily lives, education, income and employment, household burdens and supports, sexual practices, drug use, medications, and their mental and physical health. They also undergo a gynecological exam with frequent pap smears and biopsies if needed; body measurements; and collection of as many as 14 tubes of blood to assess HIV disease progression, kidney and liver function, infections, and genetic testing.

History Moves is a public history project that works to transform historical subjects into history makers. We partner with community-based organizations to produce untold narratives about how organizations and communities come to look as they do. We do this by introducing people to tools that let them move from telling their individual stories to thinking about historical connections and linkages among and between each other. Like StoryCorps—the well-known nationwide oral history project—History Moves asks people to recount their personal history through an interview with another member of their community. Through a series of participatory workshops, History Moves encourages people to imagine, interpret, and map their collective pasts. The interviews are professionally transcribed, giving new form to the participants' spoken words and concretizing their historical experience on paper. To supplement and enliven the oral histories, and to foster historical thinking and memory, History Moves asks all participants to bring historical ephemera from their lives, especially images, for sharing with the assembled group. We then supplement the personal images with images from historical research done after listening to and reading the interviews. We combine all we have collected—the sound, text, and images—to produce a multimedia archive and public presentation of the collective history.

I'm Still Surviving is the culmination of a six-month collaboration between the women of WIHS Chicago and History Moves. In it you will find excerpts from each of the fourteen

interviews conducted with and by the women of WIHS, alongside images from their personal collections and historical photos of Chicago from local archives. The participants, themselves, determined the questions and collectively decided to organize the interview around each woman's experience as a person with HIV and how her life exceeds her HIV-positive status. Working in pairs, the women interviewed one another, asking questions about their early lives in Chicago, their families; their lives as HIV+ women in WIHS, and about the losses they have experienced. After reading the transcripts, each narrator then made decisions about how her life would be represented in the text and in relation to the other women. She selected her most appealing and important quotes, and then tagged each according to a set of themes that aligned with a time in her life. We have grouped together their life history recollections in the three chapters that follow: Roots, Discovery, and Still Surviving.

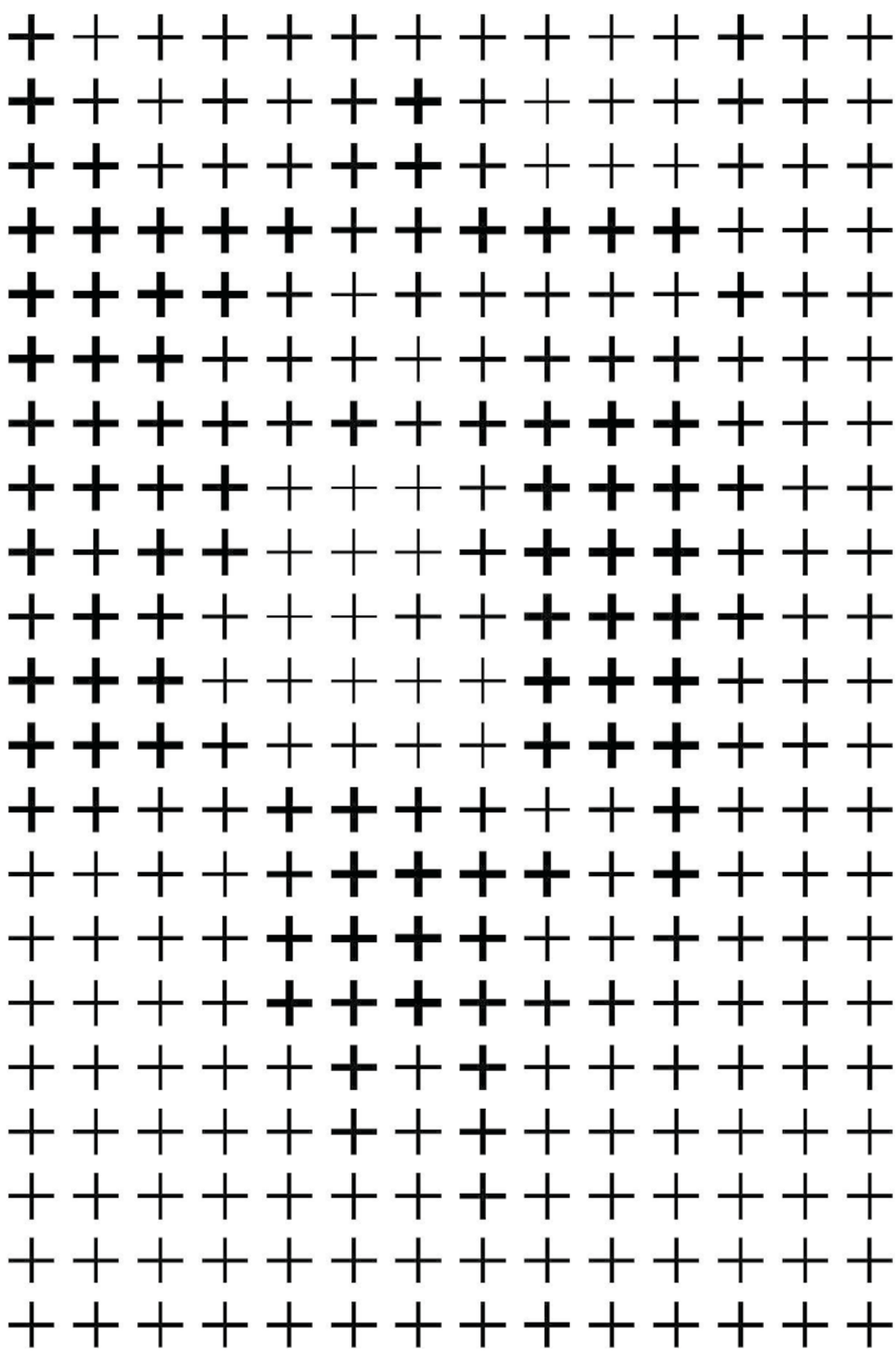
As with the best works of history, the stories here far exceed what might be gleaned from the chapter titles that name various stages in an HIV-positive woman's life. The women's experiences detail a truly sweeping narrative about gender, race, and class in twentieth century Chicago. In the pages that follow you will read accounts of the Great Black Migration to Chicago as well as the migration of Mexican and Puerto Rican families to the Midwest. You will also read about how women struggled to keep families intact through periods of incarceration, sex work, and drug use, while others made conscious decisions to live their lives without

children. Taken together, the experiences of these women with HIV remind us of the profound interconnections between the histories of Chicago, race relations, reproductive justice, and the state as an engine of inequality. At the same time this collection of voices and images shows us that women living with HIV/AIDS have been some of the most vocal proponents of comprehensive health care as they insist that health requires much more than the absence of disease. Their stories illustrate that the women of WIHS are more than surviving; many of them are thriving and reminding us that people with HIV need to be at the center of how we deal with, treat, and prevent HIV in the twenty-first century.

Jennifer Brier

Chicago, Illinois





ROOTS



ROOTS

CHICAGO THROUGH THE EYES OF WOMEN

All but one of the 14 women narrators featured in this book came of age in 1970s Chicago. They grew up in neighborhoods across the West and South sides, which witnessed the reification of racial segregation over the course of their young lives. This meant that the women lived in neighborhoods that were either all Black, all Latino or all white, a pattern that proved true for much of the city of Chicago at the time and continues to this day.

Chicago was also shaped by the Great Migration of African Americans to Chicago from points south and west. Englewood, for example, witnessed both the continuous arrival of African American families from the South (Cordelia's family came from Mississippi in 1962), and massive white flight out of the neighborhood over the course of the 1940s, '50s and '60s. National retailers, like Kresge's Department Store, featured on the next page, left Black neighborhoods in the 1970s, foreshadowing increasing economic and racial inequality by the end of the twentieth century. Cordelia described how blocks around her family home went from having houses on every lot to being abandoned over the course of her lifetime, as the neighborhood's population rapidly decreased.

For many white Chicagoans, these demographic transformations reinforced the need to keep white neighborhoods white. These children and grandchildren of immigrants from Europe and also points in the US South used racism to maintain white spaces. Both Bobbie and Sherri were from white sections of Chicago's West Side. Sherri grew up in the town of Cicero on the Chicago border, a place she described as "very racist" when she lived there and learned of the violent refusal to allow African American residents in the 1950s.



The racial landscape of the West Side changed over the course of twenty-first century as Latino residents moved into Cicero and the town went from being all white to almost 90 percent Latino in 2020.

The long history of Mexican and Puerto Rican migration to Chicago over the course of the twentieth century is also important for understanding the racial dynamics of Chicago and its effect on the women of WIHS. Formed through the movements of people, cultures, and political structures, Mexican migration to Chicago began in the early twentieth century and continued throughout the 1900s, with one of the largest influxes of Mexican men coming in the 1940s, as Braceros, or guest workers: Mae's father was a Bracero who came to the Midwest from Mexico and moved his family to Chicago to get work in the 1960s. Puerto Rican migration increased significantly at the end of the Second World War,

PREVIOUS SPREAD BACK TO SCHOOL PARADE AT ENGLEWOOD SHOPPING CENTER, C.1974
PHOTO CREDIT: RICHARD C. DREW, RICKDREW AT EN.WIKIPEDIA

THE ENGLEWOOD BUSINESS MEN'S ASSOCIATION ORGANIZED THIS NEIGHBORHOOD EVENT TO ENGAGE RESIDENTS OF ENGLEWOOD—96 PERCENT OF WHOM WERE AFRICAN AMERICAN IN 1970—AROUND THE NEEDS OF LOCAL SCHOOLS. CORDELIA, TEN IN 1974, WAS OLD ENOUGH TO REMEMBER THESE PARADES IN HER NEIGHBORHOOD.

NEXT SPREAD ARTHUR J. "AUDY HOME" FOR CHILDREN, A SCHOOL FOR INCARCERATED CHILDREN AT THE COOK COUNTY JUVENILE COURT, 1968. / TRIBUNE ARCHIVE

LOCATED ON CHICAGO'S WEST SIDE AT THE SITE OF THE WORLD'S FIRST JUVENILE COURT, THE AUDY HOME SERVED AS A DETENTION CENTER FOR "DELINQUENT" BOYS AND GIRLS, MANY OF WHOM WERE ACTUALLY RUNAWAYS TRYING TO ESCAPE VIOLENT SITUATIONS IN THEIR HOMES. MARILYN REMEMBERED BEING PLACED AT AUDY IN HER TEEN YEARS, AND BEING TOLD SHE WAS A "BAD GIRL" WHO DESERVED PUNISHMENT.

but unlike Mexican migrants, Puerto Ricans were subjects of the United States and faced no legal barriers to their movement in and out of the mainland.

Chicago's diverse Latino communities faced unique forms of segregation and discrimination. Some Mexican migrants lived in neighborhoods with white ethnic populations. For example, Mae grew up in Back-of-the-Yards when it was largely Polish and attended the local Catholic parish with one other Latina. All of the neighborhoods the women lived in became increasingly racially homogenous over the course of their lifetimes.

Racial segregation and the racism that undergirds it produced violent reactions in the city. In April 1968, in direct response to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., black rebellions (or riots as they are more often called) spread throughout the country, including Chicago's West Side. Mary C. remembered her house burning and her family fleeing. This destruction exacerbated by profound business and governmental disinvestment in Black and Brown neighborhoods which followed. The areas most impacted by the rebellions were never fully rebuilt, an urban planning decision that had a significant negative impact on public health for African American residents of the West Side for the rest of the 20th century and beyond. This, coupled with increasing fiscal austerity and state violence in South Side neighborhoods, set the stage for the social conditions that allowed an AIDS epidemic to spread as it did in Chicago.





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ABOVE

DAMAGE WAS SELECTIVE AFTER 1968 CHICAGO RIOTS
PHOTO CREDIT: JO FREEMAN

THE INTERSECTION OF ROOSEVELT ROAD AND SAWYER AVENUE SITS IN THE NORTH LAWDALE NEIGHBORHOOD, ONE OF SEVERAL WEST SIDE NEIGHBORHOODS DAMAGED DURING THE REBELLION THAT ENSUED AFTER DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. WAS MURDERED. SOME BUILDINGS WERE RAZED WHILE OTHERS APPEARED UNHARMED. IN THIS CASE A COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION WITH THE MOTTO, "PEOPLE WORKING WITH PEOPLE FOR PEOPLE" ESCAPED DESTRUCTION.



ABOVE

WEST HOWARD STREET AND CTA HOWARD STATION, 1975
PHOTO CREDIT: C. WILLIAM BRUBAKER

HOWARD STREET RUNS THROUGH ROGERS PARK, ONE OF CHICAGO'S MOST DIVERSE NEIGHBORHOODS. BEGINNING IN THE 1970S, ROGERS PARK BECAME A HOME TO MIGRANTS FROM ACROSS ASIA AND LATIN AMERICA AS WELL AS AFRICAN AMERICANS WHO CAME FROM ACROSS NORTH AMERICA, INCLUDING SEVERAL OF THE WOMEN INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT.

NEXT
SPREAD

BACKYARD, AUSTIN NEIGHBORHOOD, 1985
PHOTO CREDIT: CHUCKMAN'S PHOTOS ON WORDPRESS: CHICAGO NOSTALGIA AND MEMORABILIA

AUSTIN, A NEIGHBORHOOD ON THE WESTERN EDGE OF CHICAGO, AND NOT FAR FROM COOK COUNTY HOSPITAL, HAD BECOME MORE THAN 96 PERCENT AFRICAN AMERICAN BY 1980. THIS IMAGE FROM 1985 SUGGESTS THE EXTENT OF DISINVESTMENT IN LOCAL HOUSING AND PUBLIC SPACES.



I lost my childhood before I was 10. I became a parent at 13 because my mother died and she told me to take care our baby, just everybody take care our baby. And I was 13, I think he was about four. No, he had to be about three. I said okay—and I looked up, I was a mom at 13 in a sense, helping take care her baby. And as of today that baby, I still have that child and he's in his 40s with kids, and not only... I mean, he still stays with me. So I'm still, and I made a promise to a dying woman. I have to look out for her son, you know, this baby. And I'm like—when do I let that go. And my dad said well, you know she's dead. You let that go. I said—she might be dead but I made a promise.

Basically I am 50 years old, I am from a family of seven children, I have one brother who is deceased now and I still have six sisters. I'm the baby of the bunch as they usually say, the black sheep and all that good stuff *(laughter)*. Basically you know growing up for us was, it was real nice because my mom and dad were both from Mississippi and so they were kinda old fashioned and they didn't believe in SOB kids, which I'm quite sure you know what that means, I wanna be a little discreet here. They didn't believe in children out of wedlock at all, okay? And they didn't believe in us dating or even thinking about having a boyfriend to bring to the house and introduce to them until we were 16 years old. But of course me being the baby and a spoiled brat of the six girls, I was sneakin' around anyway....

► MARY C
► CORDELIA

My stepdad was a miner [IN CANADA], my mother was a housewife, back then they didn't work. When I was six years old I had to go live with my sister because I took epileptic seizures. And when people would raise their voice, I would get behind the stove... I was always nervous and shy. And people would come to the house, and my mother was very blunt, and they would go *(gasping)*,

and they would do that as a
smartness, but I didn't know
they'd go—oh, that's the little
chocolate one you adopted?

► DELORES

I just always wanted to be around black people. Because in Montreal where I was raised it was *en Français* and the Haitians, we didn't consider them our people. When I was little, I would say—when I grow up, I'm gonna move to the States and be around a lot of my people. And when I came here (1969) people treated me so bad.

...there were six children from five different fathers.

But we were mostly raised by my mom. I'm the oldest out of six: three girls, three boys. I was born in Mississippi, I don't remember much about that. From there we moved to Memphis, TN and I briefly remember living in Memphis, that's where my older brother and sister, second sister was born. We lived there until I was seven then we moved to Chicago when I was seven.

I'm Latina. I was born in Indiana, we stayed mostly with my grandparents, we all stayed there, my grandfather and his brothers were the type that they built their own places and my mom met my dad there in Indiana and he was of Puerto Rican descent, so Mexican and Puerto Rican. I remember... well, it was nice having all family around—aunts, uncles, other cousins, coming to see grandma and grandpa. And then whenever grandpa wanted help out in the fields because he would do all that stuff, I remember as a young kid, he'd take whatever hands and feet were available to stand and pull, you know? We'd do all kinds of stuff out in the fields helping grandpa. And I thought it was exciting because they used to bring home live meals, take it to the garage and do what had to be done. I thought that was normal.

**ABOVE**

Cordelia, age 12, c. 1977. "I was that little innocent 12 year old who couldn't wait to be 13."

**OPPOSITE**

Delores, c. 1960, New Waterford, Nova Scotia.

**ABOVE**

Sherri, in a school portrait. "I hardly went to school because I couldn't learn nothing. I didn't even know to bathe.... I can remember my mother breaking hairbrushes over my head when it was picture time, because that was a mess to deal with."

**OPPOSITE**

Debra at age 9, c. 1970.

I come from a family of eight, well there was ten of us in all but eight of us lived... I'm the sixth. I had to think because you know my mother married when she very young, very young and she had a baby very young. I'm from the South and that's where the Jim Crow laws started but there were eight of us, I got part of that Jim Crow law because you had different things for black and whites, whatever. I'm part of that.

My father wanted the best, the best for us, go to school everyday, but they had a third and fourth grade education, my parent did.

But I always told my parent, we came out okay, they couldn't teach us how to read or anything like that, help us with our homework, but we always said we made it.

It's like the salmon, you know you've got to come back to it. And how odd that I say the salmon because my ma used to work at Cook County when we were young and we used to literally live down Harrison Street, by Harrison and Racine, made my communion, went to a school that's no longer there, all of that there. And it's weird that I end up working here and then being involved in [THE WIHS] study.

**ABOVE**

Delores with her grandfather and sister in Montreal, c. 1968.

OPPOSITE TOP

Sherri, as an infant, with her siblings. "There was five of us, I was the youngest, I grew up fighting with four older brothers who always picked on me."

OPPOSITE BOTTOM

Sherri with her brother, c. 1975.





TOP

World's Fair 1967, Montreal. Attending the fair as a young girl inspired Delores to move the United States. Delores's stepfather helped with construction of the fair in Montreal. (*Delores's personal photograph.*)

BOTTOM

Miss Sweet Pea, age 15 (*far right*), with her sister and friends at Christmas, Hernando, Mississippi.



ABOVE LEFT

Marta, age 4, c. 1956.



ABOVE RIGHT

Marta, age 7, making her first communion, c. 1959.



ABOVE LEFT

Mary C. at age 16.



ABOVE RIGHT

Marta, age 14, graduation day, c. 1966.



OPPOSITE

Marta, age 14, wearing her father's hat at a family picnic.

Because they would come and stay with me a couple of weeks and we buddied around, me and the twins. Me and the twins were always close. **They called us the three retards, growing up in my family.**

I always had big feet and so I had to go to this store called Shapiro's. And so I would always feel like that my shoes wasn't going to look like the rest of my friends' shoes. But back then your friends didn't really talk about you too much, you know. Sometimes they would call me Buckwheat, you know, not only because of me having long black hair, and Buckwheat is on the Little Rascals, you know. But basically I wouldn't be too offended back then. **But as you grow up, those kind of comments, be fightin' words.**

19 years old... I was working on an assembly line up North. But I had a little problem there. I wouldn't say it was my problem, but I think it was the other guy's problem because

**he called me the N word. And
I slapped his face and then I
got fired.**

He wasn't funny, he didn't have the right to call me that in the first place. But I was called that word when I was in the South, but this was close to close. That boy's like a six foot man, white man called me that. And I didn't like it and I slapped his face and I got fired. But that was 40 years ago.

4/28, 2014

I am [REDACTED]. I were born and raised in a little town in Mississippi called Hernando. At first, it was very difficult—~~difficult~~ difficult for me as a little black (colored) girl in the South.

During the late '60's, I felt the effect of the Jim Crow law in the South.

It were a struggle and a difficult time when it came to freedom. Separation was a point of our life.

next

I felt that I was right there, but there's hope yet.

In my mind, once I set the tone, and start to talk and things begin to opened up for me. I know there will trials and to freedom and peace.

I am Crow law. In the 60's, number one for me were how can one soul swallow that much hate.

Public School, Public Places and Segregations of restroom and restaurants for black was label colored or white only.

page

4/28, 2014

But, I found myself at the forefront of the struggle for racial in the 60's and 70's.

So you know, I have respect for every race in the United States of America.

Thank you for your patience.



ABOVE

Miss Sweet Pea wrote this letter about her life in the Jim Crow South in response to a prompt asking for reflections on the twentieth anniversary of WIHS.

OPPOSITE

House in Hernando, Mississippi, where Miss Sweet Pea lived as a teen, c. 1968.

So I in turn did not have those skills to teach to my children. So much of it is, and was, it takes a village to raise a child. But then some insidious little person inserted child molesters into the mix, and the village all of a sudden wasn't safe anymore. I was a product of the unsafe village. I am a product of the unsafe village. A lot of the things I do today are because of what I went through.

...my mom used to always work, I remember she had three jobs at one time. We were kind of like okay, there's food in the fridge, there's the little washer and the little dryer, she'd do the best she could and of course my father was nowhere to be found when you needed him, kind of grew up without him there. And I didn't know I was poor. My brother had to tell us this later—you know, we were poor.

And I'm like—if I go to school they going to take me back to my mom's house and I'd then just leave and come back here. And I did that for about two weeks, and I got tired of being escorted out of the school in handcuffs, it was, you know... so I left their house because in order to stay in their house I needed to go to school. So by this time I'm in the streets and getting high and really didn't know why, you know? Didn't know why things happened to me, didn't know why I was doing stuff. And it's just been recently that I'm starting to put it all together.

We came in '67 because my sister was a baby at the time that we came here [FROM MONROE, LOUISIANA]. I remember Martin Luther King and Jesse Jackson, the riot, we was in the car because our house was on fire so just... it was a crazy time and I didn't understand it. But now that I look back—history was being made, and even though I was a part of it and I didn't understand it. They burnt the house down! Where we going to go? And people said—don't leave out the house.

Well, when you're that age you learn to pretend like everything is okay. Like you had a perfect family. But what really went wrong, I did horribly in school. You know, because I was like, you know, constantly on my mind, afraid to go home. I ran away a lot, and then at the age of 13 I was in a school for bad girls, I was in the Audy Home... That's a place in Chicago for children who are supposed to be, you know

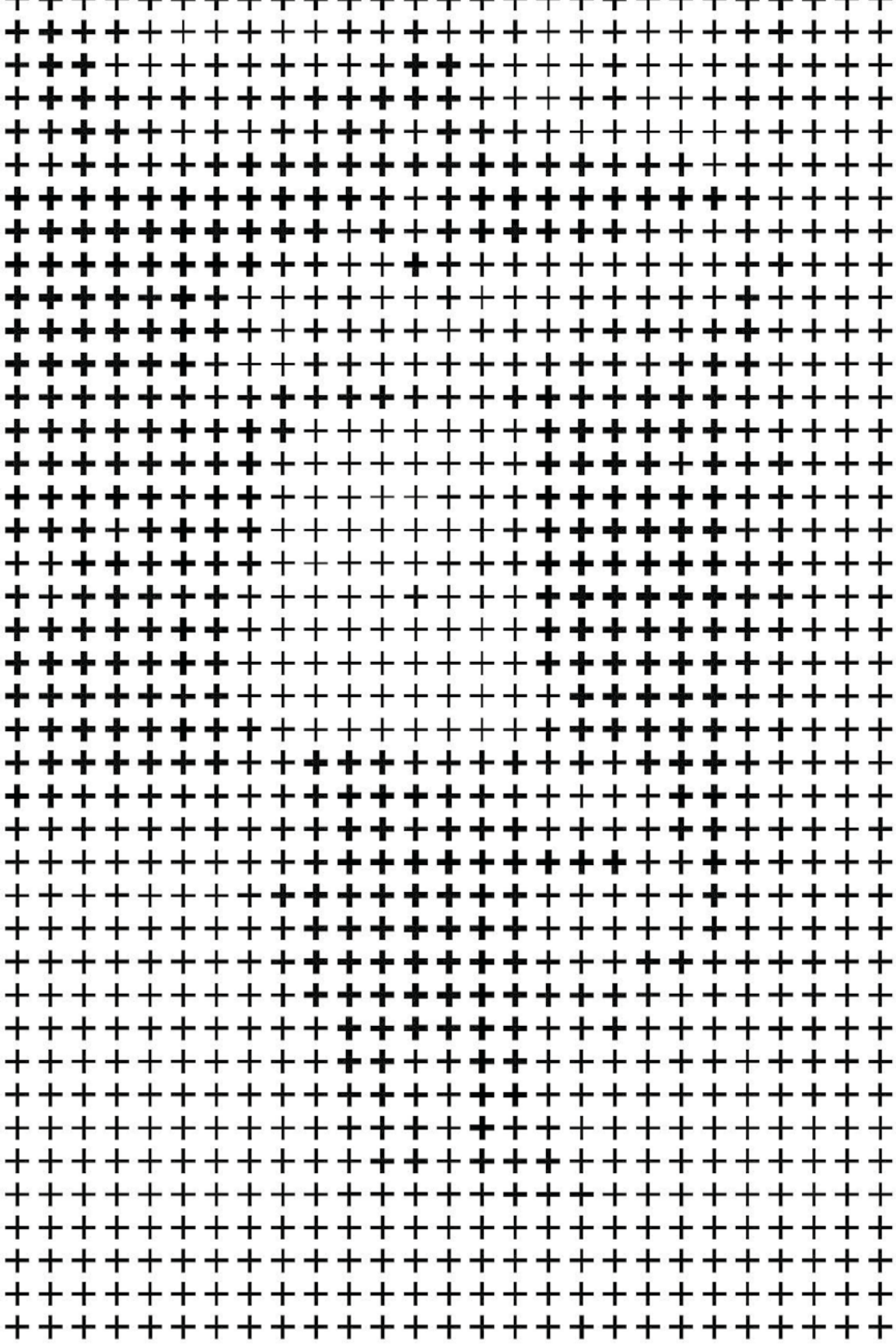
it's just like the Department
of Corrections but this is only
for children. Bad, bad children.

I wasn't bad at all, I was just you know acting out. I didn't consider running away being bad, I just wanted, I just didn't want to be at home. And so they took me away, they put me in the Audy Home.

My first child was when I ran away at 15 and got married in Kentucky because I left home. And I thought—Oh, I'm going to live a good life! That was bull because I got beat up and all that by my husband and we ended up divorcing.

You remember mama making biscuits... oh yes, I remember all that stuff. But I don't remember her protecting me. If they went to jail for doing something bad, her older brothers, she was down there getting them out, I can remember that. But as protecting me...she didn't do that. I didn't hate her, I just like—you remember that? I don't remember that! I can't remember any good days as far as her protecting me and saying it's gonna be okay and I'm going to stop. this. She'd just say—stay away from him! So I'm like, when I have my kids this ain't gonna happen. But how do I know if they don't tell you. But I told her and she didn't protect me so...that's where it was at.

But I thought well, oh gee, I'm a woman now, I'm in a white dress and I've got this big wedding, my first wedding was huge, and I thought—oh, this is the transition over. Well, little did I know I was stepping into hell. And, you take it from there.



DISCOVERY

A BRIEF WOMEN'S HISTORY OF CHICAGO'S AIDS EPIDEMIC

It was not until 1988, when the number of Chicago women diagnosed with AIDS hit the 100 mark (the identifying term, HIV was only coined three years earlier and was not yet fully in use in data collection). Men, the majority of whom were identified then as gay or bisexual, and today would be called men who have sex with men, were diagnosed at a much faster rate: by 1988 there were over 1,000 reported male cases of AIDS in Chicago. The numbers of HIV/AIDS cases went up every year for both men and women, until 1994 when the trend slowly began to change course. At that point, the ratio of women to men with HIV/AIDS shifted significantly, with women making up well over 20 percent of all new cases between 1996 to 2009.

This brief statistical history provides important background for this collection of life history excerpts. It helps us see why so many of the women narrators, and Americans in general, initially understood AIDS as a white gay male disease. While white men who have sex with men were among the first people to be sick and unfortunately die from complications related to AIDS, women were part of the epidemic from the start. Yet the earliest media reports of women focused on who they infected or put at risk, whether infant children or male sexual partners, rather than what it meant for them to be deathly ill. The invisibility of women with HIV/AIDS in Chicago was exacerbated by the intersection of racism and sexism in their daily lives and their surroundings. Despite what were often the best of intentions among doctors and nurses, the city's public health care system was unable to adequately treat poor people with AIDS who were made sicker by poverty and racism. Cook County Hospital did not initially have a sufficient



plan for treating people with AIDS and women with AIDS suffered disproportionately.

Women's invisibility was made more critical in non-hospital environments, where much of the care and social supports for people living with HIV/AIDS emerged out of Chicago's longstanding history of gay health activism. Howard Brown Memorial Clinic, preexisted the AIDS epidemic in Chicago by eight years and provided care for gay men from the start, but women with AIDS found almost no programming specifically for them. Marilyn learned about AIDS from gay men rather than from her doctors (who entered her room suited up—see the 1987 Chicago Tribune article about protective gear for health workers on the following spread), and Rosemary attended a support group with gay men at Test Positive Aware Network (TPAN) in 1991. However, we heard nothing in the interviews about AIDS service organizations designed for gay men stepping in to attend to women with AIDS.

For many of the women with HIV/AIDS interviewed here, 1988 was the beginning of a turning point in Chicago, even as they often experienced the change as one step forward and two steps back. That year, the women who would later become the first cohort in WIHS began meeting in the Radiation Center in the basement of Cook County's Fantus Clinic. They were the first attendees of the Women and Children with AIDS Program, which commandeered space in the area meant to treat cancer patients. Many of them also joined the Chicago Women's AIDS Project, the first support group for women living with AIDS in Chicago which was located in the racially mixed

Chicagoland

Chicago Tribune Thursday, June 18, 1987

Hospital adopts AIDS protection plan

Staff at County will wear gloves and other gear

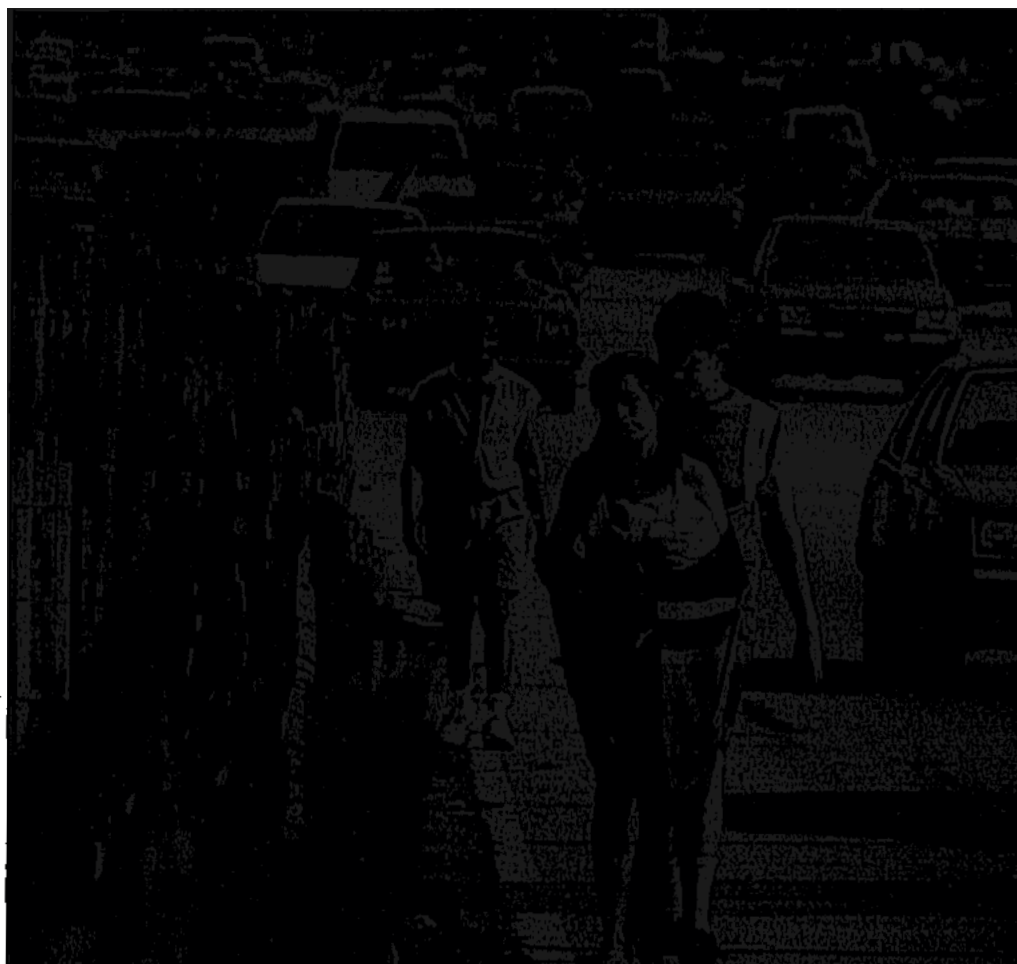
By Charles Mount
and Ronald Kotulak

Cook County Hospital has become one of the few hospitals in the nation to begin implementing a stringent program to protect health-care workers from exposure to the AIDS virus from infected patients and to protect patients from workers who may be infected with the virus.

The new employee protective measures, which were approved by the hospital's medical staff, call for doctors, nurses and other workers to wear rubber gloves whenever they come in contact with the blood or other body fluids of any patient whether or not the patient has been diagnosed as being infected with the AIDS virus.

The program calls for all employees to also wear masks, goggles and gowns if there is any chance that they may be splashed with any patient's blood or body fluids. Funds for purchasing new protective gear will be sought from the Cook County Board next week, according to hospital officials.

AIDS, or acquired immune deficiency syndrome, destroys the body's immunity system, making people with AIDS prey to a variety of infectious diseases and a more



AIDS ward is opened to women

By Charles Mount

Cook County Hospital has begun a pilot project allowing women into the AIDS ward, which previously has been open only to men who have the disease, hospital officials said Thursday.

The first female patient volunteered to enter the ward Tuesday, according to Dr. Shashi Kathpalia, director of AIDS services at County Hospital. Admission to the 15-bed ward, which opened last July, is voluntary.

Women have been reluctant to

neighborhood of Edgewater on the North Side. In their first years of existence these organizations served hundreds of women with AIDS and their children, the majority of whom were African American. They became some of the first women in the county organizing to address how HIV/AIDS affected the female body.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, local feminist activists, many of whom were white lesbians and members of ACT UP-Chicago, and DAGMAR (Dykes and Gay Men Against Repression/Racism/Reagan), also began campaigns to demand care for women with HIV/AIDS. In April 1990, they threw mattresses into the street in front of Cook County to protest the exclusion of women from the AIDS ward. Their protest worked and women were admitted, and ultimately died on the ward. (In a few pages, you will see some of the contemporary reporting about Cook County Hospital's AIDS response.) The fact that the women didn't mention ACT UP or events like the mattress protest in the stories they told one another says as much about the shape of AIDS activism in Chicago as does the newspaper archive. It raises questions about the extent to which radical activism, in the form of civil disobedience, addressed the service needs of the most disenfranchised people and communities, just as it raises questions about how to record alternative forms of activism by women with HIV/AIDS.

I started smoking weed probably when I was 14. ... My favorite stepsister was shooting drugs and I found out she was also turning dates. I needed to know what it was about this drug that made her go out there and do this. She said no, and I told her: if you don't, somebody else will. I realize today that that was a really funky position for me to put my sister in, but she gave me some... Unfortunately my sister and I became users together. We both ended up with HIV; she's dead now. She went back out in the streets after getting sober and didn't make it back.

I was never a street worker, I never had to get out there like that. And when I did graduate from high school I went straight into start working. I always have had good jobs... I was doing good things but bad things at the same time. Basically all my jobs that I did have, they were good jobs. That's how I lost them, because of the drugs, because I would be tired and call in—I can't come today. And then in 1992 I was feeling like... I lost my mom in '99 but in '92 I was feeling, it was around the time when Magic Johnson got diagnosed and everyone was kind of running to the little neighborhood clinics.

And I went to the clinic in Englewood... and the only reason that I actually went though at that point was because I was feeling, I was cramping and I was like well, because I had just had a period you know. I'm like – something ain't right. [J]ust so happened

in the midst of me drinking and
drugging and not paying
attention and being unaware of
what I'm doing, there was a
condom in me.

And that's why I was cramping. And when they took this condom out of me they told me that I had HIV, gonorrhea, syphilis, and herpes.

It was to the point where they were going to put me on the street. It was either straighten up and fly right, and I hit my rock bottom, finally. I got busted buying drugs, and I'm sitting in the cell waiting to go to court and I'm thinking—this is the second time. And I'm thinking—what if I get a little time or something, because you ain't gonna get off maybe like you did the first time, and I thought, what if something happens to my mother because she's already up in age and had a number of strokes and stuff. So I said to myself—well, you know what? You need to do something differently, so that doesn't end up happening. And the only answer was I needed to get the strength to stop doing that stuff. So what I did was I just slowly backed off of it. I lied through my teeth and said I wasn't doing it, but it was the weirdest thing, I looked at it like dieting. If I could get \$200, you could bet I had 20 rocks in my pocket and would smoke them in a day.

And I just backed up. I slowed down. Just like you cut your food portions, I cut and I cut and I backed up and I backed up. And I prayed to God for strength, or to the higher power, because I didn't necessarily believe in a God but in the possibility of a higher power, and I prayed for the inner strength, and somehow I had it. I went to a couple of meetings. I couldn't go to a lot of meetings, I could barely walk. I was as big as a house, 338 pounds, I could hardly walk from the bus stop...

**OPPOSITE**

Delores, age 24, in a club in Chicago.

ABOVE

Delores walking on State St. with her sister, c. 1969.

**OPPOSITE**

Delores, c. 1972, Chicago.

ABOVE

Cordelia [far left], going to the Cincinnati Jazz festival, 1990.

**ABOVE**

Racheal, c. 2009. "After I found out that I was HIV positive, I was naïve to the disease, and I thought it was a death sentence. I was getting high so I just figured, I'm going to die anyway, so I'm going to die getting high."

**OPPOSITE**

Marilyn, c. 1987. "I was homeless then, in the streets, and doing everything what I was not supposed to be doing. And I really didn't care. Actually it looks like I'm happy, but I was really miserable."

**OPPOSITE TOP + BOTTOM**

Mae and her family, c. 1995.

ABOVE

Delores with husband and niece,
c. 1970.

RIGHT

Marta, age 19, with her first-born
daughter, 1972.

[I USED] for a very long time. And even HIV was not a motivating factor for me to stop. I had to experience something that was very devastating for me to be encouraged to stop.

► KATHERINE

So I was kind of like back and forth in that stupor, you know, I did go back again, and

actually the person who turned me on to drugs was my organist from church. Other than that I wouldn't have never knew nothin' about no drugs.

Cuz they was, we couldn't have a boyfriend, that type of stuff, till we was 16 years old. They were both from Mississippi, so it was like, "Don't you bring no SOB kid up in here." They meant that too. They're like, "you bring a kid up in here, you goin' out the door with it." So out of six girls, nobody had any kids out of wedlock. Nobody had any kids out of wedlock, nobody had any kids until they got married.

► CORDELIA

We got married fast, we fell in love fast, we were married within a couple of months. I figured out that he's probably bipolar. We were married about 11 months, and he got beat really bad. He liked to go to the bars and he was willing to fight, too, just like the other goofballs. He ended up in the hospital and I asked for a psych eval, which they said—we can't do that just because you want it. Then they started suspecting HIV because of the dementia and all the brain damage... they felt there was something more going on. So they took the test and he came out positive, and they also figured out that he was bipolar in the process. At that time I took the test, and I was negative.

▶ SHERRI

A specialist girlfriend of mine called me from Evanston, everybody knew we were getting married, this guy and I. And I came in from church and she said—sit down. I went—what's up? She said, the guy you're engaged to is dying from AIDS. I went—I'm not engaged to him anymore. And then she said—well, you were with him for over two years and you said you stopped using condoms after you became engaged because—I thought he was safe. But he wasn't. So she said, get to Evanston Hospital, and I got out there and they knew nothing about this virus, and at that time you had to wait like a month for results. And when this young intern came in he looked at me and he said—Delores? I said—what? He said, you're going to die.

▶ DELORES

**ABOVE**

Sherri with her husband on their wedding day.
 “This is when we were married in 2002.
 It’s an important part of my story, and my life.”

**OPPOSITE TOP**

Marta, age 18, on her wedding day, with her siblings.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM

Delores at her daughter’s 8th grade graduation in Chicago, 1984.





This picture was taken
while I was sitting
with Wendy.
I was still pregnant
with my beautiful
daughter.
To Michael
(my husband)
from
(your wife)
Zell
K59875

**ABOVE**

Racheal, c. 2009. Note to her husband on reverse of photo.

OPPOSITE TOP

Marta at age 18, pregnant with her first child.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM LEFT

Mary C. with her children, 1991.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT

When Katherine gave birth to her son M. in 2001, she decided to get clean—and got assistance from caseworkers to find a treatment program.

So I was up all night calling places, and it just so happened that Julie [W.] she works at the CORE Center, she was my substitute for my counselor, but she wasn't even working at the CORE, she was working at County and somewhere she saw my name. She was just coming to see if it was me. I call her my guardian angel. She walked down that hall and I said— Julie, I need your help, I gotta go into treatment, they said I can keep my baby! *(crying)* You know and she was like...she called some place and they found a place that day for me to take [MY KIDS]. They came and picked us up and took us to Haymarket.

The most pressing issues I faced was my drug addiction and finding out I was positive was...there were a couple of other personal issues that I faced. My drug addiction, I remember I went to the methadone clinic to try to get myself some treatment, and that didn't work for me. I remember one day going to my mom's house and I was just out of it, and I remember her telling me distinctly:

I don't know what kind of help
you're getting, what ever help
you're getting is worse than
the stuff that you were on
before you got the help. And
that always stuck in my head.

Diagnosed '89 and commercials were coming out and I know I had done drugs in the past and I was drinking and I know I had multiple partners with no condoms and those commercials on TV were, all they had to do, they were just missing saying, "Marta!" To me, they were directed to me, and I remember yes, just kind of sitting there. I was like oh okay, I've got somebody talking down on me, I gotta go get tested. And eventually I took myself in to get tested and once I was tested, since I kinda, you know the checklist kinda goes off yeah-yeah-yeah... you are Positive. The result came back. And I remember that rush of sorta numbness but yet trying to get it back.

[THE DOCTORS] came in my room, fully gowned, I mean from head to toe looking like astronauts and told me I had AIDS. They didn't say nothing about HIV positive, and did I want to talk to a chaplain? And you know if you have to talk to a chaplain, that means, you know, you don't have long to live. It could be today or tomorrow. That's because they didn't really know that much about HIV or AIDS you know?

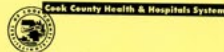
I was diagnosed in June 1992, June the 4TH. At the same time I was diagnosed, two or three days later, my nephew got killed.... All the emotion and everything running around, but when this was diagnosed with me, I was mad as hell. I was mad as hell because I felt that God had traded...but when things happen to people, they think of all crazy kinda stuff. That's a human. You think—why did this happen to you? You might be a good person, you might be a bad person. But I was mad as hell.

I didn't know anything [ABOUT AIDS WHEN I WAS DIAGNOSED]! All I know was that it was like a deadly... I did know this, it was a virus and it was a deadly virus. And I did know that it was a gay man's disease. But I really didn't care at that time, you know? I didn't really care because I was just still out there, you know, in the street. All I cared about was getting my fix and then oh — I'll get treated tomorrow. But when I got to the Fantus Clinic I started learning about it through group, you know. I started listening to what my doctor was saying and I didn't even know that if your T-cell count fall below, back then it was 200, then you had the AIDS.

I talked to anyone, you know, and I learned mainly from gay, gay men about this disease. What I did was I started working as a Certified Nurse Assistant, so mostly all my patients back then had AIDS. They had Kaposi's Sarcoma, you know. It was all kind of, it was a gay man's disease back then. But what they didn't know was that I was diagnosed with HIV, they said AIDS. I was adhering to my medications. I took control of what I was supposed to do.

John H. Stroger, Jr. Hospital
of Cook County

John H. Stroger, Jr. Hospital
Consent for Physical Examination and Treatment



PATIENT NAME: [REDACTED]

ADMIT DATE :

PT#:

I, (or the above named patient) am voluntarily entering John H. Stroger, Jr. Hospital for diagnostic and medical care. I hereby consent to such routine diagnostic procedures and medical treatment as my physician or his/her designee deem necessary.

I am aware that one or more physicians, residents, nurses, and other health care providers may attend to my medical needs as necessary. I am further aware and consent that among those who care for me are physicians, nurses, and other health care providers in training who care for patients at John H. Stroger, Jr. Hospital as part of their education.

I understand that I may be requested to sign one or more additional consent forms authorizing specific diagnostic, medical or surgical procedures. Prior to signing any additional forms, I will have an opportunity to discuss my condition, the recommended course of treatment, and the associated risks and alternatives with my physician or his/her designee. I further understand that I have the right to refuse my consent to any proposed procedure or treatment. Should I refuse my consent, I may be required to sign a form so stating.

I acknowledge that no guarantees have been made to me as to the result of any diagnosis, treatment, test, surgery, or examination performed at John H. Stroger, Jr. Hospital

RELEASE OF INFORMATION

I authorize John H. Stroger, Jr. Hospital to release my medical information and records generated in the course of providing services to third party payors, or their agents for the purpose of evaluating, determining, or administering claims for health insurance to:

- 1) Entities involved in billing and collection for the hospital, physicians and ambulance/paramedic services (provided prior to my arrival at the hospital) and third party payors responsible for payment of patient charges (including but not limited to insurance companies, health benefit plans, employers involved in approval of benefit claims, government agencies or intermediaries representing any of the above);
- 2) Any person or organization involved in discharge planning or case management.

Signature: [REDACTED]

(Patient/Spouse/Parent/Legal Guardian/Patient Representative)

Date: 8-20-2010

Form 591A Revised 12/2000

Page 1 of 3



RUTH M. ROTHSTEIN CORE CENTER

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Cook County Board of Commissioners

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Cook County Health & Hospitals System

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Cook County Health & Hospitals System

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Cook County Health & Hospitals System



**COOK COUNTY HEALTH
& HOSPITALS SYSTEM**
CCHHS

Robert Weinstein, M.D.
Chief Operating Officer

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Andrea L. Zopp

Physicians Statement

Date: May 3, 2013

Patient [REDACTED] has been and is currently being treated at RMR CORE Center. Her medical diagnoses include: AIDS, chronic Hepatitis C, asthma with COPD, diabetes type II, prolonged PTSD, recurrent major depression, and cervical dysplasia.

I certify that these illnesses are disabling, longstanding and indefinite in nature, and may impede daily activities.

If there are any questions please feel free to call.

Sincerely,

Case Manager Name: Naomi Jiménez, MSW

Case Manager Signature: [REDACTED]

Physician Name: Katherine Force, PA-C

Physician Signature: [REDACTED]

Pager#: 312.250.2100

Date: May 3, 2013

Pager#: 312.556.0184

Date: 05/03/2013

Client's Signature for receipt of this document: [REDACTED]

• Ambulatory & Community Health Network • Cermak Health Services • Cook County Department of Public Health •
• John H. Stroger, Jr. Hospital • Oak Forest Hospital • Ruth M. Rothstein CORE Center •

We Bring Health CARE to Your Community

OPPOSITE & ABOVE

Medical documentation from the Cook County Hospital and CORE Center, shared by one of the women narrators.



COOK COUNTY HOSPITAL 1835 W. HARRISON
ALWAYS BRING THIS CARD WITH YOU

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

COOK COUNTY HOSPITAL 1835 W. HARRISON
ALWAYS BRING THIS CARD WITH YOU.

CK Pin# [REDACTED]
DOB [REDACTED] Age- 49Y FC-Limit of Liability 08/03/2010
Acc# [REDACTED] Core Adult MR#000833976c
[Barcode]

ABOVE

Orange cards belonging to Debra and her partner Deborah, who was also HIV positive.

OPPOSITE

Debra at Sisters of Sobriety, c. 1992.

1989, I received a letter from my husband at the time from his office... Yes, my husband had gone in and was diagnosed with a skin disorder and when they did the blood work I guess something else came up, and that's when I got a letter from his doctor's office stating that they wanted me to come in for some blood work.

And I thought it was in relation to the skin disease that he was going to be treated for.

Finally we went to about the third or fourth doctor and as soon as we got there he said—what's your problem? So we told them this, this, and this are his symptoms. And he said—have you been tested for HIV? And we said—no! I didn't even think of that and I thought, let them test him, I know that... how could that be? We were living, we had our two kids... that would be the furthest thing from my mind. I thought he had cancer...

I mean the pain, the emotional pain was far worse than the physical pain, and I just asked God to just—stop. ... And that's when I asked him to help me to come in, and God whatever it is that I have to do I will do it, whatever they tell me to do, whatever... I'm going to do it. ... And I delivered [MY CHILD], and I'm telling you when I asked God for help, things just started happening. I had already had two children in the system... and they were already terminated from parental rights. And it was the lady from DCFS came and she was like— well, I'm going to let you take your baby but you have to get into treatment. Now this like a few days before Christmas.

I ended up in the penitentiary with my youngest daughter with a friend, my second diagnosis in five years, still not knowing what it is that I have. Got out of the penitentiary and there was a DCFS worker waiting for me at the gate. And he told me that if I thought I wanted my kids back I probably wouldn't get them back because I had HIV. But he brought me to the wrong place, he took me to the Fantus Clinic at Stroger Hospital. And that was his mistake, taking me to the Fantus Clinic because not only did they educate me about HIV, they educated me about my rights concerning HIV and you know, that nobody could take my child simply because. But they did take my youngest from me.

There's a new 'women and children's clinic' at the county, it was like six months old. That was February of '89 and they started that summer before, July of '88. And so I eventually found my way to the Radiation Center, but not before going to a couple of different addresses because he really didn't know how to tell me where the hell it was, somewhere in there. So after making a couple of calls, after going to where these people would tell me which was all the wrong places, I finally got through and they told me of a health educator and he was the one to get in touch with to get the testing done. And I remember I kept missing him.

Remember when we used to have the group on the second floor in the Fantus Clinic? The women's support group we'd have on the second floor in the back. So I waited out in front for him where the population was waiting for whatever clinic they were going to go into, in the Fantus Clinic. The lady at the front told me—well, he's a little guy and he's usually in a white coat.

[MY HUSBAND] was past the HIV stage and his count was 12. The doctor basically said you know it's just a matter of time. He could last two weeks, he could last two months,

but he's not going to last long.



ABOVE

Every WIHS participant who gets her care at Cook County Hospital (renamed John H. Stroger, Jr. Hospital of Cook County in 2001) has an orange identification card. These cards are required for access to care and some women have had the same card for more than twenty years. Worn, yet still with vibrant color, these cards captivated

the History Moves team and have come to represent the project as a whole, paradoxes and all. When asked about the significance of the cards, Debra reported: "I have three numbers: my social security number, my penitentiary number from Dwight, and my Cook County number."

This was '85. And the doctor came in and started asking me about my life and my habits. And he came back and he goes your baby has HIV so I'm pretty sure you have it, too. He walked away and I let him. It was just like everything else in my life, nobody explained it to me, nobody told me anything. So after a week or so in the hospital they let my daughter come home, she was better. Her immune system had kicked in, kicked mine out, she is not positive.

► DEBRA

So one day at the beginning of the year of his fourth grade they were talking about hygiene and germs, what you can see, what you can't, clean your hands, wash your hands, cover your mouth when you sneeze; so the question was—do you understand what viruses and germs are? And he was a smart one to say—

**yes I do, I have the virus that can
cause AIDS.**

So with saying that, the teacher caught on but the kids weren't really paying attention. And we didn't have a phone and I had a note left in my mailbox to come down to the principal's office. To the understanding from our nurse at clinic since he's in a public school, it had to be reported to CPS downtown that there's an HIV child enrolled in your school. They had to do that, they had to report it. And they had to keep things, how did they tell me...in a safe, secure place.

► MARTA

... back then, it was in its infancy. So didn't nobody really know so everybody was like, **ooo, you contagious, you know.** So, I didn't really feel good about that. I just left the hospital, went out in the street, had drinks, you know.

Because most of the African-American churches, I don't know how it is now, but I knew then— **you were ousted, people would cringe because they didn't know, understand it.** You don't get HIV from touching someone, you don't get HIV from going to bathroom, you know? But I have heard a lot of people complain about you know they came out in church and then people felt differently of them. And so that's when I stopped going to church.

And of course everybody hates [MY EX-HUSBAND] because they know he gave me HIV eventually, which is wild, because I maybe had sex with my husband maybe twice in one year. Not because I didn't love him, because I love and find him attractive, but I had my own issues, physical, or whatever, menopause, so I just couldn't bear the pain. But twice in one year... and I got HIV. I got very sick and my friend said—I'm going to take you down to Cook County Hospital, my friend **██████**, and he said you better have that tested because he knew my husband had HIV already like eight years, and that's pretty much when I separated from my husband. I told him to stay with his mother. **I was homeless, sleeping in a garage. I ended up homeless and broke.** I wanted my husband to try to get into rehab or something, and his family... forget that. **They're all losers.**

But if you're living your life and you call yourself doing good and doing everything you're supposed to do, and something happens, you're like no, that ain't me! I don't know how that happened. Because all I knew was the drug addicts and the prostitutes and the people who was shooting drugs were getting HIV. And then it hit me and I wasn't doing any of that, I'm like—oh my God, this is wrong, this is not happening. And then when I got tested again it still said the same thing. I'm like—why me? Why was I the chosen one? Why he didn't tell me? And I don't know if I could have been better prepared to say yes, I will stay with you or I will leave, I don't know. He took that choice from me. The choice that he took from me, I wish he hadda told me, I don't know if I would have left. I really don't. But the fact is—I wanted to know. Because he took a portion of my life.



SURVIVAL

STILL SURVIVING

More than a few of women who are part of this living women's history of HIV/AIDS have declared, "HIV saved my life." This has been true in all three locations included in this project: Chicago, Brooklyn, and in and around Raleigh-Durham. Being saved means different things to different women—some associate getting and staying clean with their HIV diagnosis while others lift up the medical care and services they receive, particularly housing, because of their status. Still, they all describe a set of conditions that could have killed them regardless of HIV. Saying HIV saved them is very different from saying that HIV/AIDS cannot and has not caused them great harm.

Cordelia, one of the Chicago women featured here, reports that she is "still surviving," in part because of the Women's Interagency HIV Study (WIHS). The WIHS began in 1993, when Mardge Cohen, then a primary care doctor at Cook County Hospital, received funding from the National Institutes of Health, with five other sites around the country, to study women living with and at risk for HIV infection. WIHS began at the nadir of AIDS treatment and prevention activism, when exhausted AIDS activists had begun to hold political funerals for their dead and had their hopes dashed as the election of Bill Clinton failed to change the health care landscape in the U.S. But this program defied the political defeat around it. Cohen and her colleagues at Cook County imagined a model of care and research that positioned the women themselves as integral partners and advocates in directing their own health outcomes and the program's research agenda.



ABOVE JACKSON BOULEVARD CHRISTIAN CHURCH

LOCATED A FEW BLOCK NORTHWEST OF COOK COUNTY HOSPITAL, JACKSON BOULEVARD CHRISTIAN CHURCH IS ONE OF THE OLDEST IN THE ROCKWELL GARDENS NEIGHBORHOOD AND ONE OF THE 4 CHURCHES ATTENDED BY WIHS NARRATORS.

**NEXT
SPREAD** DEMOLITION OF ROCKWELL GARDENS, 2006
PHOTO CREDIT: PAUL GOYETTE, LICENSED UNDER
CREATIVE COMMONS

MANY OF THE WOMEN IN THIS PROJECT REPORTED LIVING IN PUBLIC HOUSING AT SOME POINT IN THEIR LIVES. IN 2000, THE CITY OF CHICAGO BEGAN ITS "PLAN FOR TRANSFORMATION," WHICH, AMONG OTHER THINGS, CALLED FOR THE DEMOLITION OF PUBLIC HOUSING HIGH-RISES LIKE THIS ONE ON CHICAGO'S WESTSIDE. THIS PLAN FAILED TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE HOUSING FOR PEOPLE SEEKING IT, THE MAJORITY OF WHOM WERE FAMILIES LED BY BLACK WOMEN.

With an infrastructure in place already documenting women's lived experiences of HIV/AIDS in Chicago, WIHS was well positioned to immediately document and report the benefits of combination anti-retroviral treatment introduced in 1996. While most women did not believe they would survive for more than a few years, more than two decades later, over 50 percent of women enrolled in WIHS during 1994–95 are still alive.

In the intervening decades, the women of WIHS have built community again and again—even in the face of systemic racism—and in the process have realized what it means to be thriving and surviving.



...what I can do is be a face, a constant face, of HIV and AIDS in the black community.

I ain't scared. I ain't afraid.

I never really became a woman in Chicago until I got clean off the drug. That was August 10, 2010. When I surrendered and I was powerless over drugs. I've been clean off drugs ever since then. That's when I became a woman. And I started living my life as a woman. Now I'm married, I have a home, I pay bills. I go grocery shopping. **I do things that normal people do.**

Because here I am, a white single female, heterosexual, having contracted it through my ex-husband, so where does that leave me? So that's why I'm very in favor of getting the knowledge out there to the young ones, because for every... I think statistically, for every one person who knows that they are HIV, there's 100 who don't know. It's important. But I think in general the public knows it... because every once in a while the news will report—**it's no longer a death sentence and all that, but it's a lot more complicated than that.**

I would say at 48 when I let go of my husband. Because there was always a child, a husband, so I never been on my own. So I'm standing by myself without a husband but I still have those kids. So I'm finding who I am as a woman now, searching for the last five years I guess, **finding this woman that's somewhere inside of me.**

Because I believe in God and I think that that's what's helped me through a lot of everything that's happened in my life is going to church and praying to God and learning that **God is there no matter what... for me.**

Knowing that I could survive in the midst of the storm, knowing that everything I've went through was experience. Not only that, but it's to make me better. We go through challenges in life and if we can deal with it, we come out ahead. Looking at how I was able to see my brothers, being pimps, and watching the women get beat and watching the pimps come up to the school and pull the girls from the school and I'm like—oh that's not gonna be me, that's not gonna happen to me! And seeing the drugs and everything and still being able to say that that's not me, even though I had a lot of pressure. But I felt my strength was within and I believed in God, and my family didn't go to church or anything, I went to church every Sunday but no one else went. **I'm like—I can do this, God got my back, my faith.** And it was my faith, even at an early age, looking at all the traumas and trials I've been through and being able to say—**man, I was there but it didn't happen to me, I didn't get into this.**

And so I fought, I went to the CORE Center, they had a program set up for parenting skills. And so they said...I still got the certificate, you go there and get your certificate, then you take that to DCFS and then they know you working towards your goal to get your son back. And so when I used to go over to her house, my son's foster mother house, I used to sit down, she would get the bleach and wipe whatever I touched. And so it went on like that, and then I think it was more she was being nasty towards me because she know she had to fight, **because I had gotten start healing then, feeling better...** I want my child back! And so we started going back and forth to court and what happened was I started getting visitation, everything. They had to let me participate in everything. And this went on for years. My son is 26 now, and he's still back and forth with her.

When I was first diagnosed, once I was diagnosed and in treatment with it, it was not totally a death sentence. But it wasn't until I did the [WIHS] study **and they asked me what I feared the most** that it hit me like a ton of bricks, **not being able to watch my kids grow up.** I had been fine for years [I HADN'T CRIED ABOUT THIS]. She said all the women broke down crying when they got asked that question. It was always in the back of my head, but it came out verbally. It was one of those good booger snot cries.

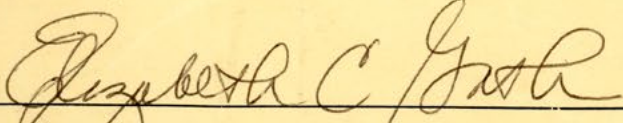
CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

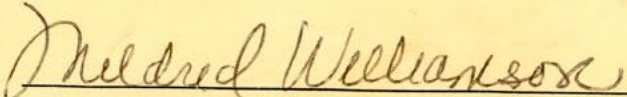
PARENTING CLASS

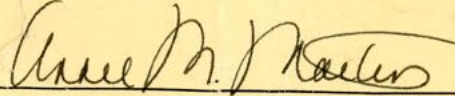
CCH/Women and Children's Program

This certifies that as of MARCH 24, 1993

has successfully completed
Parenting Classes


Elizabeth Gath, M.D.
Program Associate Director


Mildred Williamson
Program Administrator


Annie Martin
Instructor

ABOVE

A Parenting Class Certificate of Completion, awarded to Marilyn in 1993. "When I started Fantus Clinic, going there to get my treatment, they had parenting classes. They had a class of 10 women who was trying to get their completion of parenting classes. We did, we stuck with it. So it was a good thing and so I took it to DCFS, and that's when they gave me supervised visits. They started me off like that. That was huge."

**OPPOSITE**

Marilyn, c. 1992. "This picture was when I was going to DCFS for my supervised visits. And I had cleaned myself all up as you can see. And things was getting better."

ABOVE

Marilyn, with her son, age 7, c. 1996. At the time, he lived with her three days a week.

**OPPOSITE + ABOVE**

Katherine's parental rights over her two children, J and J, had been terminated by the courts, but the case was reopened after her successful drug rehabilitation allowed her to have full custody of her younger son M.

J and J, c. 2005 (opposite), when they were 8 and 9 years old and returned to Katherine's care, and again in 2011 (above).

I thought it was a death sentence when I first found out about it and it ended up making me a better person. I ended up becoming stronger and being more health conscious without drug use and being more mindful and more aware of my body and the things that I need to do for me to stay healthy. And now my kids are grown, and I have two grandbabies.

You know, we've come such a long way and never in a million years did I think that I would be here 20 years later. I thought to myself—dear God, just give me...my daughter was 16 and my son was 21 when I was diagnosed and I thought

dear God, just give me two years
That's all I want is two years.
And here he's given me 20.

GRADUATION CERTIFICATE

This Certifies That
DEBRA [REDACTED]
has successfully completed studies in the
PARENTING SKILL CLASSES
at the Women & Children Program of Cook
County Hospital and was granted this 23rd day of
April in the year 1998.

Annie Martin
Annie Martin

Mardge Cohen, MD
Mardge Cohen, MD

Renee Pearson
Renee Pearson

**ABOVE**

Parenting certificate awarded to Debra, in 1998.
Certificate is signed by WIHS Principal Investigator
Mardge Cohen, then a physician at Cook County
Hospital.

**OPPOSITE**

Mae with her grandchildren.

**ABOVE**

Delores with her granddaughter, c. 2002.

**ABOVE LEFT**

Mary C. with her great-grandchild, 2015.

ABOVE RIGHT

Mary C. with her grandchildren, 2009.

**ABOVE**

Marta with her son, daughter, and grandchildren, 2015.

**OPPOSITE TOP**

Cordelia's parents at their 45th wedding anniversary, 1998.

ABOVE

Cordelia, at her parents' anniversary party, 1998.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM

Cordelia with her sisters, 2005. "When my sister turned 60, we gave her a surprise 60th birthday party. We decided, her favorite color is purple, so we decided we were gonna all wear something purple or in that family of purple. Lilac or whatever. That is all six of us, all six of us girls. And we just had us a good time."

He's the person that I had my last two children with, he's the person who taught... well, I can't say taught... but showed me the difference in life and that I could be loved, that I was worth loving. And there was nothing he wouldn't do for us. You see what I'm saying? And I stood with him for 22 years, I took care of him.

I say I've been delivered from the disease of addiction. I'm not recovered or recovering, I've been delivered. It's been taken away, you know what I mean? I've learned how to live this super life a new way. You know what I mean? I got busy about my business, got busy about making my kids a priority and in the interim when I got [REDACTED] out of the system, the judge was like— don't you have two other children in the system? When a parent gets themselves together, it's not for one, so they reinvestigated return home for the other two. So I had to go through a lot of stuff.

My T-cells, nothing has never went down that low. I've always been active, always been able to do for myself. Never had to have no—I'm not going to say I didn't get the flu or whatever, you know that's common. But as far as my HIV status, no

I've been able to take care of myself, do for myself.

That's when I told them all that I was HIV positive. And my sister, she's the youngest, she took it the hardest. She was like, "But you just got clean, you just come back into our life, and now you gon' leave again." And I had to explain to her that they have medicine now, and um, that, um, I'm working to—I wasn't undetectable at the time—I said I'm working toward becoming undetectable. And I explained undetectable to her, to my family and stuff, and I told them that, you know, I was... I was healthy, you know, and now when they call, they call me asking how am I doing. I tell them that I'm undetectable, you know, and I'm just, I'm healthy. You know. **I'm just as healthy as you are, you know.** As long as I don't put nothing else in my body or nothing like that, you know.

I'm, uh, I'm okay.

Still to today, my son went to his death and didn't know that I'm HIV-positive. My other two children don't know that I'm HIV-positive; my mother doesn't know, no one knows. **My brothers don't know.** **And I lost two brothers from HIV.** And I got one sitting right now in UIC that got sores all over him and everything else. He's getting ready probably to pass...soon. But he doesn't know I have HIV.

Normally it's just the people from WIHS that really know, okay. And my husband knew.... I live like, I don't even know how to say, like ashamed of myself. I'm very clean, my house is immaculate, if I get cut I won't let nobody help me, nobody even come near where I bled if it went on my floor. You see what I'm saying? My bathroom's so immaculate you wouldn't believe it. This is the way I am because of me having this HIV. **And I'm so afraid.** What happens if something happens and they catch it, **how do I live with myself without telling my own children?**



ABOVE

Debra with her partner Deborah on the steps of the Chicago Women's AIDS Project, Mother's Day, c. 2000.

Here's a glimpse at the WIHS Appreciation Party held last November at the Como Inn.

Over 150 WIHS participants, staff and friends from all four WIHS sites in Chicago celebrated the two year anniversary of the WIHS over dinner, dancing and a special program dedicated to all of the women in WIHS.

The party was a huge success! We ate good food, danced the macarena, and some women even won raffle prizes including a night at the Chicago Hyatt Regency Hotel. All WIHS participants also received special WIHS "Dance of Life" t-shirts as a token of our appreciation. But most importantly, the party gave us an opportunity to celebrate each other for an evening.

To all the women in WIHS:

As a WIHS participant and a WIHS Chicago Representative of the National Community Advisory Board member (NCAB) Chicago representative, it is with great pleasure to say that the Appreciation Party was a hit!

The WIHS participants, their guests and the staff all appeared to have a blast. It was a great opportunity to meet the doctors, nurses, scientists and support staff in a relaxed atmosphere. Especially because their names are often heard but we don't often get a chance to talk to them in an informal atmosphere.

I feel we all had an awesome time. The cake, decorated with the WIHS "Dance of Life" logo, was especially beautiful and it was as delicious as it looked.

I think the staff did an outstanding job putting together the 1996 Appreciation Party. I sincerely hope that all who attended had a good time. I think we've got a lot to look forward to. Let's make 1997 a blast.

Your sister in the WIHS,
Patricia Ellis
Chicago NCAB Representative



From Dr. Mardge Cohen's Statement of Appreciation:

"Tonight is a salute to the very special women who participate in the WIHS in Chicago. You are contributing to our rapidly developing and improving knowledge and therapy of HIV infection. In the past year, we have seen some remarkable advances in the understanding and treatment of this disease and, in your own way, each of you has contributed to this.

Thanks to you, the four Chicago sites continue to lead the nation by being on the top of the six consortiums in collecting the highest quality data for this study. We don't know how to say thank you enough, but hope that this Appreciation Dinner can serve as a small token of thanks to show how indebted we are to you.

Tonight, we bring the city of Chicago together, in terms of the geography of where we all live, in terms of our cultures, in terms of our different institutions, and in our resolve to stand shoulder to shoulder to fight this epidemic — and to enjoy every minute of life while we can."

— Mardge Cohen, MD is the Chicago WIHS Principal Investigator



Celebrating the commitment of peer advocates.

ABOVE

An early WIHS newsletter from 1996. Newsletters were distributed to the women participating in the study to keep them informed about study findings and events for the women. This newsletter features a WIHS Appreciation Party that the study held for its participants.

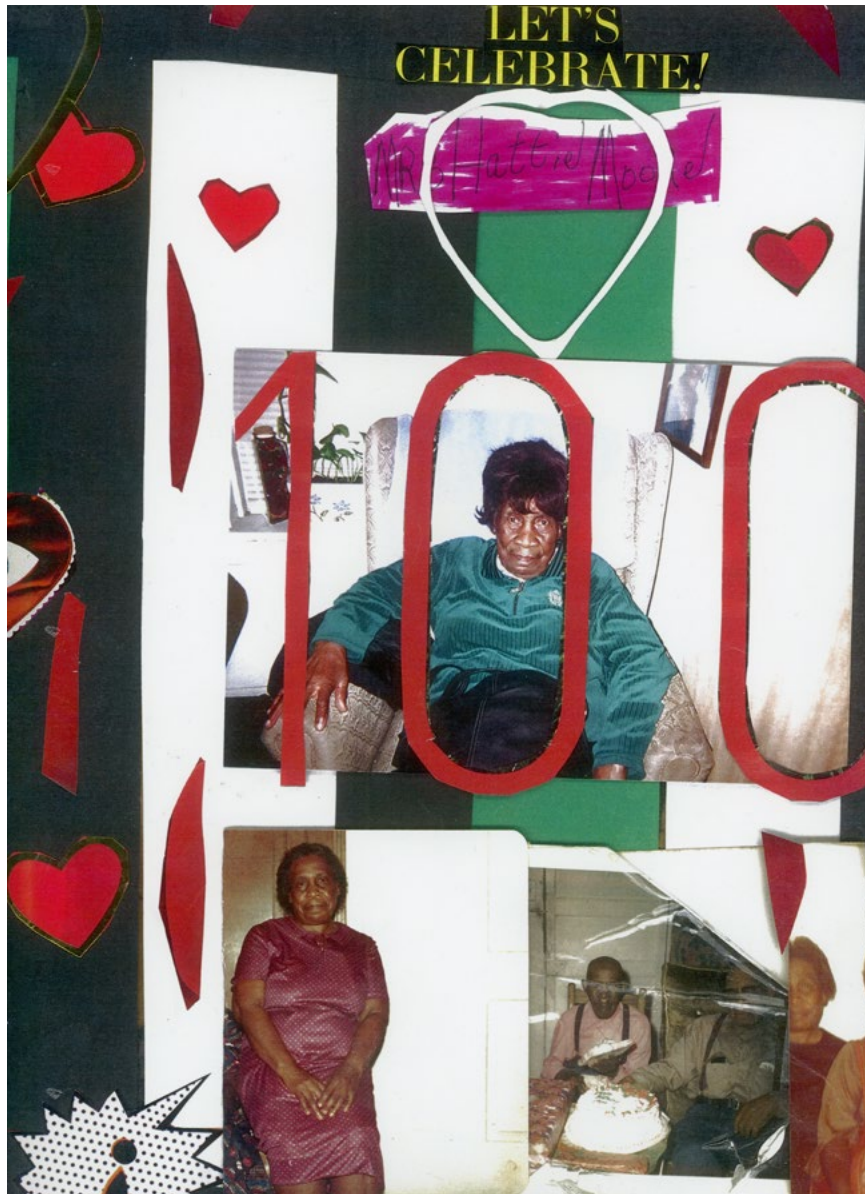
**ABOVE**

Miss Sweet Pea in Las Vegas, 2015. "We were just celebrating life, love and hope, that's what we were celebrating. And joining together as five sisters having fun. I didn't find no husband though."

OPPOSITE TOP

Debra, with her brothers and daughters, at her daughter's graduation from Gwendolyn Brooks High School, 2002.



**OPPOSITE**

Personal collage from Sweet Pea, using photos from 1970–2015 to commemorate her aunt's 100th birthday.

ABOVE

Miss Sweet Pea's personal collage of her son and his children, 2014.

I'm like okay, I got to questioning my faith and like okay, you been to church all these years, apparently you've got all this or what-ever and so you still around for something. I started doing a little bit of research, I'm real good with computers and I started doing a little bit of research, and I heard about the Radiation Center, which was, they had a women's group in there, a women's support group.

So I started going to the women's support group at Cook County Hospital, okay?

Northwestern started a women's group for women over the age of 40 with HIV... and, um, I started going twice a month to the women's group, and we would have an evening dinner and it was informal. We would just talk about what's bothering us, what's on our mind, things like when we were first diagnosed you would get up 50 times a night and make sure your door was locked. And I've learned through my yoga and meditation, to just let it go, like Frozen.

I did my volunteer work, I did the MATEC [MIDWEST AIDS TRAINING + EDUCATION CENTER] training you know. Because nobody wanted to be with the AIDS patients in Cook County Hospital. So what'd they do? They trained the AIDS patients to go sit with the AIDS patients. Because we knew that there's nothing, we knew we needed comfort, so we took these classes and we went and comforted our people.

I never forget, I walked up one day and there was this guy, he just had the sheet wrapped around him and he was just rocking. He was like—I've been here for five days, nobody's talked to me, they barely want to touch me. I'm like—we can talk, I'm here, I ain't going nowhere. And for me, that was my epiphany. To see him just wrapped up, just waiting to die. Because the nurses only came when they had to. So from that point on I started running my mouth and talking.

I've met a lot of women who I have a lot in common with. It don't matter where we're from. It don't matter if you were born on the South Side, the North Side, Cicero, whatever. **We all have a lot in common.** From the beginning to probably how a lot of us were raised or we ended up recently. And how we deal with what's going on with us.

Treatment opened up, because I was scared, I didn't want no more and I wanted to give my son a chance! And I stayed in Maryville for two years, I went to Haymarket, I stayed there for 18 months and I was scared to leave because I just didn't want to get high no more. I moved into a program where they monitor us, you know? They subsidized my rent, then I had just got active into, after that I begin engaged in my medical care, wanted now to take care of my HIV. **I began to educate myself about what it is that I had.**

[MY SON HAS] given me two more grandchildren and they're fine and his wife is still fine. It goes on like that. Yes, little close encounters like that kind of wake you up. Once all the drugging and the alcohol, I finally got rid of all of that, you know WIHS and the clinic and the people you meet, **you learn something from people everyday.**

**ABOVE LEFT**

Marta, in front of Cook County Hospital with another peer educator. They were attending the Women's & Children's Annual Picnic, 2002.

ABOVE RIGHT

Marta in her office, where she worked as a community referral coordinator, c. 1997.

OPPOSITE

Marta at the XIV International AIDS Conference presenting a WIHS poster, 2002.



**OPPOSITE**

Debra with colleagues from the Chicago Women's AIDS Project, c. 2000.

ABOVE

The Chicago Pride Parade, where Debra served as Marshall c. 2012.

**ABOVE**

Katherine with Dr. Mardge Cohen at a party celebrating Dr. Cohen's departure from Cook County Hospital, c. 2007.

OPPOSITE LEFT

Katherine on her first day as a Peer Educator at the CORE Center, c. 2004. Katherine has served as a peer educator for the past 11 years.

OPPOSITE RIGHT

Katherine at the WIHS gala, 2014.



She [MY DAUGHTER] accepted my illness that day. And she's never looked back since then and she's 28 now. But the fact that there was no judgment, you know? Today we try to be a non-judgmental family. When you're at home, no judgment. You get enough of that out in the world, you shouldn't have to be judged when you're at home. So we kind of practice that now. And that was as big a day to me as the day she told her friends—my mom has HIV. And y'all need to not be having sex! I think that's the biggest thing handling HIV dating. You might see somebody you want to date and you talk to him but you can't go no further than that unless you tell him. And you have to be very careful with that, too.

[MY MOTHER] was like—well Sister *(that's my nickname, Sister)* no use in keeping it a secret; it's something you gotta live with now. You should just tell the rest of them, they'll be understanding. And me knowing the type of family and sisters that I had, I knew that they would handle a problem, if anything they would be catering to me. I told them and that's exactly what it was. They were catering to me, still 'til today they—Sister, what's your cell count? Because now they are more aware about it, especially with one of my sisters being a doctor. I've never been hospitalized before, I've never been sick, very seldom have a cold, my T-cell count always have been in the 800s, undetectable, even the herpes breakouts that I usually have on you know my bottom part, I don't even have them that much more.

But you know what's ironic to me about that little area, it was in the Radiation Center and the irony of like how many of us with HIV are now dying from cancer? To think that the women's clinic started in the cancer clinic and now we need a cancer clinic in our clinic.

I started doing some research, and that's when I found out about an organization called TPAN on the North Side. It was an organization that was headed up by a gay group and... wonderful guys. So after work, I would drive up to the North Side.

[B]ecause I'm still undetectable and not on any medication, there was a brief sub-study through WIHS where they took a fresh sample of my blood and they sent it to New York to analyze down to the gene level, and

hopefully use the information from that, as well as the others they've collected to put towards developing a vaccine.

I can't afford this medicine. And [THE NORTHWESTERN STAFF] said all you have to do is pick it up. And then after every so many weeks I would go in...my ears got black, and people kept saying—have you been to the Bahamas? Because I was really chocolate, and I liked the color, but then after they adjusted it, my nails are white again.

Then I got introduced to WIHS through the CORE Center. And WIHS is just great, they're great to us. I get tests that I need to actually have anyway and all the Paps **I get what I need—medical attention.** They're very friendly and very nice to us, generous with us, you know generous with us, personable. It's been a great experience being in WIHS.

And that's how WIHS was born.... And it got bigger and bigger and branched out and they, it was such an inspiration to me because the CORE Center for one, they have groups there, different support groups. So I could come to the CORE Center and I could go to a Recovery Group, I can go to a Women of Dignity Group, I can go to an HIV Support Group, I can do all of that at the CORE Center. And I could see my primary doctor. And WIHS, before they got this wonderful office, they still have some of their people that come back and forth that's at the CORE Center, but then they created this wonderful office. So for one, WIHS took a lot of weight off of our primary care doctors because WIHS does so much for us, from the Pap smear to the...so when I go to see my primary care doctor, she's like—okay Cordelia, what you need? Some paperwork filled out or refills sent down? And let me check your heart and look in your ears, okay, have a good day (*laughter*). And for a while I was like dang, that's not fair, she don't have to do nothing! Here it is research got to do all this different stuff. **I'm like okay, you get the care where you can get it or when you can get it, from whoever you can get it from.**

**OPPOSITE**

Marta receiving a physical examination as part of a WIHS study visit, c. 1995.

ABOVE

Marta in a WIHS dental study, c. 1995.

[W]hen I first walked in the door [OF WIHS] it was just unbelievable because you saw people from all walks of life, the ones who was living on the streets, the ones who prostituting, the ones who was shooting up, and you're looking at— **hmm, what am I doing here, I do not fit in.** And the ones who work the streets. And as I got to doing and talking to the ladies I found out that I really wasn't a whole lot different from them, even though my lifestyle was different. **We're all women, and we all were affected.**

Dr. Mardge Cohen, who of course you know is the initiator of all of this CORE Center being in existence and all of that. And we used to sit in that Radiation Center before they actually built the CORE Center, we'd sit in that Radiation Center, it would hot as a firecracker in there because there wasn't no air conditioner so we'd have a fan on and we sitting skin to skin sweating **and we just be talking but it was just one big family you know?**

I like them [THE WIHS STAFF] because they came to be — Joan, Dr. Sha, Sylvia, Anna— **they have all came to be like a family.**

I always tell people my role model is my parents, but I had another role model, Muhammad Ali. That was my role model, 'side my parents. He was my role model because he didn't let no one, nothing stop him for doing what he had to do as a person....So I'm kinda like that. **I don't let nobody stop me from doing or saying.** If I feel like saying something—here's my feeling, nobody else feeling, it comes from me. When things stress me out, I read and write and stuff. If you don't deal with them, they won't heal. My surviving is my struggle, my strength.

I struggle and that is my strength.

Life after diagnosis has changed, for the better. It may have taken me many years after 1989 to get my life back in order. I eventually got back on track. The want and need to go back to school is what my desire was and that's what I did. **I did not let my HIV status stop me nor did I let people stop me.**

**ABOVE TOP**

Racheal with her husband, 2012.

ABOVE BOTTOM

Racheal at Sister of Sobriety with her roommate.
“I went to women’s treatment center August 10, 2010.
That’s my clean date. I’ve been clean ever since.”

**OPPOSITE TOP**

Racheal with her family. “We were all together
when I told them all that I was HIV positive. And
my sister, she’s the youngest, she took it the hardest.”

OPPOSITE BOTTOM

Racheal in front of her home, after she got clean,
c. 2011.

BREAKS MY HEART,
I CANT BE WITH YOU,
I KNOW YOUR HURT, YOU USED TO TRY
NOW YOU ALWAYS MAKE ME CRY

YOUR NOT A LITTLE BOY, YOUR A GROWN MAN
YOU USED TO DO THE BEST YOU CAN
I'M YOUR LOVING WIFE, TOOK VOWS FOR LIFE
I TOOK THEM SERIOUS
IS THAT SO MYSTERIOUS
BREAKS MY HEART - WE LIVE APART
I WON'T BE ABUSED ANYMORE
I'M YOUR WIFE NOT ONE OF YOUR WHORES

LIKE YOUR EX-GIRLFRIEND
THEY CALL HER BLOW JOB MARY
NOW THAT IS MIGHTY SCARY
SHE PROBABLY GAVE YOU HIV
THEN YOU GAVE AIDS TO ME

I STOOD BY YOU, HELD YOUR HAND
BUT YOU WOULD NOT UNDERSTAND
I KEPT MY HUSBAND SAFE AND SOUND
MY REWARD FROM GOD SO PROFOUND
YOUR MY HUSBAND, I'M YOUR WIFE
YOU GAVE ME A DEATH SENTENCE, FOR THE
REST OF MY LIFE
TILL DEATH DO US PART
YOU BROKE MY HEART
ALL THE REST I CAN FORGIVE
HIGHER POWER JUST LET ME LIVE
A WHOLE LOT LONGER
LET ME GET A WHOLE LOT STRONGER

AUG-2012

HIV definitely saved my life.

I knew enough to know I didn't want to die, you know? And that meant getting clean, getting sober. I had one attack in my body like it was a hungry lion and then I threw drugs and alcohol in the mix and my body was like—girl! I'm going to quit on you if you don't stop.

Till today, I'm surviving and enjoying life, and like I tell people, as much as I tried to die, it seemed like the more I tried to die the more I would live. I was doing drugs, drinking, I was trying to take myself out and I was like, okay, I must be here for something. So I kind of really feel like, you know, my faith in God is keeping me here to take care of my daddy like my mom would have done.



MEET THE WOMEN OF CHICAGO

BOBBIE	My first child was when I ran away at 15
CORDELIA	Born and raised in Englewood
DEBRA	I got tired of being escorted out of the school
DELORES	I had a big rock on my finger
KATHERINE	I've only been clean for 13 years
MAE	Long time married
MARILYN	I ran away a lot
MARTA	My mom used to always work
MARY B.	Some of the joys
MARY C.	I lost my childhood before I was 10
RACHEAL	I never really become a woman in Chicago
ROSEMARY	I received a letter from my husband at the time
SHERRI	I met my husband; We fell in love pretty fast
SWEET PEA	My father wanted the best for us

In many ways you have already met the women at the heart of this project. They have shared beautiful and painful stories, which History Moves has woven together into a collective narrative. Here, you can meet the women, again, as individuals with their narratives and reflections together on one page. The text on the left hand side appears as a poem, in part because the women's words are poetic, and in part because the poetic form best expresses the wide range of emotions that they shared with one another and now with readers. You will also see all of their pictures as a collage on the right. We hope taking in the whole page will give you a deeper sense of the women who have made this project possible.

BOBBIE

My first child was when I ran away at 15
got married in Kentucky
I thought
I'm going to live a good life!
That was bull

Still to today, my son went to his death
didn't know that I'm HIV-positive
My brothers don't know
I lost two brothers from HIV

My husband knew
He's the person I had my last two children with
He showed me the difference in life
I could be loved
I was worth loving
And I stood with him for 22 years
I took care of him

As far as my HIV status
I've been able to take care of myself
do for myself

NO IMAGES SHARED

CORDELIA

Born and raised in Englewood
 Still in the same house
 I'm the baby of the bunch
 the black sheep

I always have had good jobs
 I was doing good things
 but bad things at the same time
 That's how I lost them, because of
 the drugs

I went to the clinic in Englewood
 I'm like—something ain't right
 It seemed like the more I tried to die
 the more I would live

no use in keeping it a secret
 it's something you gotta live with now

I started going to the women's support group
 Cook County Hospital
 One big family
 My faith in God is keeping me here
 Take care of my daddy like my mom
 would have done



DEBRA

I got tired of being escorted out of the school
in handcuffs

I left their house

To stay in their house, I needed to
go to school

I'm in the streets

getting high

really didn't know why

Just been recently that I'm starting to
put it all together

It was the adults in my life not taking care of me

It takes a village to raise a child

I am a product of the unsafe village

HIV definitely saved my life

I knew enough to know I didn't want to die

Meant getting clean, getting sober

I did my volunteer work

They trained the AIDS patients to go
sit with the AIDS patients.

We knew we needed comfort

We took these classes

We went and comforted our people



DELORES

I had a big rock on my finger
 But he lied to his family
 He lied to me

A girlfriend of mine called me said
 the guy you're engaged to is dying from AIDS

They knew nothing about this virus
 When this young intern came in, he
 looked at me and said
 Delores you're going to die
 I automatically started hyperventilating

A women's group for women over the
 age of 40 with HIV
 We would just talk about what's bothering us
 what's on our mind
 I've learned through my yoga and meditation
 to just let it go, like Frozen



KATHERINE

I've only been clean for 13 years
 HIV was not a motivating factor for me to stop
 I had to experience something that was very
 devastating for me to stop

The lady from DCFS came and she was like
 I'm going to let you take your baby
 but you have to get into treatment

So God was allowing me to get my mind right
 I wanted to give my son a chance!

I've been delivered from the disease of addiction.
 I'm not recovered or recovering
 I've been delivered



MAE

21 or 22 years

Long time married

He was just a good husband

good father

good brother

That's why I cannot bring myself
to tell my family
they loved him so much

He was past the HIV stage

His count was 12

The doctor said it's just a matter of time

My daughter was 16

My son was 21

When I was diagnosed

Dear God, just give me two years

And here he's given me 20

I wonder if I didn't have HIV

my husband didn't have HIV

things would have been *(crying)* so different

But I really try not to dwell on that

I thank God for what I do have

I've always asked him to just give me strength



MARILYN

I ran away a lot
At the age of 13 I was in a school
for bad girls
I wasn't bad at all
I just didn't want to be at home
They put me in the Audy Home

They came in my room
looking like astronauts
told me I had AIDS
They didn't say nothing about HIV positive
Did I want to talk to a chaplain?

All I cared about was getting my fix
I'll get treated tomorrow
I started going to groups
I found out that other people had
worse issues than I did!
I wasn't out there alone.

Life after diagnosis has changed, for the better
I did not let my HIV status stop me



MARTA

My mom used to always work
 She had three jobs at one time
 And I didn't know I was poor

Those commercials on TV
 were directed to me
 I had done drugs in the past
 I was drinking
 I had multiple partners with no condoms
 the checklist kinda goes off
 yeah-yeah-yeah
 took myself in to get tested
 you are positive

It's like the salmon
 you've got to come back to it
 My ma used to work at Cook County
 It's weird that I end up working here
 being involved in the study
 Still here



MARY B.

Some of the joys
the first one was being married
the second was having my children
the third thing was being able to be clean

I thought it was a death sentence
it ended up making me a better person

Someone brought up to me participating in the study
If I could give something back
help other women along the way
that was something I wanted to do

They asked me what I feared the most
hit me like a ton of bricks
not being able to watch my kids grow up
And now my kids are grown
I have two grandbabies

NO IMAGES SHARED

MARY C.

I lost my childhood before I was 10
 I became a parent at 13
 my mother died
 she told me to take care our baby

All I knew was
 the drug addicts and the prostitutes
 were getting HIV
 I wasn't doing any of that
 I'm like – why me?
 Why he didn't tell me?
 Because he took a portion of my life

When I first walked in the door
 it was just unbelievable
 you saw people from all walks of life
 I really wasn't a whole lot different from them
 We're all women
 We all were affected

There's always a child
 a husband
 I never been on my own
 So I'm finding who I am as a woman now
 I'm not even sure who she is
 what she would like
 what she would like to do



RACHEAL

I never really become a woman in Chicago
until I got clean off the drug
Now I'm married
I have a home
I pay bills
I go grocery shopping
I do things that normal people do

I wasn't surprised that I tested positive
but I was still hurt
I thought I was going to die

My sister, she took it the hardest
"But you just got clean"
"You just come back into our life"
"Now you gon' leave again"

I'm living here
I'm undetectable
My T-cells are great
I'm as healthy as a horse



This picture was taken
while I was sitting
with Wendy.
I was still pregnant
with my daughter.
To Michael
(my husband)
from your wife,
Rachael
K59875



ROSEMARY

I received a letter from my husband at the time
wanted me to come in for some blood work.
From that point on
our relationship became very tumultuous
And when you have kids, you hang in there

They thought it was just a gay disease.
I found this organization and I started going
I was the only single white heterosexual
female in the group
And they said—come in!

So that's why I favor getting knowledge out there
to the young ones
It's no longer a death sentence
It's a lot more complicated than that



SHERRI

I met my husband
 We fell in love pretty fast
 No matter what happened
 and believe me, a lot of things went bad
 I always felt that man loved me
 I haven't seen him in two years
 I can't have nothing to do with him anymore

My brother was my hero
 I was doing the drugs
 I was stealing the money
 He said get out of my F'N house
 I want my sister back.
 When I straightened out
 a year and a half later
 He said—welcome back.

It saddens me when I think of women
 that their families aren't supportive.
 I've been blessed since I've been sick
 My family has been great to me

Got introduced to WIHS through the CORE Center
 I've met a lot of women
 I have a lot in common with
 It don't matter if you were born on the South Side
 the North Side
 Cicero, whatever



SWEET PEA

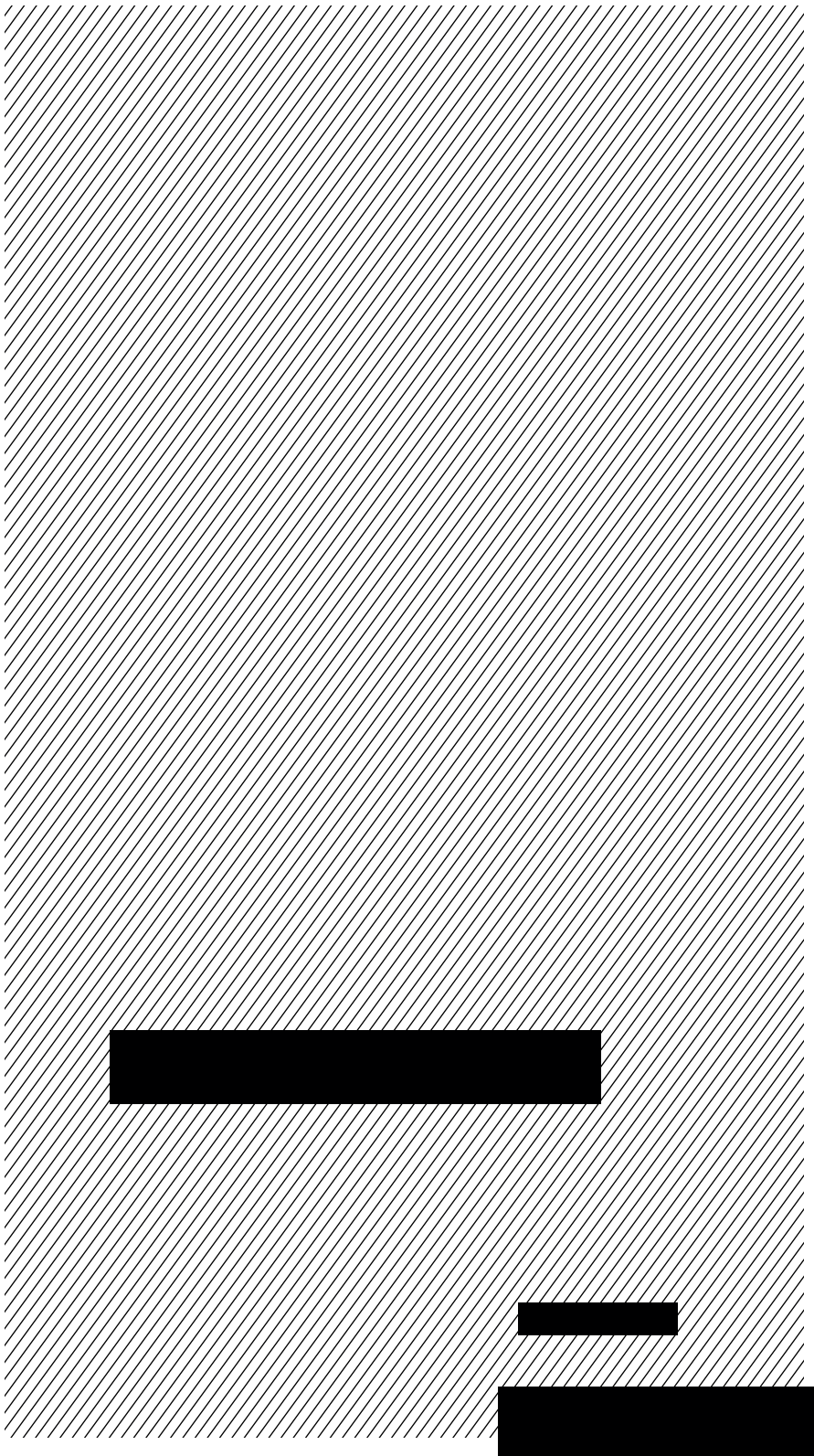
My father wanted the best for us
 Go to school every day
 They had a third and fourth grade education
 my parents did
 But I always told my parents, we came out okay.

When this was diagnosed with me
 I was mad as hell
 This wasn't the only tragedy that happened to me

I had lots to live for
 I had my kids
 I have lovely grandkids
 I have to live for myself, take care of myself

For me to heal, writing, reading, and doing
 my art work
 And I love to go walking
 To clear the mind





A large, stylized white cross is centered on a black background. The background is filled with a dense pattern of thin, white diagonal lines running from the top-left to the bottom-right. The cross is composed of two thick, white rectangular bars intersecting at the center.

CHICAGO