Glenna McCarthy

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Bronx, New York

Diagnosed With Hepatitis C in 1999; Diagnosed with HIV in 1990

The following is an excerpt from the Hep Spring 2017 cover story:

Glenna McCarthy was cured of hepatitis C the hard way, but now, she's made it her mission to help others take advantage of the new easier-to-take treatments.

McCarthy, 50, found out in 1990 that she had contracted HIV from a boyfriend. Feeling as though she were "damaged goods," she went on a "self-destruct mission" that led to injection drug use, a stint in prison and hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection.

While she was in jail in 1999, she was informed that she had AIDS and HCV.

"I had never heard of hepatitis C, and I was not ready to even think about it," she recalls. "I was trying to be smug and say, 'Who cares?' I really had nothing to lose at that point. But when you realize you're going to prison and you might die in prison, it snaps you out of it."

McCarthy started HIV treatment for the first time in jail and today maintains an undetectable HIV viral load.

McCarthy says she didn't know how to adapt to life out of prison when she got out in 2004. "I tried everything. I tried going to school, taking martial arts, you name it. I was trying to find relationships with people who were as damaged as me so I wouldn't be judged."

Several years later, McCarthy got arrested again and got sent back to prison for a shorter period. But this time when she came home, she found the Crime Victims Treatment Center in Harlem, which helps people affected by violence.

"I went in there thinking I wouldn't be worthy of them caring about me, but when they did, it made a big difference," McCarthy says. "I started learning about posttraumatic stress disorder, and it made sense—it just helped me get some clarity."

McCarthy also started volunteering at an animal shelter in Spanish Harlem, working with abused and neglected animals, especially pit bulls. "I related to them because nobody likes them and they've been discarded," she says. "I thought they needed love."

Around 2012, McCarthy started seeing a gastrointestinal specialist for stomach problems and learned that she had moderate liver disease and abnormal liver enzyme tests, so she decided to start hepatitis C treatment.

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