



GILEAD

| HIV

*"I kept my HIV  
secret for nearly  
30 years, but  
I will not  
stay silent  
any longer."*

*Rebecca*



# Rebecca

is a transgender woman. She has been living with HIV for over 35 years. While she is now fully at peace with her diagnosis, her journey to this point has been a whirlwind of immense stigma, discrimination and challenges.

In the late 1980s, Rebecca began to speak to her healthcare professionals about transitioning. At this time, 'trans' was not something that was understood or accepted. As a public figure, this became all too clear to Rebecca when the Irish press decided to out her.

Within a week, she had lost everything. She was shamed for her appearance, she lost her career and her life spiralled out of control.

While already feeling demonised and isolated from those around her, as part of her consultations Rebecca had to undergo an HIV test. Although she had heard of HIV before, she never thought that it would ever affect her. When her test came back positive, her world fell apart.

At the time, Rebecca was informed she likely had two years to live and that, on top of this, there was only a 50:50 chance that she would survive gender surgery. She didn't want to die the way she was born, so proceeded with the operation aged 31.

But Rebecca survived and used her diagnosis as an opportunity to refocus.

For 29 years, Rebecca kept her HIV diagnosis a secret out of fear that the life she had built could fall apart again if she revealed her status. But it didn't. In 2016, she started talking about her HIV publicly and this was met with resounding love and support from the HIV and online community. While her experience has been positive overall, she still receives negative comments from people who have outdated preconceptions about HIV.

Yet, Rebecca does not live in fear, and she is determined to make sure that others do not either – especially as the reality of living with HIV has changed drastically. Working alongside 56 Dean Street, at Chelsea and Westminster Hospitals and running her own Project Bootcamp, she is working tirelessly to make sure that nobody is without the support that they need.

More than three decades since her diagnosis, Rebecca is now living her best life. She is empowered. She is about to become the first trans woman to have their own TV show on Irish television. And this is just the beginning.

The more we talk about how misperceptions of HIV impact those affected, the more people will understand and the more lives we can help change.



*By Working Together* We Can End The HIV Epidemic For *Everyone. Everywhere.*