

Hi, I'm Cornelius Wilson, and I'm a proud African American same gender loving man. My childhood was pretty good, our house appeared to be the house where folks like to hang out. There were aspects of my childhood where my same gender loving identity tried to emerge... I suppressed it, but I endured a certain level of teasing. I had good friends that used to tell me that they didn't care. They were still my friend and that I wanted to prove to the guys that were calling me names that I was going to be more than what they figured those names were. The fear I had about the gay lifestyle was the stereotype of the very flamboyant. I began to meet guys that were very masculine... I found that they were just like me.

You know, I happened to start working as a volunteer to provide information and education on HIV and AIDS for the Black community. When we would get together in our little groups on the weekends, folks would bombard me with all these questions. For some reason, I had this knack of being able to counsel and make folks feel comfortable. Then I asked some of the guys that has started coming in, volunteering with me, to kind of help me out, and we just did it from a grassroots basis. There were Tuesday nights when every chair was full and there were people lined up along the walls all the way around. It gave me the strength and the ability to eventually share with my mom, about the fact that I was gay. And when I shared with her it was so funny... she was like, "OK, what do you want, a medal? You're my son. I'm gonna love you no matter what." So from that point, I had no cares in the world as to what anybody thought.

As I evolved the organization moms was right there. When we started doing fundraisers I would put her at the door. The sweet little old lady – because you know how you have friends come to the door and they want to come in, and not pay. Moms would be there and she would be like... "Look, I know you got a dollar". And she went with me and supported

me with any and everything that came up. But that was my best friend and I love her to life. You know, one day down the road I'll see her, but not right away. I'm not going anywhere anytime soon.