

Elizabeth Glaser

Address at the Democratic National Convention

July 14, 1992: New York City

I'm Elizabeth Glaser. Eleven years ago, while giving birth to my first child, I hemorrhaged and was transfused with seven pints of blood. Four years later, I found out that I had been infected with the AIDS virus and had unknowingly passed it on to my daughter, Ariel, through my breast milk, and my son, Jake, in utero.

Twenty years ago I wanted to be at the Democratic Convention because it was a way to participate in our country. Today I am here because it's a matter of life and death. Exactly four years my daughter died of AIDS--she did not survive the Reagan administration. I am here because my son and I may not survive four more years of leaders who say they care, but do nothing. I am in a race with the clock. This is not about being a Republican or an Independent or a Democrat -- it's about the future...for each and every one of us.

I started out just a mom--fighting for the life of her child. But along the way I learned how unfair America can be. Not just for the people who have HIV, but for many, many people--gay people, people of color, children. A strange spokesperson for such a group -- a well-to-do white woman -- but I have learned my lessons the hard way, and I know that America has lost her path and is at risk of losing her soul. America wake up -- we are all in a struggle between life and death.

I understand the sense of frustration and despair in our country, because I know firsthand about screaming for help and getting no answer. I went to Washington to tell Presidents Reagan and Bush we needed to do much, much more for AIDS research and care, and that children couldn't be forgotten. The first time, when nothing happened, I thought, Oh, they just didn't hear. The second time, when nothing happened, I thought, Maybe I didn't shout loud enough. But now I realize that they don't hear because they don't want to listen. When you cry for help and no one listens you start to lose hope.

I began to lose faith in America. I felt my own country was letting me down -- and it was. This is not the America I was raised to be proud of. I was raised to believe that other's problems were my problems as well. But when I tell most people about HIV, hoping they will care and try to help, I see the look in their eyes -- its not my problem they're thinking -- well, it's everyone's problem and we need a leader who will tell us that.

We need a visionary to guide us -- to say it wasn't all right for Ryan White to be banned from school because he had HIV or a man or woman denied a job because they were infected with this virus. We need a leader who is truly committed to educating us.

I believe in America -- but not with a leadership of selfishness and greed where the wealthy get health care and insurance and the poor don't. Do you know how much my AIDS care costs? More than \$40,000 a year. Someone without insurance can't afford this. Even the drugs that I hope will keep me alive are out of reach for others. Is their life any less valuable? Of course not. This is not the America I was raised to be proud of -- where the rich people get care and drugs that poor people can't. We need health care for all. We need a leader to say this, and do something about it.

I believe in America, but not with a leadership that talks about problems but is incapable of solving them. Two HIV commission reports with recommendations about what to do to solve this crisis are sitting on shelves, gathering dust. We need a leader who will not only listen to these recommendations, but will implement them.

I believe in America -- but not with a leadership that doesn't hold government accountable. I go to Washington to the National Institutes of Health and say, "Show me what you're doing on HIV." They hate it when I come because I try to tell them how to do it better. But that's why I love being a taxpayer -- because it's my money and they must become accountable.

I believe in an America where our leaders talk straight. When anyone tells President Bush that the battle against AIDS is seriously under-funded, he juggles the numbers to mislead the public into thinking we're spending twice as much as we really are. While they play games with numbers, people are dying.

I believe in America -- but an America where there is light in every home. One thousand points of light just wasn't enough -- my house has been dark for too long.

Once every generation, history brings us to an important crossroads. Sometimes in life there is that moment when it's possible to make a change for the better. This is one of those moments.

For me, this is not politics. It's a crisis of caring.

In this hall is the future: women, men of all colors saying, Take America back. We are just real people wanting a more hopeful life. But words and ideas are not enough. Good thoughts won't save my family. What's the point of caring if we don't do something about it? We must have ACTION: a President and a Congress who can work together so we can get out of this gridlock

and move ahead. Because I don't win my war if the Congress cares and the President doesn't--or if the President cares and the Congress doesn't support his ideas.

The people in this hall--this week, the Democratic party -- all of us can begin to deliver that partnership, and in November we can all bring it home.

My daughter lived seven years, and in her last year, when she couldn't walk or talk, her wisdom shone through. She taught me to help others, when all I wanted to do was hate. She taught me to help others, when all I wanted to do was help myself. She taught me to be brave, when all I felt was fear. My daughter and I loved each other with simplicity. America, we can do the same.

This was the country that offered hope. This was the place where dreams could come true. Not just economic dreams, but dreams of freedom, justice and equality. We all need to hope that our dreams can come true. I challenge you to make it happen, because all our lives, not just mine, depend on it.