In My Life

May 1, 2004 By Nick Burns

POZ asked five fearless and world-wise HIVers from around the country to help us celebrate our 10th anniversary by naming their own bleakest and brightest milestones of the past decade.

John Ramos, 46,
Fort Lauderdale, FL
Private investor,
Tested positive: 1984
Pits: In 1995, I was hospitalized with pneumonia for three weeks. I started wasting and didn't want to be seen. All I lived on was hope, faith and love.
Hits: Finally accepting my mortality, I let myself take on projects, like helping children read through a church program.

Earline Budd, 45,
Washington, DC
Transgender health program coordinator for Us Helping Us
Tested positive: 1991
Pits: Being diagnosed in prison—especially for someone like me, living opposite of their birth gender.
Hits: Participating in the Fuzeon clinical trial. I started in 2001 with a CD4 count of 60, and today it's between 375 and 400.

Richard Apodaca, 61,
San Francisco
Retired custom tailor
Tested positive: 1984
Pits: I'm starting to lose friends again. They feel good and take [drug] holidays, and the virus figures it out. They've been on meds for so long, they're tired of it.
Hits: Running the New York marathon last year. I was on TV because I'm old and have full-blown AIDS.

Julia Tripp, 49,
Boston
Communications consultant
Tested positive: 1996
Pits: Acknowledging the impact of stigma around HIV and [dealing with] other potentially crippling

consequences of poverty.
Hits: [My] personal growth and empowerment through working to create respectful relationships between clients and AIDS agencies serving them.

Justin Ligreci, 21,
Staten Island, NY
Peer facilitator and student
Tested positive: 1994
Pits: Seeing all the ignorance, like the infamous “I thought you could get it from sharing utensils.” After 20 years of AIDS, there is no excuse for anyone to be ignorant.
Hits: Knowing that HIV hasn’t beaten me—and won’t be beating me anytime soon.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/In-My-Life-294-4994