



You Are Beautiful

Derrick “Strawberry” Cox reminds us that we are valuable and worthy of love.

January 5, 2026 By Derrick “Strawberry” Cox

My name is Derrick Cox, but I go by Strawberry. I am from southeast Washington, DC. I have red hair, green eyes, light skin. I’m a man, and I’m feminine.

Growing up was not easy because of how different I was, how I looked and how I acted. Being different from everyone around you was, well, let’s just say that kids really do know how to be mean, and the adults do too.

I had to learn how to fully love and accept myself for being who I am as a feminine male who enjoys the company of other males. Sadly, this came only after a failed suicide attempt around age 13. It was after years of being rejected, unloved, unappreciated and just made fun of for simply existing.

When I was young, I was promiscuous, and I had many lovers. I was polyamorous, without knowing what it was. Then when I was 21 years old, I found love with one person. I trusted that person with everything, including my body.

He believed that every pretty gay man was HIV positive. He assumed that I was positive as well. I didn’t know his status or the fact that he hadn’t been taking his meds. You can imagine the hurt, pain, confusion and disappointment once I found out the news.

I found out that I was HIV positive in late September 2010, but I didn’t believe it. I ended up shutting down emotionally for a long time, without letting anyone know.

It wasn’t until I found a doctor who I felt safe and comfortable with at Whitman-Walker [Medical Clinic] in early 2011 that I revisited my diagnosis. Due to my lack of care for my body, my CD4 numbers were low, and my viral load was very high.

HIV was not something that I wanted to die from—or continue to be afraid of—so I decided to work with my doctor and take actions to take back control of my life, my mental health and my sexual experiences with others.

I started my meds to get my health back to where it needed to be. And since then, I have remained undetectable. I started with two to three pills a day and then ended up doing one pill a day, and now, I'm doing injectables. I've never been as happy as I am living in my truth, sharing my story and helping guide those who are just as lost and confused as I was.

I want to let everyone know that regardless of your status you are still beautiful. You are still able to love, and you are still worthy of being loved. And nothing can stop that, as long as you do what you need to do to take care of you.

Today, I am 37 years old and still remain undetectable and am as healthy as ever. My sex life is very open, and I don't hide my status from anyone. There's no shame, judgment or stigma that can keep me from continuing to fully live in my truth without any guilt or regrets.

No matter your status, you are still valuable!

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