



Day By Day

For many of us who are HIV positive, trauma is a fact of life.

January 9, 2023 By [Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.](#)

I remember the day that I learned I had HIV as if it were yesterday. In fact, it was over 30 years ago, but such traumatic events tend to stick in our brains. When those moments are compounded—over years and decades—the results are hard to overcome.

For many of us who are HIV positive, trauma is a fact of life. Living with the virus can be difficult enough, but for most of us, there are lots of other challenges. Additional stress and anguish can arise because of our skin color, our gender, our orientation, our socioeconomic status, our disabilities and even our age. That said, conquering our trauma is possible.

Our cover subject, Rae Lewis-Thornton, knows more than a thing or two about this topic. In fact, she has written an entire memoir that explores the sources of her trauma, including living with HIV. As a long-term survivor and an advocate, Rae decided to share her story in the hopes of helping others. [Go here](#) to read more.

In this special issue of POZ dedicated to African Americans, we highlight Rae’s story alongside those of other Black advocates, such as Venton Jones, David “Jax” Kelly and Tracy L. Johnson Jr.

Venton is a longtime HIV advocate. In November, he was elected to the Texas State Legislature to represent House District 100, which includes parts of Dallas and Dallas County. He is the only openly HIV-positive Black state legislator in the United States. [Go here](#) to learn more about his win.

Jax, who is currently president of Let’s Kick ASS Palm Springs, has been an HIV activist for decades. He served on the board of what would become the New York City HIV service organization Harlem United. In 1999, he moved to Los Angeles, testing HIV positive in 2006. [Go here](#) to read why he believes compassion is key.

Like Rae, Tracy also understands trauma and the struggles to overcome it. He ran away from home as a teenager due to physical, mental and verbal abuse and tested HIV positive soon thereafter. He was fortunate to find mentors who believed in him. For the past 15 years, he has helped others believe in themselves. [Go here](#) to read more about him.

Monkeypox—recently renamed mpox—was a major health story in 2022. New cases have declined dramatically, but major disparities remain, especially among people living with HIV.

In particular, the Black community has a disproportionately high rate of mpox, which mirrors the HIV epidemic. People with untreated HIV also have more severe outcomes from mpox. Integrating care for HIV and sexually transmitted infections with mental health care and services for homeless people could go a long way toward addressing this situation. [Go here](#) to read more.

In October, NMAC hosted its United States Conference on HIV/AIDS (USCHA) in San Juan, Puerto Rico, which I was pleased to attend. Due to COVID-19, the event was its first in-person conference since 2019. Go [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#) for more on USCHA.