Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff

Long-term survivor Jackson Watkins suggests living life to the fullest.

June 30, 2021

I was diagnosed with HIV in 1992. I was infected in 1982. Since 2004, I’ve had horrific neuropathy in my feet, burning pain every day—one of the many side effects of the meds.

I’ve been in a loving relationship for more than 25 years. Live your life as full as allowed.

What three adjectives best describe you?

Loving, honest, trusting.

What is your greatest achievement?

Being in a loving relationship for more than 25 years with a man that I truly love and who loves me in return. We have survived many things, and our bond is as strong as ever. Also rescuing nine dogs in 26 years.

What is your greatest regret?

Not having a relationship with my younger sister and growing up without having a father figure in my life.

What keeps you up at night?

Mostly neuropathy symptoms, such as pain, burning of the feet and aching legs.

If you could change one thing about living with HIV, what would it be?

That I felt better and could have kept my job that I loved for 17 years. Or at least to feel well enough to volunteer today.

What is the best advice you ever received?

Hold your best friends close and never take them for granted. Also, listen to your body.

What person in the HIV/AIDS community do you most admire?

My pharmacist, doctor and medical staff.

What drives you to do what you do?

My passion for quilting and hand embroidery. My Episcopal church.

What is your motto?

“Don’t sweat the small stuff; it’s all small stuff.”

If you had to evacuate your house immediately, what is the one thing you would grab on the way out?

My lockbox/firebox. And my sewing/quilting machine!

If you could be any animal, what would you be? And why?

Greyhound. Because they are the gentlest, most loving and intelligent creatures I have ever gotten to know.

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