Everybody Hurts

For many people, chronic pain is a constant companion.

August 16, 2021 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

I am grateful for many things in my life, not the least of which is being in relatively good health, HIV notwithstanding. That said, I am human. As such, I am not impervious to the aches and pains all of us feel, especially as we age.

So when it comes to overall health, my Achilles' heel is my back. I seriously injured my lower back in 1991 while in the military, and it hasn't been the same ever since. As I've gotten older, however, my lower back has only gotten crankier. I never know exactly when it will flare up, but I do know it will.

My back troubles could be so much worse. I take some comfort from knowing that. Nevertheless, having back issues means that I am always monitoring what I can and cannot do. Do I risk lifting that box? Do I go on that hike? Am I healed enough from my last screwup to try again?

At least I have a few options when it comes to my pain management. For many people, chronic pain is a constant companion. For some people living with HIV, chronic pain is yet another result of having the retrovirus.

Our cover subject—Jesús Guillén, founder of the HIV Long Term Survivors group on Facebook—is one of them. Living with HIV and chronic pain has been a struggle for him, but he believes the search for relief is worth it. Click here to read more about his journey and the latest pain-related research.

This special issue on aging also spotlights other long-term survivors, such as Ronald Johnson, Orbit Clanton and Steve Pieters.

Now retired, Johnson was most recently the policy leader of AIDS United. His HIV advocacy stretches back to 1984, five years before he tested positive for the virus. Now 73 years old, he's still busy. He chairs the steering committee for the U.S. People Living with HIV Caucus and is active in other HIV networks. Click here to read more.

As the chair of the AIDS Clinical Trial Group's Global Community Advisory Board, Clanton helps lead the group's efforts to support community outreach and education. His years of HIV advocacy work allowed him to hit the ground running when COVID-19 appeared. Click here to learn more.

In 1985, Pieters was interviewed by Tammy Faye Bakker on live television. As a gay man living with AIDS and a pastor (at the time, for the LGBTQ-affirming Metropolitan Community Church), he was an unlikely guest for the televangelist. That interview is recreated in a new Hollywood film titled The Eyes of Tammy Faye. For the back story, please read our Q&A with Pieters by Mark S. King here.

June 2021 marked 40 years since the first AIDS cases were documented. For reflections on the legacy of AIDS and its implications for COVID-19, click here.

June also saw the loss of Marco Castro-Bojorquez. His death was met with not only sadness but also surprise, as he had recently returned to the United States from his home country of Mexico. As a human rights advocate and filmmaker, he was dedicated to uplifting Latinos, immigrants and people living with HIV. Click here to read remembrances from the HIV community. R.I.P. Marco.

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