



That's What Friends Are For

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August 12, 2024 By [Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.](#)

I will always remember how crushed I felt when I tested HIV positive in 1992. I was 22 years old and not out of the closet to my family. That was before effective treatment, so I feared that I would never see 30.

Although my social network was small, I had a few friends in those early years who I could count on for support. That didn't make everything better, but it sure made things more manageable than if I had been alone while learning to live with HIV. I'll be forever grateful for the acts of kindness that I received back then.

If the HIV epidemic has taught me anything, it's that you can't fight this virus in a vacuum. It literally takes a community of folks dedicated to the same vision to get anywhere in a given struggle. In this case, it's achieving a world without HIV.

Our cover subjects—Ci Ci Covin and Masonia Traylor—exemplify the best in finding support from friends and in fighting the virus. They shared their HIV stories in *Unexpected*, an Emmy-nominated short documentary film produced by Emmy-winning actress and HIV advocate Sheryl Lee Ralph. Go [here](#) to read more.

In this issue of POZ Focus, which always specializes in single topics, we take a deep dive into women's health. In particular, we explore the numerous issues that women with HIV must consider, including treatment options for the virus.

Ci Ci and Masonia not only give us details about being in the documentary, but they also reveal the realities of selecting and adhering to HIV treatment. Please be sure to give their feature story a read.

We also profile a woman who is HIV negative but who, as a researcher, helped to establish that

people living with the virus who maintain an undetectable viral load do not transmit it via sex, a concept known as Undetectable Equals Untransmittable (U=U). Go to [here](#) to read how Alison Rodger, MD, and her colleagues confirmed that U=U.

Researchers are constantly studying ways to continue improving care and treatment for people living with HIV. In addition to U=U, another HIV transmission concern has been settled recently. The American Academy of Pediatrics released new recommendations saying moms who are living with undetectable HIV can safely breastfeed their babies. The same guidelines apply to chest feeding for trans men. Go [here](#) to learn more.

Women with HIV are at higher risk for cervical and anal cancer. At-home tests for human papillomavirus, which causes almost all cases of these cancers, may be on the horizon. Go [here](#) to read more. See the rest of the issue for more on women's health.