You’re Invited!

HIV blogger and activist Mark S. King turns 60 with a digital blowout celebrating all long-term survivors and featuring A-list celebs. Here, the birthday boy, er, man, reveals more details.

November 16, 2020 By Trent Straube

How does it feel to approach the big 6-0?

Existential panic sets in when you’re about to hit a milestone, but I’ve been practicing. I’ve already been telling people I’m 60. And then you’re immediately hurt when they just keep talking and don’t express shock. But you’re asking for it. You can’t win.

What? You’re 60? Impossible, you look so young!

I’ve had a lot of work done, like when I had my face fixed for facial wasting. And you know what, I’m going to see my face doctor [next month], but now I’m going because I’m old. There’s this tension between being grateful for being alive and thinking that aging is a bummer. I don’t get to bitch like everyone else [just because I survived HIV]? I think not!

What can you tell us about the December 16 party?

This ain’t another webinar. No PowerPoint slides, no crying. This is a celebration and a chance for all of us who have been missing each other so much to come together for a perfectly frivolous and silly and yet important time to have fun. The one-hour birthday event is a show all attendees can watch. There’s going to be musical performances and surprise celebrities, and I don’t mean D-list but A-list celebrities will make an appearance. To do what? To come in and cheer on long-term survivors of HIV. I get to throw a party for my 60th birthday, but, really, what you’ll see in that hour is a celebration for all of us who have met major milestones we never thought we’d make. Then there’ll be an after-party on Zoom, where you’ll get to see and be seen and talk, and there’ll be breakout lounges, where if you see friends from [AIDS conferences] you can chat.

The party’s a benefit for The Reunion Project. What’s your relationship with the group?

I just admire them. They’re a national network of long-term survivors who have been putting on excellent events. They took a campaign and turned it into action and a program.

Not to be a party pooper, but is your event free?

Anybody can view the event. We’d like you to register so you can get the link and the reminders—and so you can make a contribution to The Reunion Project, but you don’t have to. We want to make it accessible to everyone. Anyone who is a long-term survivor should be able to

sashay into this party!

Mark’s Milestones

The activist lists six life-changing events since his HIV diagnosis on March 15, 1985.

1. The death of my best friend, Lesley, in 1987. I was with him. I was 26. That changes you forever. I think a lot of us long-term survivors are a little bit haunted.
2. The arrival of combination therapy in 1996. To those of us with access to health care, effective HIV treatment was a finish line [that meant] you might enjoy a full life.
3. Getting clean and sober. I started the process in 2005. After you find out you’re going to live, you have to take care of yourself. I had some baggage from the trauma of AIDS, and it presented itself as drug addiction.
4. U=U. I had internalized that I felt like a threat, and I had pretended it didn’t bother me—until the science proved [I wasn’t able to transmit HIV because I’m undetectable]. To shed that burden was profound.
5. Marrying Michael. We met at an AIDS conference in 2012. We married in 2015. I found love when I was over 50—that’s when I was finally ready to be a good husband.
6. Black Lives Matter. It taught me that our AIDS movement leaves people behind. I say to long-term survivors, “Don’t get caught up in our own great tragedy. Use it to have empathy for someone else.”

For more information or to register, go to MarkIs60.com.

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