



Learning to Live With HIV

Shannon Farabee turned to writing to help process her HIV diagnosis.

July 20, 2026 By Shannon Farabee

I found out I was HIV positive on February 3, 2021. I was 45 years old, had three school-aged children and had been divorced for six years. I was at the top of a career that I had worked hard to build and wasn't prepared for the neurological symptoms that occurred during that first year. It took some time to adjust but things do calm way down.

I became undetectable within a month of starting HIV medication. I was very sick for the first year and a half. I lost 60 pounds in three months and experienced cycles of vomiting that made working and driving difficult. Initially, I continued to drink alcohol, which only made things worse. Through the grace of God and the support of good friends, I stopped putting that harmful substance into my body. I found healthier ways to cope with stress and discomfort. Recovery is possible!

I also learned to eat more consistently and make better nutritional choices. Nutrition became essential to managing my symptoms. Eating every few hours helped keep the nausea at bay. As I maintained a healthier routine, my weight increased from 150 to 165 pounds. Now I rarely get sick.

One of the greatest things I learned is that there are medications you can take to prevent HIV. If you're at risk, go to your doctor or your nearest HIV clinic and ask for PrEP, which stands for pre-exposure prophylaxis to find out if it's right for you. I don't want anyone else to hear the words, "You are positive for HIV."

Thanks to the sacrifices, hard work and dedication of countless researchers, healthcare providers, advocates and people living with HIV, we can now live long, healthy lives with effective treatment. They never gave up on the belief that we could create a world where HIV is no longer transmitted from one person to another. The next step is ensuring that everyone knows their HIV status and has access to either treatment or prevention.

Once you're on treatment and your viral load is suppressed to an undetectable level, you cannot sexually transmit HIV. This is known as U=U, which stands for "Undetectable = Untransmittable." I have my blood work checked three times a year, and I've remained virally suppressed for the past five years without any problems on treatment. It's remarkable how far we've come, and advances continue every day.

In 2023, I began writing my book, [Learning to Live with HIV](#), as a way to process everything that was happening to my body and mind. Writing helped me make sense of my diagnosis. I wanted to document my experience so others could better understand what living with HIV is like without having to experience it themselves. I also needed to understand how this diagnosis would shape my life—and how much power I would give it.

The point of my book is to let people know that HIV is still here. If you're at risk for HIV, you can take medication to prevent acquiring it. You don't have to tell anyone, just go to your doctor and ask for PrEP.

Although today's medications allow people with HIV to live long, healthy lives, we still don't have a universal cure or a vaccine. I believe both are possible in my lifetime, but until then, we need to prevent new infections. I encourage you to check out my book and help spread the message that HIV is not over. We still have work to do before no one ever has to hear the words, "You are positive for HIV."

What three adjectives best describe you?

Determined, inquisitive and adventurous

What is your greatest achievement?

My three beautiful babies

What is your greatest regret?

Not protecting myself from HIV

What keeps you up at night?

Knowing that people in many parts of the world still lack reliable access to food, shelter and HIV treatment

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

I wish I had asked for more help during my first year after diagnosis instead of trying to bulldoze my way through it.

What is the best advice you ever received?

You are enough.

What person in the HIV community do you most admire?

Ryan White and his mom Jeanne White-Ginder.

What drives you to do what you do?

The need for more HIV housing where people can grow their own food and exchange services for room and board.

What is your motto?

Together, we make a difference!

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

out?

My meds

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

An eagle, so I could soar above all parts of this beautiful planet we call Earth.

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<http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/learning-live-with-hiv>