



Once in a Lifetime

For decades, I didn't feel comfortable describing myself as a long-term survivor.

January 8, 2024 By [Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.](#)

I tested HIV positive in 1992 the day after my 22nd birthday. For decades, I didn't feel comfortable describing myself as a long-term survivor. In my mind, that term was reserved for those who got the virus in the '80s.

As I got older and more people living with HIV were thankfully aging with the virus, I finally was OK identifying as a long-term survivor. Now, having lived with the virus for over 30 years, it just seems plainly obvious to use that phrase.

Words matter. They're also often not as straightforward as they may seem. While the phrase "long-term survivor" fits many of us, the expansion of its use as a catch-all can obscure important differences.

Case in point: adults who were born with HIV. There are about 10,000 of them in the United States. That number may not be large, but they do represent a significant segment of those living with HIV, and they share an experience those of us not born with the virus can't truly comprehend.

For example, I was indeed a young adult who tested HIV positive, but I didn't have to go through childhood and my teenage years living with the virus during the worst of the AIDS era, most likely with health concerns and at least one parent lost to the epidemic.

What we can do, however, is offer our support. To that end, our cover story focuses on adults born with HIV. The pages of POZ have spotlighted their stories over the years, but this moment is particularly special. During the most recent United States Conference on HIV/AIDS, nearly two dozen adults born with HIV took to the stage, the largest group of them ever to gather at once.

Our cover subject, Porchia Dees, was one of them. She and her colleagues declared that their voices needed to be heard. They told the attendees that from then on they wanted to be called lifetime survivors to underscore their experiences living their entire lives with the virus. Their alternate group name is dandelions, in honor of a poem of the same name written by the late lifetime survivor Mary Bowman. Go [here](#) for more.

In this special issue focusing on African Americans, we highlight Black advocates such as Porchia and related topics. For example, go [here](#) to read about Iris House marking its 30th anniversary;

you'll also learn how Jamie Lee Curtis is planning to make a movie about [Glenn Burke](#), the late baseball player lost to AIDS credited with inventing the high five; and you'll say goodbye to LGBTQ and HIV advocate [Ronnie Grace](#); and much more.

Gary Paul Wright is another excellent advocate. As the current executive director of the African American Office of Gay Concerns, he cofounded the organization in 2001 "to ensure men of color have a voice in the fight against HIV/AIDS." Go [here](#) to learn more.

To read what you need to know about taking the antibiotic doxycycline as post-exposure prophylaxis after sex to prevent chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis, go [here](#).