



With a Little Help From My Friends

I'm forever grateful for their support.

February 10, 2025 By [Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.](#)

I tested hiv positive in 1992. At 22 years old, I had graduated from college but still lived with my parents. As a closeted gay man, my life was suddenly even more complicated. The virus was the cherry on top of a hot mess.

All that changed in 1993 after a little help from my friends. I moved from my parents' house in Queens, New York, to a shared apartment in the East Village. I found a sense of belonging among like-minded folks. My despair turned into hope, which wasn't easy to achieve before effective treatment. I'm forever grateful for their support.

As unlikely as it may sound, for many of us living with HIV—me included—the virus eventually pushed us onto a better path than the one we were on. Instead of staying in the closet without a plan for my life, I found a way forward after testing HIV positive. I'd rather that the virus had never entered my life, but I'll make that lemon into lemonade for as long as I can.

Our cover subject, Bridgette Picou, can relate. In 2012, just before her 40th birthday, she had a sore throat and got antibiotics at a local clinic, which offered her an HIV test. She got an unexpected positive result. After some time to reflect on her new reality, she decided to go to nursing school to become an HIV health care provider. Please [go here](#) to read more about her journey.

Picou's advocacy, which purposefully spotlights women living with HIV, is a great fit for this special issue of POZ focused on women. We also highlight the efforts of Monica Johnson, Tamela King, Keiko Lane, Evaline Beaird and Valencia Landry.

Monica, a long-term survivor and the founder of the HIV community organization HEROES, based in Louisiana, and her friend Tamela, a high school art teacher, have produced an illustrated primer on HIV. Many images were created by Tamela's students. [Go here](#) to learn more and see the artwork.

As a teenager in Los Angeles in the late 1980s and early '90s, Keiko was one of the youngest members of both ACT UP and Queer Nation. Now a therapist and an author, she has written a memoir of those times. [Go here](#) to read more about her experiences.

As a long-term survivor, Evaline has undergone a lot in her HIV journey. In 1992, she became pregnant, then tested positive for the virus. Married to a military serviceman, she was surprised by the diagnosis, which set off a chain reaction of challenging events. [Go here](#) to find out how she's coping today.

Valencia knows what it's like to be an HIV advocate in a conservative state. A native of Louisiana, she now lives in Texas. Since testing positive for the virus in 2005, she has been an outspoken member of her community, helping other people with HIV live with dignity. [Go here](#) for more about her work.

As this issue was going to press, we learned of the passing of two dedicated and respected HIV advocates: Cindy Stine and Bryan C. Jones. [Go here](#) to read remembrances of them.