Living With the Upsides

POZ asked readers: How did HIV change your life? Here are edited excerpts from positive responses on the impact of living with the virus.

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“HIV changed my life in a positive way. Now I am more aware of my health. I visit my doctor every six months for my lab results. I am undetectable, so I really don’t have too much to worry about other than taking my meds as prescribed.”

“Being in the nursing field for 33 years, I was devastated when I was first diagnosed. Stigma was my biggest fear. I knew I had to have a strong mindset if I was to survive, so my new journey had to begin. I accepted the truth, then I poured myself into a whole new world with HIV. So now nine years later I feel stronger than I have ever felt in my life. I am determined to live my life to the fullest. Stigma no longer holds me captive. I have no time for ignorance. I live for me. I will survive with my head still high and with an infectious smile on my face!”

“HIV changed my life by showing me how marginalized the HIV community is in terms of acceptance. While still trying to figure out what my life was going to look like living with the virus, I found love and rejection. I became so aware of the rejection that for years I would not tell anyone my status. I now have a master’s degree and am working. Things are OK and I am confident that I can live a long time and be happy.”

“When I found out I was HIV positive in 2011, I cried like a baby. I got the virus through a blood transfusion in 1997. My doctor told me it was no longer a death sentence. I still find that when I see certain doctors, some will treat me as if I had leprosy. I have learned to tell them that I am undetectable and have been since 2012. I find it has made me much more of a stronger person, more independent. I fight more for my rights, especially for my health care. Happy guy here.”

“I was 26 and I thought it was the end of my life. For five years, I didn’t want to work or be around

people. I felt like I wanted to die, until I met someone who was also living with HIV and showed me love and attention. I knew then that if he could do this, so could I. In 1996, I found out I had HIV. In 2006, I found out I had AIDS. That was big game changer for me. I had to deal with all the haunted feelings all over again. But thankfully today I am undetectable and healthy. I wish that people would learn that people like us with HIV/AIDS are just like everyone else."

"I was diagnosed in 2000. The first seven years were scary. I was ashamed, stressed, misunderstood and had self-pity. I stepped away from dating. However, the more I knew about living with HIV, I got better with myself. I've since learned all I can to change my state of mind. I'm no longer scared and live every day to the fullest. I have a great support system and won't change it for the world. As of today, I don't have any regrets because God still loves me!"

"When I learned my HIV status, I started growing in a more beautiful way. My life as a person living with HIV started as being homeless in Minnesota. It got me to search what I really wanted to do and be. I wandered the South for two years, lost and lonely. I ended up in Tennessee and stumbled on the love of my life. We lived and grew there for 25 years. I helped my partner and husband of those wonderful 25 years die peacefully at home in 2016. He is still in my heart. I moved back to Minnesota and live happily there now. I am never alone."

For responses about the negative impacts of living with HIV, click here.

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