Mark Stack

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Atlanta, Georgia
Positive since 1983

My story starts back in 1983 when I was told I had GRID (gay-related immune deficiency) and had six months to live. Thirty-two years and six months later, I'm still here.

I am a widower of a 15-year partnership. He passed away from cancer. I am the last of all who I knew growing up, even my half-brother, who passed in 1995. I have carried too many boxes in my life, and I am not going to carry any more. No one should have to.

The youth of today make me a little uneasy about the spread of HIV, because they just don't care about themselves or anyone else, which is a real shame. Back in the day, when I was younger, people were more respectful to one another, even our parents. Not like today; I am no saint and I have done my share of things, but to see the kids today, WOW! Most of them can't even spell their own name. All they care about is smoking blunts, and so many are on the down-low having sex with men to get the money to buy their blunts. Then they have sex with their so-called girlfriends. More and more of the girls are getting HIV, and then the guys say it's the girls' fault, which makes me scared about our future.

They are most definitely not thinking about themselves or anyone else. I have been through some rough times in my life, seen many things and done many drugs, but the things I have seen are not like today. My story is long and I have many faults, but they made me the person I am today. I just wish I could change the world to make it a better place. I am not a miracle worker. I have seen the end of the '60s, all of the '70s, '80s, '90s and up to today, and I feel that I am going to hopefully see another 52 years, if not longer. That's how sure I am about myself. I'm strong about who I am and what I can be in this world. Even at age 52, I still have a lot to give and share.

What three adjectives best describe you?
Fun, happy and strong

What is your greatest achievement?
Living 52 years

What is your greatest regret?
Losing all that I have loved

What keeps you up at night?
Nothing

If you could change one thing about living with HIV, what would it be?
Nothing

What is the best advice you ever received?
Live life like there is no tomorrow because you are only promised today.

What person in the HIV/AIDS community do you most admire?
Myself, I have had it for 32 years.

What drives you to do what you do?
Life

What is your motto?
Don’t sweat the small stuff—life is important.

If you had to evacuate your house immediately, what is the one thing you would grab on the way out?
My two cats, they are my heart. Sylvester is 18 and Winston is 5.

If you could be any animal, what would you be? And why?
A cat, because it has nine lives.

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