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Blackpool, England
Positive since 2006

I've been in the same relationship since age 20—I am now 42. My partner is older than me by 20 years. Our relationship was not about sex; we just felt comfortable around each other and looked out for each other. We did have sex the first few years, but I needed more excitement and had affairs. My partner is always the faithful one, in bed at 10 p.m., while I stayed out until 4 a.m. enjoying life to the full.

In my late 20s, I remember experiencing the dreaded flu symptoms and a friend said I should get tested. It took me five years before I went. I was so scared to hear the results. But I was not getting better. I was getting weaker and had thrush in my mouth and golf-ball-size glands on my neck.

When I went to get tested, it was no surprise that the results were positive. But I was shocked that the specialist deferred my treatment—she thought I didn't need them yet. My viral load was high but CD4 count was 320. After another year or so she advised me to start meds when my viral load was 250. I started taking Atripla. Being told I needed start meds was worse than being told I was HIV positive.

I remember the first night I took the meds. I got in bed and didn't know what to expect. But I expected the worst. I took the pill and just lay there in a dark room. I kept turning on the light to look at my skin. After an hour, I felt like I had this protective aura all around my body, like a shield on the outside protecting me from the world. The feelings were out of this world.

I had to see my specialist next day so I told her about what I'd experienced. She said it sounded like a side effect from the drug Atripla.

I continued to take Atripla for seven years with no problems, except for the crazy, realistic dreams. Eventually the dreams became problematic, so I changed to Eviplera (known as Complera in the U.S.), which I have been on for around four months. It's a fantastic med. You have to take it with food, but I have had no side effects whatsoever.

Just before I swapped to my new meds, I got a couple of pimples on my penis. A specialist removed them and sent away for a biopsy. She was shocked that the results came back as Kaposi's sarcoma (KS). I was given an AIDS diagnosis since KS is defined as an AIDS-related condition, but it's only a name. I'm still doing well and it's been nearly six months with no more lesions.

I still have good days and bad days like healthy people do. At the moment my glands under my arm and in my groin are really sore, but I have had a cold, so that could contribute to the swelling.

HIV is not the end of the world. It's the start of a new chapter in your life. I value things more each day now. I am still together with my other half and in some ways we are stronger and closer. I did not tell him about my diagnosis for around four months after I found out. I gave myself time to get my head around it with the help of a very special friend, who may have given it me. But if it was him, I forgive him, as it takes two people to get where I am today.

My partner and I don't talk a lot about my condition. But if I have to see the specialist, he will ask how I got on. He has gone with me to some of my appointments. He is still HIV negative. We are great friends and will always be together no matter what the world throws our way.

I have loads to be thankful for and I especially appreciate all the people in the '80s, '90s and later who lost their life so young in the early clinical trials. I feel their contribution has given us the amazing meds of today.

I can go for days without thinking I am HIV positive. The other day I went to see a film called Pride at the cinema with my partner and six of our friends. The film mentioned people who had HIV/AIDS in the '80s and one guy referred to it as "anal-injected death sentence." I thought about it and was glad that for our sake times have changed so much from the '80s. We need to be grateful for this.

What three adjectives best describe you?
Genuine, caring, upfront

What is your greatest achievement?
Being me

What is your greatest regret?
None

If you could change one thing about living with HIV, what would it be?
More support for people who need support

What is the best advice you ever received?
My specialist said, "I will never tell you anything that is not true. And you will be fine."

What person in the HIV/AIDS community do you most admire?

Ryan White – he was a brave young lad.

What drives you to do what you do?
Ambition and love of life

What is your motto?
If it’s not broke, leave it alone.

If you had to evacuate your house immediately, what is the one thing you would grab on the way out?
I would grab my dogs, laptop, phone and car keys.

If you could be any animal, what would you be? And why?
A dog. Not sure why; I have lived my life like a stray cat in heat.

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