Open Your Heart

August 14, 2017 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

I remember very well how heartbroken I was after testing HIV positive. On top of the prospect of a painful death and the potential discrimination I might face, what I dreaded most of all was the idea of going through all that alone.

For the first few years, I did indeed face most of my HIV journey on my own. I had support from a handful of friends but chose to keep my HIV-positive status from my family. That decision, in addition to the fear of constant romantic rejection because of the virus, made those years quite difficult.

Much has changed for me since then. I'm lucky to have the support of my family and my wonderful partner. I'm grateful for that support, especially as I grow older. Now just three years shy of 50, I'm increasingly aware of all things related to aging, including the challenges of aging while living with HIV.

Anna Fowlkes, 70, knows a lot about the topic. Five years ago, she was doing HIV prevention outreach at an outdoor festival where musician Paul Johns, 72, was operating the sound system. She approached him and his buddies to ask them about getting tested for HIV. He thought she was flirting with him.

Five years later, Anna, who lives with HIV, and John, who is HIV negative, have built a life together. They grace our cover and prove that aging with the virus doesn't have to mean living without love. Click here to read more about their romance and how others are finding intimacy while aging with HIV.

Intimacy can take many forms. For example, the relationships between photographers and their subjects can often be quite close. The upcoming exhibit The ACT UP Portraits: Activists & Avatars, 1991–94 shows how close Stephen Barker was to his subjects, who were friends and fellow ACT UP members.

That intimacy allowed Barker to capture vulnerable and revealing portraits of activists better known for protests and marches than for quiet moments for all to witness.

As today's activists know all too well, the fight against HIV/AIDS is far from over—and what's at stake is much more than funding for programs and services. Discrimination that results from HIV stigma is perhaps as prevalent as ever, and people living with HIV still need legal help in all areas of their lives. Click here to see portraits of David Barr, Gregg Gonsalves, Mark Harrington and

more.

Thankfully, Lambda Legal is on the case. Most people know the nonprofit advocacy group as a defender of LGBT people, which is certainly true. What many people don't realize, however, is that Lambda Legal also fights for everyone living with HIV, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Click here to read how Rachel Tiven, chief executive officer of Lambda Legal, and Scott Schoettes, HIV project director at the nonprofit, are making the case for equality for LGBT people and all people living with HIV.

Schoettes was a member of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS (PACHA). He was appointed by former President Obama. On June 16, Schoettes and five other PACHA members resigned. He is one of three members living with HIV who stepped down.

Click here to find out why Schoettes and the others quit PACHA. They spell out their concerns about the Trump administration's failures to adequately address the epidemic.

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