POZ Stories: Theresa Kenney

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Theresa Kenney

Theresa Kenney got HIV on Valentine's Day 1997. It happened with a guy she met on a blind date set up by her best friend. Soon after, he was diagnosed with the virus—and alerted her to the situation. She got tested right away. It was negative. But when she repeated the test 30 days later, the result came back different.

"I stood in my best friend's kitchen crying so hard," she recalls, "but I could not tell her what was wrong. When she reached out to hug me, I cried, 'Don't touch me, I have AIDS!'

"My first appointment was with Dr. Judith Feinberg, and I am here today because of her. When I cried like a baby, she hugged me tight and said, 'Sweetie, you will not die of AIDS.'"

Feinberg was right. Today, Kenney marks a 10-year relationship with a man who is HIV negative, and she is the very proud grandmother of three. (Plus, her beloved maltipoo, Trad, just became a father of seven!) In short, Kenney is doing well with HIV, although, as she says, "I have had many ups and downs and have overcome many dark days." Since her diagnosis, Kenney got educated about the virus and started advocating for awareness. Kenney says one of her greatest achievements was sharing her story with a room full of students. "There were many questions, but they thanked me—they didn't know white women got HIV."

She reached a much larger audience in 2013 when both she and her daughter, Crystal, participated in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "Let's Stop HIV Together" multimedia campaign. (You can watch their video online.)

What drives this Cincinnati star to keep shining? "The sense of knowing I am not alone," she says. "I want my story to reach women everywhere to encourage them to get tested—it can save your life."

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