



Rick Wilson

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Baltimore, Maryland
Positive since 1984

I came out in 1976 in the era when nightclubs were wild with absolute freedom. I dove into it without looking back. From New York City to D.C., I wanted to experience all I could of the gay community.

In 1984, I joined a research study called SHARE. It was during that time that I learned I was HIV positive. I remember not really knowing how to react to the news; at the time, people were dying tenfold. I lost friends and romantic partners.

I remained healthy and under a doctor's care. I lived my life in 5-year increments. I managed to have two 10-year relationships with HIV-negative men.

I looked at HIV as being a host to an alien organism. I wanted to co-exist with HIV peacefully. I told so few people about my status back then. I did not want to be stared at as if I may drop dead at any second.

Now it is 2013. I have never been sick, with the exception of some dental issues, which I have since taken care of. I found out 15 years ago that I also have hepatitis C—a double whammy. Still, I have managed to travel the world, explore a part-time career that I love (in addition to a full-time job) and become a member of a performance art troupe.

I am often asked why I am not dating? The answer? I get tired of having to explain my status.

Hence no random hook ups, dates, etc. A friend who is a transwoman, recently said to me, "Get over yourself. Do something about it, or live your life with hairy tits." She is right. Why am I taking myself off of the market? So I am going to get back out there and see what happens. WTF. Why not!

What three adjectives best describe you?

How I describe myself and how others describe me can be different at times. I can be blunt, sweet, quiet to live with, creative and funny. We won't go into what others have said in not-so-pleasant times.

What is your greatest achievement?

In 2012, I bought a home and fulfilled a lifelong dream of spending a month in Nepal and trekking to the Mt. Everest Base camp.

What is your greatest regret?

Probably being too honest and hurting friendships as a result

What keeps you up at night?

My cat, B. Arthur. It would be nice to share my home and travel the remote corners of the world with someone. However, that does not keep me up at night.

If you could change one thing about living with HIV, what would it be?

The crap it does to your body

What is the best advice you ever received?

A man I met in San Francisco handed me a pair of electric clippers and said, "Shave—you are too beautiful for all of that hair." I did and never looked back.

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

Dr. Valli Meeks of the Plus Clinic at the University of Maryland School of Dentistry. She saved my smile.

What drives you to do what you do?

This is my one shot in this life. Make the best of it, even though that is easy to forget.

What is your motto?

Experience everything you possibly can. Most importantly, see the world.

If you had to evacuate your house immediately, what is the one thing you would grab on the way out?

My cat, of course

If you could be any animal, what would you be? And why?

A house cat. Why? So I can be kissed, cuddled and lay in the sun all day; if you piss me off, I can drop a deuce in your shoes.