Robert Ray

August 14, 2015

Compton, California
HIV Negative

In 1983, I founded the Gay & Lesbian Crisis Center in Ventura, California, because a friend had been severely beaten and had no one to call for help. In 1984, I founded AIDS CARE in Ventura because all of my friends were dying on me. Prior to this time I lived in “tubs- and tea-rooms,” but somehow I remained HIV negative. I am now 74 years old. I truly believe that the main thing we did in the ’80s to combat the AIDS epidemic was talk, talk and talk some more.

What three adjectives best describe you?
Tired, retired, satisfied

What is your greatest achievement?
Founding the two above nonprofits

What is your greatest regret?
That I didn’t have the finances to do more

What keeps you up at night?
I fear that youth today are too complacent with regard to HIV/AIDS.

If you could change one thing about living with HIV, what would it be?
I was lucky on that one—I’m HIV negative.

What is the best advice you ever received?
Don’t be afraid to speak your mind.

What person in the HIV/AIDS community do you most admire?
Dr. Anthony Fauci

What drives you to do what you do?
Today I am an activist in my city trying to reduce crime and discrimination.

What is your motto?
Keep talking until they hear you.

If you had to evacuate your house immediately, what is the one thing you would grab on the way out?
My four dogs. I can’t just take one of them.

If you could be any animal, what would you be? And why?
If I could be treated as well as I treat my dogs, it would be a dog.

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