Steve Charter

November 6, 2015

Bowling Green, Ohio
Positive since 2013

I am what is considered a “newbie.” I came out in September 2012 after many years of hiding in a deep, dark closet. I almost died from pneumonia in the summer of 2013. A relative who witnessed my deterioration and slow recovery suggested that I get tested for HIV. I went to the local health department to get tested and received a positive diagnosis on September 10, 2013. I was angry, anxious, ashamed and frightened.

I cried many times and then felt really, really stupid for becoming infected. I felt even more stupid when long-term survivors and others who are HIV negative scolded me for not being more aware or educated about the disease. I felt humiliated and violated when I had to share the names of my sexual partners with the health department. I wanted to end my life, but I received some positive encouragement and support from professionals.

My biggest fear is not finding a loving partner who will accept me with the disease. The prospect of being alone for the rest of my life is devastating to me.

The path has not been easy. The first year of my life with HIV has been a challenge. I have had days when I wanted to quit, but I am strengthened by a positive support system and the stories of long-term survivors. I am thankful for their lives, and for the lives of all those who sacrificed in the past, so that I have the medications today that keep me alive. My advice to others is to seek out a support system. Most important of all, talk about your concerns with others who understand!

What three adjectives best describe you?
Faithful, compassionate and exuberant

What is your greatest achievement?
Accepting life as a choice!

What is your greatest regret?
Having to share my burden with and rely on others for support. I have always handled my personal struggles on my own.

What keeps you up at night?
Loneliness

If you could change one thing about living with HIV, what would it be?
The stigma associated with the disease, even in the gay community

What is the best advice you ever received?
To move onward and upward!

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

What drives you to do what you do?
Being able to help others and being a positive example and influence

What is your motto?
Onward and upward!

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

If you could be any animal, what would you be? And why?
A retriever! Man’s best friend!

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