



Stories of Resilience

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Jeff Berry dreamed of becoming a famous DJ. He even moved to Chicago to make that happen. But all that changed when he tested positive for HIV in 1989 at age 30.

“HIV made me shift course,” says Berry, a 64-year-old HIV advocate. “I had to take a leap of faith and leave the life I knew behind. I also felt an obligation to those who didn’t survive to continue the work that they weren’t able to finish.”

After his diagnosis, Berry quickly learned about the power of community thanks to the Test Positive Aware Network (TPAN). The TPAN meetings that he attended helped him navigate life with HIV.

Berry’s connection with TPAN turned into volunteering and eventually a full-time job. He worked with the organization’s HIV magazine, *Positively Aware*. He started out answering phones as well as handling magazine distribution and advertising.

“Positively Aware was always by people with HIV for people with HIV,” Berry explains.

In 2005, he became editor-in-chief of *Positively Aware*, a position he held for about 18 years, until last year. Although Berry didn’t have a journalism degree, he was passionate about helping others.

In 2015, Berry cofounded The Reunion Project, an organization for HIV long-term survivors who have felt “left behind by the very systems and organizations we helped to create,” Berry says.

Last September, Berry became its first executive director. He oversees the group and works to secure funding for staff and programming.

Every year, The Reunion Project hosts several two-day town halls around the country to honor long-term survivors. These town halls are a safe space for people to come together and share their stories of resilience. But they also raise awareness of the issues this community faces, such as stigma and discrimination.

The next town hall is September 22 and 23 in Charlotte, North Carolina. There will be another one this November (details to come).

In addition to these in-person town halls, the organization hosts virtual ones as well as webinars for community members.

“We also developed a grant opportunity for people to apply and receive mini-grants so that they can create their own smaller programs in their local community,” Berry explains.

He remains committed to ensuring that people living with HIV get the resources and services they need to enjoy healthy lives. Most important, he wants to make sure everyone has the ability to make the right choices for themselves.

“I’m just really grateful to be able to continue doing this work,” Berry says.

Despite all his accomplishments, Berry remains humble. “I don’t feel like a hero,” he says. “My heroes are the people in the HIV community who we never hear about but who continue to make a difference every day in the lives of people with HIV.”