5 Things I've Learned About Having HIV

July 18, 2012 By Aundaray Guess

As I reflect back on the diagnosis of my disease I can honestly say it has changed me and my perception of life. I may sound like a broken record as I harp on when I first learned my status 25 years ago, but back then it was a different disease. Back then there was no certainty of how long you would be on this earth. The stigma was much more pronounced as people rallied to stop kids with HIV from going to certain schools or swimming in public pools while family members feared the toilet would get them infected from a positive family member. Yes it was a different time.

But after all those years I have learned much. I learned not only about the disease but my ability to look at the positive aspects of it and enjoy a wonderful life. It was lessons I wish I knew but now that I know I would like to share with others. I call this the **5 Things I've Learned About Having HIV**

It's Not a Death Sentence

When I was first told my news I thought for sure I had only five years left to wrap up all affairs as I felt I was soon to be leaving the earth. I used Dick Clark New Year Eve's celebration as my countdown. I just knew each drop of the ball was going to be my last. But a funny thing happened on the way to the forum as I got to experience more New Year ball drops and the death sentence I gave myself was no longer there. I realized that HIV doesn't mean death. Of course it's not the easiest road to navigate but what is life without challenges. Along with adopting a healthy lifestyle which included diet, exercise and treating my body like a temple and not allowing negative substances such as drugs, food and people, invade it, I was on my way to living a blessed life. And after 25 years I am not a long term survivor but in a long term position to live the best life one can.

2. **It's Okay to Cry**

I didn't cry when I heard my news. Not that I was trying to be macho but I just didn't want to give the disease the luxury of breaking me. Tears that should have fell, I kept them behind a wall and my smile was the outside gate that gave one the impression that life was good. I don't know when I had my first cry, but I know that all it took was one hole from life to poke that wall and the dam burst open. The wonderful thing was that instead of feeling like I was lost, I instead felt freer. It was like my tears were a monsoon that rained down on me and washed away all my pain. At that point I gave myself permission to cry. Having any type of disease is something we're not used to and if we cry, we have every right. Even now I give myself permission as I've earned

those tears, but I’m careful to not stand too long in the flood. Crying is not a sign of weakness but can be a cleansing of the soul that makes room for good things. It’s okay to cry.

When I make this statement I don’t mean to say that we should accept stigma. I say it in hopes that others don’t let stigma be a barrier to their happiness. I know from my own experiences how people can be ignorant and show it either by their actions or the words they choose. I learned that if I let people’s words direct my life I would be on a path of their choosing instead of mine. I learned that you will be stigmatized because of HIV. But you’ll also be stigmatized for your gender. You’ll be stigmatized for your age, your race, your height, hell even for the clothes you choose to wear that day. People just love to stigmatize as most have to put a label on you or find a way to place you in a box to understand you. And most of us fear what we don’t understand which results in stigma. As my mama would say, “Do You”. Live the life you want to live.

> Makes you feel like a leper. But love is an amazing thing because it comes when you least expect it and the greatest love is the one you give yourself. That love radiates and makes others want to love you. Living a bitter life only attracts rotten apples and bad intentions. By giving myself the gift of love I have found a great soul mate and despite my circumstances as a negative person he accepts me flaws and all. But I learned that I also had to accept my own self. And 13 years still going strong.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/5-things-ive-learned