Aging With HIV Since Childhood #NHAAD

September 18, 2020 By Shawn Decker

It's National HIV/AIDS and Aging Awareness Day.

Say that one five times in a row real fast.

Although I've been diagnosed with HIV for thirty-three years now, I'm still a somewhat young man at tender age 45. I know a lot of people view their forties as "over the hill", or as having one foot in the grave. Maybe there's a few toenail clippings in the grave, but certainly nothing more. I'm not embarrassed that, as of this year, I refuse to walk around my house without slippers on my feet. And that vintage robe that I bought for a New Year's Eve concert a few years ago? Well, now I love nothing more than wearing it while watching an episode of The Golden Girls. Sure, I've noticed more aches and pains in the last five years than was the case before, but overall I'm happy with where my health is. I'm taking one pill a day for HIV, I have a loving and stable relationship... it's the kind of future I'd have wished for when I was diagnosed with HIV at age 11.

Of course, I understand that there are certain health risk factors that are expedited for those living with HIV. It's impossible to foresee what challenges await me in my fifties and beyond if I'm lucky enough to get there (we could all go at any moment). But, one thing HIV, hemophilia and hepatitis has taught me is that, whatever it is, I'll be okay. High cholesterol is a burden for most. For me it's gravy, because no one thought that I'd see the 1990s, much less be in a position where it's not out of the realm of possibilities that I could live to be 90.

I guess, ultimately, what I'm trying to say to anyone else who is considered to be aging with HIV is: keep hanging in there. If you're a fighter, keep fighting. If you're a lover, keep loving. Keep being you, because you are so much more than your medical resume.

Positively Your,
Shawn

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