From My First “HIV+ Birthday” To Now

July 16, 2021 By Shawn Decker

Growing up, I loved playing computer games. They were slightly different than what my Nintendo provided. A bit clunkier, but charming nonetheless. When our first computer arrived at the Decker household, it felt like the beginning of something special. It didn’t do everything that was advertised- or even come close, probably as much our fault as the new technology’s... but there was a sense of promise there.... untapped potential.

Today I’m 46. An old family friend sent me a photo that I haven’t seen in decades, taken around the time of my first post-HIV diagnosis birthday, age 12. I’m wearing a fresh shirt, part of a mall shopping spree to get ready for the start of middle school. 7th grade would be my first time back since getting kicked out of school due to ignorance about HIV, which left me with more time to play video games during the last two weeks of 6th grade.

Any new HIV diagnosis is hard, whether it was 1987 or yesterday. That kid, me, got through things pretty well. Puberty was a huge distraction from HIV, but it was also a bitter reminder. It certainly complicated my increasing curiosity about sex. Bartering for dirty magazines with my friend’s older brother helped smooth the transition over. That computer was useless on those fronts, there was no internet connection outside of military bases and government agencies.

Back to the picture. You can see a wrestling ring on the screen. It took me forever to learn how to play that and win without the aide of a joystick. What wasn’t hard was eight years and a lifetime later, when I sat down at a computer that was connected to the internet, and I started writing about HIV for the first time. I was ready, and the words flowed. I made myself laugh as the dark humor came out, jokes at my own expense. I thought about how strangers would perceive me and a big part of the reason for going public was to show people that those living with HIV were normal humans like everybody else. But those jokes weren’t just to set others at ease, they set me at ease, too. I was discovering my niche in real time, and thanks to the advancements in technology and a receptive audience to my website, my life would never be the same again.

Now, here I am all these years later. 46 years old. That fucking rules. I know how fortunate I am, but even before HIV I was taught that tomorrow is not promised to anyone, a lesson learned during trips to the hospital due to some hemophilia-related dramas. Psychologically, though, being taught to live in the moment and enjoy the time you have that isn’t spent in a hospital certainly helped me deal with the uncertain future that HIV teased.

So here I am. Sitting at a computer. Writing out this time capsule of what I’m feeling today. Which

is happiness and gratitude. I hope to have more birthdays and adventures ahead, but I don’t feel entitled to that- which is good. It forces me to look around and fully appreciate the right now.

I hope this message finds you well and happy with your right nows.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/first-hiv-birthday-now