



Float Like a Butterfly, Sting Like High Cholesterol

Welp, my current drug regimen honeymoon phase ended. HIV med? Fine. Hemo treatments? Fine. New bipolar med? Same side effect, different day.

August 1, 2026 By [Shawn Decker](#)

Welp. I came in overconfident on my previous blog post. Like Apollo Creed in his exhibition bout with Soviet-block amateur sensation, Ivan Drago. Which, by the way, is a movie-going experience (Thanksgiving Day 1985 in Roanoke, VA) that scarred me.

I loved Apollo Creed. My mom says, in my toddler years, I lit up when the character's inspiration, Muhammad Ali, fought on TV. "Baba Dali!" I'd say. In my teenage years, when USA Network's Tuesday Night Fights became a ritual, I fell in love with the real sport of boxing.

Around 18 or so, I ordered a collection of HBO Boxing tapes on all of the legends, from Jack Johnson, to Dempsey and Joe Louis. To Ali.

Speed bowling, regularly, is part of my exercise.

And even though reading was- and always has been until lately- hard for me, I bought a book on Ali, becoming not just a fan of his athleticism, but his charm in how he approached the media. He possessed the spirit of the MTV generation before the network was born, but had the heart and mind of the activists of his time, and he shares that generational DNA with the greatest HIV/AIDS activists.

Fighting for the people, while questioning the motives of the cold machine that drives division, and sows discontent.

I respected his stance for peace, too, which robbed him of three prime, physical years for athletes that didn't have the modern advances in nutrition and training that allow for extended careers.

Missing those years, I believe, is why he fought on a few too many times at the end of his career. After boxing, he became the big teddy bear I saw through a toddler's eyes, promoting peace and love and- even with his gift of gab due to Parkinson's- he still found ways to make people laugh.

A young artist named Will Stroud did that portrait of me. "You got a cool look."

In 1996, when I was in NYC for the first time to be interviewed for POZ, I was so nervous leaving

my bedroom, where I curated every word and image on my website. “Just be yourself,” I told myself. When I saw that a street vendor was selling Ali goods, I bought two framed pictures of my hero.

One, his iconic rematch with Sonny Liston, the Tyson of his day, the man he’d won the heavyweight title from. The second bout, many believe Liston took a dive, other’s think the phantom punch landed with cosmic consequences.

But the picture, of Ali standing over Liston, screaming for him to get up and fight- that’s worth more than another eight rounds or, about as long as I think Liston would have lasted on his best day against the new champ.

The second framed photo I bought?

An older Ali, clutching onto Larry Holmes, a future great in his prime. Like the other picture, it was a gross mismatch, only this time my guy drew the short straw. As an Ali fan, I’d always wished that he’d hung the gloves up in a losing bid against someone like Holmes, but he fought on even after Father Time told him- in that picture, in that ring- that the winning days were finally over.

Anyway, that was a long way from the Rocky IV reference. But things I’d regret not sharing while the typing fingers and memory were hot.

In my previous blog entry, I’d mentioned a lot of things, including healthy lifestyle changes and an honest attempt to get my two-decades-long high cholesterol down. Never before have I eaten so well. Or exercised and done yoga every day.

Not the way I like to get high. Or liked, I'm the cleanest I've beenest since June.

In 2018, I'd gotten my cholesterol down to a normal level, the only time I've ever achieved the magical feat in recent memory. But the lifestyle changes were unsustainable back then. I did feel like I had the game plan in my back pocket, and over the last month and half I pulled it out.

I was overconfident on my birthday, when labs were drawn early in the day. No joke, at 11:58pm, I checked MyChart: my cholesterol was spiking. The LDL looks like a rocket ship heading into space.

I get labs within the next week, I'll report back. I'm still eating well, a friend suggested a vitamin that doesn't destroy the human liver, but that's in my back pocket for after this next round of labs.

I want to see if, naturally, things settle down. The culprit, I discovered, is a side effect of my bipolar disorder medication, which I started in June after getting the diagnosis. I had dinner with a friend last week who shares my medical resume (hemophilia, HIV), and I told him: "I had six weeks, taking three medications and feeling great, like none of them were slowly trying to kill me."

I paused.

"I'll cherish those six weeks for the rest of my life."

My new HIV doc is going to put me in contact with a dietician. I can't take statins; I've tried twice and they make me feel incredibly awful. I read that a new cholesterol drug has been approved, but I really love my lean mean 3-drug regime: Odefsey for HIV (I never believe the spelling, f'n come on with these names), Altuviiiio for hemophilia (are you f'n kidding me with these f'n names?) and Seroquel.

It's like a game of f, marry or kill with these names. I think I'm f'n and marrying Seroquel and just ghosting on the other two to avoid charges. You can never be too safe with HIV criminalization stuff.

The good news? Unlike 2018, my lifestyle changes are here to stay. I feel great. There's been a lot of change in my life, but the present feels like a gift. My health is first, and my art is second.

Oh, shortly after the MyShart reading, I did have a plate of spaghetti with meat sauce at a local diner because, as Depeche Mode sang, "you've got to make this life livable."

So, wish me luck on the next poke. My cholesterol has been elevated for so long due to HIV, medication side effects and hereditary predisposition, unlike the last blog post, I don't have any idea what's going to happen this time.

I'm fully at peace with that, as I wish you luck on your saga. Be kind to yourselves out there.

Positively Yours,

