Independence!

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I never imagined that I would someday say this, but living with HIV is as much of a gift as it is a curse.

We all know why HIV is a curse - the fact of the matter is that it just plain sucks having to worry about whether every unusual ache, pain, cough or cold is a symptom or a sign that we are in decline or whether that immeasurably small cut on our index finger may invite some exotic infection that cannot be cured. We worry about who will pay for the cost of our care, and whether the care that we will someday need will be there for us at all. We worry about those we love, and when and how we should tell them that we are infected with a pathogen like no other in human history.

But there IS an upside to living with HIV. Those same worries, those same fears of discrimination and the stigmatization that can be so emotionally paralyzing, allow us to understand the true nature of life: that in the grand scheme of things, we are all little more than parasites on a dust mote, as likely to be wiped off the scrim of existence by some intergalactic squeegee man as we are to endure as part of a greater god. And when we consider that fact, when we tune out the worries and fears of daily life and tune into the wondrous imperfection of the world around us, it brings us closer to understanding that happiness is never measurable by the steel and stone monuments we may leave behind or whatever wealth we may have accumulated, but only by our own memories while we are alive to enjoy them.

This Friday, the 4th of July, will mark the 232nd anniversary of the day that we Americans declared our independence from a foreign nation that was then our common oppressor but is now our nation's greatest ally. But just as we declared our political independence so many years ago, let us all declare our independence from the oppression and unhappiness that those of us who live with HIV still endure today, and from our common viral enemy.

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