



# The Invite Into A New Chapter

I'm in the midst and mist of the biggest change of my life since my HIV diagnosis date 39 years ago. If it's healthy to do so, I'll share the journey.

July 13, 2026 By [Shawn Decker](#)

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On the last Saturday of the year that was my first foray into my 50s, I wanted to do something special.

Madonna's new album, and my sturdier-than-ever arthritic left ankle, were the inspiration. As was the last month of my life, which has seen a lot of change that I'll dip more into at a later time... if I feel up for it.

Right now, I'm literally getting my feet back under me and, oddly, I've never been healthier. It is, in part, due to a bipolar disorder diagnosis I received in early June. A keepsake memento for what was, undoubtedly, the Worst Day of My Entire Life. On a calendar, that date registers as 06/08/2026.

Frought with feelings and unnecessary dangers, thanks to friends who seem to have learned everything they know from watching a very special episode of Friends. Still, I carry no malice or anger, I literally lost my mind and, as a result, had never had to fight harder for my life than I did on the Absolute Worst Day of My Entire Life.

A day that will always carry a modicum of PTSD, a term I first heard about in Paul Hardcastle's runaway hit, "19". Despite my newfound balance on an ankle with practically no cartilage (I have no time or patience for spellchecking cartilage, I think I just got closer though) and relief in the form of Seroquel, the latest drug added to my daily routine, reliving that day comes with a certain amount of psychological heebie jeebies.

What I'm here to write about is, last Saturday.

Sent this to Sean Strub, wasn't intended for public ridicule.

I put on the AIDS Memorial T-Shirt that I wore onstage in my 80s cover band, which I organized.

Our best shows got in just under the wire in 2019, before that worldwide virus chopped us all off at the knees. The 80s Nights were also Stranger Things themed, the decor was just fabulous.

Still, before I left the house for soundcheck, I had anxiety: something I've lived with my entire life, but something I wouldn't treat until 2025. But, when I looked in the mirror to check my luke one last time, I focused on the shirt. I quietly invited any spirits hanging around to join me later onstage and, no joke, in the best moments I felt them.

In real time.

Which made for the best times, the ones we can't really properly convey, over coffee or in a blog post.

This movie made me cry, which I needed.

So, on Saturday I went to a movie- so I could stay awake for the 10pm doors at the basement

dance club below a restaurant I really love eating at. Healthy eating, the healthiest of my life... my new HIV doc suggested treating my longtime bully, high cholesterol, with statins.

But I've tried twice. Most recently a decade ago, when my primary care physician got real pushy, the way 80s commercials told me I'd be approached by strangers with, armed with illegal street drugs.

"OK," I said, with trepidation (refuse to spellcheck anything, I wouldn't come back to type if I did). With trepidation, I said: "But, put me on the lowest possible dose, then I'll do it."



A just-the-tip type agreement. Well, what do you know, I felt horrible after like three days on the shit. At least in the 80s anti-drug commercials, you got the sense that the taker of the free illegal street drugs at least got to enjoy a hot start before the inevitable demise to come.

So, when my new HIV doc suggested the quick fix, I instead offered to do the impossible: change my diet and lifestyle. Which has been improbably easy, considering the more dramatic changes in my life. Not only did I start eating tomatoes for the first time, I started swimming in my brother's pool.

I feel so good. Also, when I got diagnosed with bipolar disorder, it wasn't a huge surprise. Years before mom passed in 2022, I'd guessed that she was undiagnosed bipolar, which unlocked a lot of levels of grace. Also, she had a really hard childhood- sure, mine had lots of bloodshed and hospital visits with hemophilia, and that whole getting kicked out of school after HIV...

But, I wasn't working a job to support my family at age 12, among other disadvantages that she experienced. I honestly look back and think Mom and I shared our childhoods in the 80s, something I'm honoring right now as I work on a follow-up to my humorous medical memoir, *My Pet Virus* (2006).

Which kind of embarrassed her, with all the sex talk. Her lame church friends were all like, "You had the PORN-O-graphetti movies... in your HOME?" Fuck those assholes that read my book and then through the best bits in their hard-working, church organists face.

Fuck them all the way to the hell that is their miserable, daily experiences in their bodies, guided by pea-sized brains that birds collectively chirp insults at.

Anyhoo, I've never felt more calm and centered than I do now. I take two pills a day, 1 for HIV in the morning and 1 for bipolar disorder- something I've lived with for a very, very long time I now realize- before bed.

I've had 7 hours of this type of sleep in my life; even when my body was so fatigued from not treating HIV that, in my early 20s, I had to sleep about 11 hours to even be able to function. That was survival sleep.

This is sir-thrival sleep.

My life is: health first, art second these days. I do relaxing art before Seroquel sends me off to sleep with the angels.

I'm not suggesting you lose your mind to get some... but... (80s commercial music, fog machine,

neon sign above a alleyway club)... “I got something that’ll really make you fly.”

I jest, my hope for you is that you make peace with your diagnosisseeez, whatever they may be.

So, did I dance?

No. There was a bigscreen TV behind the DJ, so I ordered a mocktail and sat at the bar to watch some World Cup action. Game was tied, near the end. Before I left, a friendly guy offered to buy me a drink- when I told him I wasn’t drinking he ordered me a seltzer water.

It was a pleasant experience, and I got home early, in time to watch some TV with Dad before I retired. Right now, I’m staying in what was Mom’s bedroom, where she felt the worst she ever felt in her life...

It’s ironic that, well, I’m in there feeling my best. My heart hurts, but I know that, on my birthday this Thursday, when I return to what was once home to have a psych doctor’s appointment and acupuncture (it’s how I par-tay, bay bay), I’m also getting labs.

My new HIV doc is going to be stunned with the results. I did cheat yesterday, eating a ham sandwich. But I don’t want to peak too early with this strategy. It’s kind of like the dance club, maybe next time I’ll hear a song I recognize, or go request some new Madonna?

I love the new album. And, when I dance, just like in 2019, I will not be alone.

Exploring more, I love taking walks on a nice day, peeking into novelty stores. Finding gems and inspiration.

The spirits will be right beside me- unlike a lot of friends I've lost over the last month, people who

simply could not find the words for their friend who damn near perished, multiple times, on The Worst Day of His Life.

It's okay, real life and emotions and people who speak through them may as well be wearing a Mork & Mindy costume. It's that foreign, and I'm tired of explaining myself to people that more resemble the church ladies that shamed my mother over my book.

The spirits, and the true friends, they always seem to drift in when I need them.

Hope this finds you well on your journey- be kind, to yourself and others. It's a long hard slog out there, don't be afraid to shave off a few of your rough edges... which may be internal, external or simply existential. Part of living is surviving any of the forms that loss can take, as it crashes your party.

From my experiences, it's simply the tax of being on this side of the other side.

Positively Yours,

Shawn

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