Meet Bry, the Eccentric Uncle and HIV Long-Term Survivor

The first-time author tells us how he turned his back on anger and despair

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Bryan ‘bry’ Guyll has been living with HIV for over two decades. He recently wrote a book, The Surreal Life of the Eccentric Uncle, where he chronicles his life, from his first boyfriend, to receiving his HIV diagnosis, to present day. We caught up with bry to learn more about his experience as a first-time author, as a long-term survivor, and how he maintains his positive outlook on life.

Tell me a little bit about yourself.

I’m 54 and a single gay Washingtonian. I’m HIV positive for 23 years and healthy. Laughter and joy are top priority in a healthy me. I’m one who is outgoing and upbeat but it has taken me a lifetime to get to where I am today. I try to focus on the optimistic view of life, and people tell me that I’m too kind. I will never again allow anger and hate to control me. Worry just fuels the fire so I try to dampen it out. My life is never boring as I’ve always included adventurism with it. What comes along for the ride is a dash of quirkiness. I know myself, which allows me to be in a settled state of contentment.

What inspired you to share your story so publicly and write a book?

First, I have to say that I’m no writer and I’d never had any interest on that subject, whatsoever. Writing a book wasn’t even on the table of things to accomplish, and it never entered my mind. I’m going to walk you down memory lane and this is how it all began:

Detail from Bryan Guyll’s nonfiction book

While I was at my lowest, I had to do whatever it took to keep me sane so I decided to turn my back on all that anger, hate and blame by writing down the positive attributes in my life. One day, I realized that my writing became stories, which in turn saved my life as they brought me back to the here and now. Do you know what I got out of writing? The most important aspect a person needs when they’re at their lowest and that is “Purpose.” As I glanced down, I saw it. What I saw was how to put that puzzle of stories together as one: A book.

That purpose helped get rid of the following feelings: Uselessness, Helplessness, Homelessness, Inconveniencing People or Guilt and Dread. What I got out of it is Hope, Drive, Optimism, Truth and the possibility of an opportunity to get out. And I did and had. You see, my story is more than a little blurp within the continuum of life.

Your book has song suggestions throughout. How has music helped you throughout your life?

Music has swayed me as far back as I can remember. My emotions were linked to the music I was

listening to. When I was happy, I'd play upbeat gay disco music. When I was depressed or heartbroken then my songs of choice were sad and lonely. Love is a whole other experience in music. Music is the language of love and is the remedy for healing the heart. The love songs I listened to allowed me to mentally dance in an airy daydream. Simply lovely.

It sounds like you've come a long way from the unhelpful, curt doctor who provided you HIV diagnosis 22 years ago. How have you found providers who are a better fit for you?

Plain and simple: Research. Today, there's no excuse as education is everywhere. What can affect your choice is being in denial. Without your tune up, you'll break down fast. HIV treatment works. Taking control will boost your survival, tenfold. For me, I prefer a gay doctor and I had two of the best. I was fortunate. The right doctor should show their enthusiasm when educating you on, well you.

Like my Charlotte doctor, your doctor needs to have the art of conversation down and be able to talk in laymen's terms. You need to be completely comfortable on any topic at hand. No question is a stupid question if you are unaware. You know it's okay to stand up to your doctor. You'll be a completely new person with the love of life when you've chosen the right doctor. It's that important.

What advice would you give someone else who wants to share their story?

Life is one big story filled with lessons which includes every scenario from the beginning of time. Your story is included but with one exception: Your journey is yours and yours alone which makes your story special. With that said, everyone has their own adventure to share, and with everyone being different, there will never be a day without something new.

Telling your story will surprise you about — you. If you feel lost, remembering is the biggest key to solve that problem as it helps guide you back to where you were. They say you need to know where you came from to know where you're going. That's true, here. Writing will wake your third eye up and the love of storytelling will arrive with ease.

What keeps you motivated?

Every breath I take. Knowing that I'm okay. My support team. My family. Thinking positive. Knowing myself. What the future has for me. My mottos. My wall of accomplishment. Maybe I put a small dent in our community. Lastly, my contribution to our community: My book.

Anything else you'd like to share?

I'd like to share my outlook on life with HIV. My motto is: Think Positive. Feel Positive to Become

Positive. My motto on HIV/AIDS: I’m not living to die but dying to live. People ask me how can I be so positive living with HIV and the stigma associated with it. I say ‘I have to’ because I have no choice. If I don’t death would be that much sooner.

It’s easy to get lost in life and feel unworthy. I know. Here’s what I have to say: Whatever’s circling around and haunting you, it’s your choice to have a good day or a bad one. No matter what, that stuff hasn’t changed. That stuff always works itself out, so don’t allow it to control you and your thoughts. Negative thoughts bring chaos, and positive thinking brings order.

And finally, I want to leave on a note above the rest. I had an epiphany recently and that is it’s okay to make mistakes and still be successful. With that said, I recommend creating what I call “My wall of accomplishment.” It’ll be a constant reminder that you’re okay because you are.

The Surreal Life of the Eccentric Uncle is available at rosedogbookstore.com or order over the phone at 1-800-788-7654.

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