Is Mine A Normal Life?

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In these days of HIV as a “chronic” or “manageable” disease, is my HIV positive life normal, more or less? When I was diagnosed with HIV, I was a seventy-year-old married woman. I was a recently retired bankruptcy attorney. I had just moved from Vegas to Bakersfield, CA with my husband of four years and our dog, Pooh Bear. I’d been in declining health for a couple of years. I thought it was fibromyalgia; I was in pain. My husband thought I was edging toward dementia. Life at that time did not feel normal.

So that’s not a good starting point for measuring what it’s like now that I know what’s wrong (HIV) and I’m dealing with it. I measure “normal” as something akin to happy and healthy. Yes, I’m happy. As to healthy, that’s a hard one to answer.

Like anyone my age, life has been full of ups and downs. No straight lines around here, either before or after HIV. So, it’s hard for me to measure if mine is a “normal life.” All I know is that I’m happy. My life is full. And while my health has its challenges (not all of them related to HIV), I’m able to get out of bed every morning and go to work. I have more opportunities to contribute to the community that I live in (and more time to do so). My faith has deepened. I have a happy marriage and lots of friends. I’m engaged in a new career (copywriting) and, although I’d like to be earning more money, I’m productive. I’ve written a book and I’m working on a screenplay (a ghost story). And I still enjoy my morning coffee.

But is my life normal? Perhaps others won’t think so. After all, I have what’s still thought of as a deadly disease. But in every way that matters to me, the answer has to be yes. I know that’s not true for everyone living with HIV. I know I’m one of the lucky ones because I have a support system and I can afford my meds.

Maybe the real question is, “would I trade what I have now if I could go back to my HIV-free days?” And the answer is “no.” I’ve gained too much, learned too much, and given too much to ever go back. I wouldn’t be able to give that answer, of course, if I’d acquired HIV in earlier days. So, in that regard, I’m very blessed.

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