What if...

October 25, 2013 By Aundaray Guess

What if....

Those two words separately have little meaning but combined has a powerful way of influencing your life. To say those words makes you enter the road to doubt and hesitation. We want to use the combined words to prevent us from self-harm but sometimes don't realize the harm it does to self. I adopted the words into my language and even today fight to keep them at bay but they were once so pronounced in my life. The words 'what if' truly came into my life at a specific moment. I would have to say the 'what if's' of my life were truly born during the early days of me discovering that I had HIV.

In those early days after walking home from the doctor and trying to make sense of the news he just shared to me of my status there were two thoughts running around in my head. Am I going to die of this disease and what will people think of me? I wanted to share the devastating news right away but the 'what if's' came pouring in filling my brain with uncertainties. Questions that I couldn't answer but I still produce came, questions such as what if they reject me. What if they blame me? What if they tell me this is what happens to people who are just like me, gay? Knowing that to share my news I also had to reveal my other secret, my sexuality, that was sheltered by my 'what if's'. I think no matter how hard I tried to find a workable solution in the end each scenario had the same outcome and not in a good way.

My life went on but I wasn't happy in the space. I was living in a house made of fear, surrounded by walls of missed opportunities and covered with a roof of depression. Although I wanted to evict myself from that space I didn't have the nerve to. You can say that the 'what if's' kept me prisoner as I looked out the window envy of others who were living their happy lives. But that door before me gave me pause and remained lock despite me holding the key in my hand to release myself.

Another aspect of living a 'what 'life is recognizing the limits it places on you when it comes to dating or forming a relationship, sexual or non-sexual. This is when your doubts go into overdrive. Some classic thoughts I had were:
What if they find out about my secret?
What if they discover my medication in the bathroom cabinet?
What if they fall in love in love with me?

I then asked myself what if I start to live a negative life? Not negative in the state of mind way but negative as if I was never diagnosed with HIV. That all my interactions about my health were a lie

despite who was asking, whether it was my doctor, my family, friends and those I was interested in romantically. That my response to them was that I am HIV negative and no way am I one of those people. Knowing that in my responses I was living a life created by my ’what if’.

I was so scared of my ’what if’s’ coming true and living in such a place of fear it seemed my life was on freeze frame. Yet there was a small light of hope when I decided to let my shield down and not use my status as a barrier. When I finally accepted my status and stopped denying myself the ability to love. You would think the ’ what ifs’ were exorcised by me freeing myself but even in that space of me sharing my status with someone in my dating life I developed a different strain of ’what ifs’.

They were now reformulated and questioned:
What if I give them HIV?
What if I re-infect them or they re-infect me?

And the one that really made me pause

What if I die on them?

My language of what ifs were truly making my life have less value and if I examined all the questions of my ’what ifs’ I would see that it was mostly for the benefit of others and what they thought of my life. In my unselfish moment I was being selfish to myself and denying my own self a rich full life. Ironically when I questioned what if I die on them I should have looked at myself as I was already slowly dying mentally and not because of my HIV status but because of my own self-inflicted limitations. My ’what ifs’ had dictated my movements, my non-movements, my dreams and goals and I was tired of it stealing my joy. I had heard of the benefits of jumping into the waters and learning to swim but I was so scared of drowning that I stayed on secure ground.

I can say that my life took a change for the better when I finally quieted my ’what ifs’. It took finding who I was and recognizing I was more than HIV. I rewrote the definitions of ’what if’ and instead of it ending with a negative conclusion, replacing it with positive outcomes. I had to let go of trying to control the endings and just let it happen and then deal with the ramifications good or bad. And in that moment recognizes it was not the word ’what if’ that I had issues with but it was the word control. I wanted to be one who decided to reject me. I wanted to control who knew my status. I wanted to be in control because handing the keys of my control to others I felt made me weak and what if they couldn’t handle the responsibility.

By removing or limiting my ’what if’ and lessening my control I started to see the difference it made. With the shield down more people came into my life. And yes some people did leave but they only made room for others. And the greatest benefit was I started to truly live. I started to reclaim my dreams. Things I thought I could never do I accomplished:
I went back to school and got my degree.

I quit the unsatisfactory job and fell in love with one I liked
I learned to swim literally as I always wanted to but had a fear
I started a blog just for me and a few friends and now helping strangers navigate the world of HIV

I would never had accomplish any of these things if I had never stop trying to be always in control and having the ’what if’s’ run loose in my thinking.
I finally used my key and left that house of fear.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.