Reflections On My Life With HIV

June 5, 2017 By Larry Watson

How is everybody doing? Today, as I prepared for work and looked at myself in the mirror, I didn't like what I saw. HIV has been renting space in my body for 30 years. Now, at the age of 51, I've spent the best part of those years on antiretroviral medications to manage the virus. During that time, I've worked very hard to improve my life and my health.

Truly, those drugs allowed me to survive. But the one side effect that continues to drive me into a deep depression is the frustrating fat distribution that's a result of the HIV meds doctors initially prescribed for me.

For most of my life, I've been an athlete and naturally my body was ripped. When I saw myself, I felt good about how I looked. Notice that I said I felt good about how I looked not how anybody else felt about how I looked. That's because what anyone else thinks means nothing to me! What I think and feel about me is most important.

Several weeks after I acknowledged feeling bad about what I saw in the mirror, I found myself sitting in a hospital bed after spending three days there for a problem that neither the doctors nor I could figure out.

Despite being hit by fever, diarrhea, pains in my stomach and groin area, chills and nausea, when I was released my viral load was still undetectable. My CD4 count was 836 and my percentages were great. I thought about never ever being sick during my few years on this earth. Sure, I suffered from seasonal colds every year, but that was it. There was a time that I wouldn't go near a hospital, but, as I've aged with HIV, I realize that it's essential I get all those checkups for folks over 50. Can this be a positive side effect of living with the virus?

As I've grown older, I'm also amazed by what a smile and some laughter can do for your health. I spent one weekend laughing and joking with my wife and it seemed as if my energy level tripled. Depression and mood swings were always a part of my existence until I began waking up smiling just happy to be alive.

These days I laugh at the silliest jokes and smile at the shape of clouds or the sunset. Now, I look at life as having another day to bring joy to me and the people I love. My passion in life is to help others and this also keeps me happy. You see, HIV doesn't define me, and never will!

And so my life continues as I look forward to each and every new day. I'll continue to let you know what I experience, think and feel. Thank you for allowing me to share.

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