

## How I find the **JOY** in every day

by **Ronnilyn Pustil**



*HIV may have led me to the love of my life. Within two years of my diagnosis, I was engaged.*

### **LAURA, 37**

Board Member of GNP+NA (Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS North America) and Member of PASF (Projet action sida femmes), Montreal  
Diagnosed in 2005

I find joy in thinking and doing and planning and imagining all sorts of possibilities.

Being diagnosed with HIV is life altering. For me, the diagnosis ushered in a range of positive implications. I now actively think about joy. I crave and cultivate moments of happiness. I'm moved by things that at one time might not have stirred my spirit. Lightning struck me and in its wake is a light within me. I let life happen, savouring all sorts of opportunities. At the same time, I am motion, forging straight ahead. Accepting, valuing and being easy on myself are catalysts for joy.

HIV may have led me to the love of my life. Within two years of my diagnosis I was engaged. We're currently planning our wedding. This is a journey (more like an odyssey!) that gives us immense joy.

One thing that makes me hopeful is the prospect of creating a family. This is a contemplative joy. You can't know how many kids you'll be blessed with—

not specifically because of HIV, but biologically, cosmically—so it's a point of true wonder.

HIV has led me to discover and join a sorority of sisters around the world who collaborate and find strength in collective action and support. I glean joy from close friends who generously support me and whom I support, taking an avid interest in their milestones and achievements.

Life is short, and I intend to keep it sweet.

### **ROBERTA ALLEN, 68**

Private tutor; Volunteer  
Halifax  
Diagnosed in 1999

My own power and control over my life is my joy. I didn't always have that, but now I'm hanging on to it with my fingernails and my toenails and my teeth.

I'm a survivor. I've had many hardships in my life, which have made me strong and determined to be the best I can be and not take anything less than the best. If I don't get good treatment from one doctor, I will find

another one. I encourage other people to do the same. I don't allow anyone to tell me what I can't do—whether it's medical or whatever.

Just getting up every morning and doing my daily routine brings me joy. I curl my hair every day because it's as straight as a stick, I eat a healthy breakfast, I tutor two mornings a week, I sew and do crafts, and I walk 100 miles a month. Walking invigorates me. I am grateful for the awesome support of family and friends. This also brings me joy.

I found a naturopath who is absolutely fabulous. She is helping me detoxify my liver, and I finally feel good. I wasn't always able to say that because of the fear that I might be sick in the next few minutes, but now, when somebody asks me, "How are you?" I can say, "Good, thank you." And that brings me great joy.

*I walk 100 miles a month. Walking invigorates me.*



**TOM PANKRIL, 39**

Teacher

Toronto

Diagnosed in 1998

One of the things that having HIV has made me really conscious of is nutrition—what I put into my body. I find a certain amount of joy every day in eating something healthy, whether it's taking the time to prepare an awesome meal made with fresh ingredients or choosing a bran muffin over a double chocolate chip muffin. I feel that with each food choice I make every day I'm doing something good for myself.

I find great joy in the ritual of going to the grocery store or fruit market and choosing healthy products: fresh tomatoes over canned, fresh green beans over frozen. And when I get home there is another layer of joy in preparing the food. There is nothing like the luxury of taking time to prepare my meal, and, for instance, steaming fresh vegetables instead of microwaving frozen ones.

I'm especially lucky if I have an opportunity to sit down and eat with company, whether it's lunch with a co-worker or a sit-down meal with my family.

Other than my dog, this is my greatest joy.

*For more info on how to boost the nutrition quotient of your meals, see "Conquer the Kitchen" on page 15.*

**BOITUMELO, 31**

(Boi, for short)

Marketing and Sales

British Columbia

Diagnosed in 2005

I find joy in putting my health and myself first.

I find joy in knowing that it is actually possible to accomplish my mission of putting myself first.

I find joy in getting enough sleep and waking up refreshed.

I find joy in being surrounded by understanding people. Being an HIV-positive immigrant is one of the most difficult things I ever had to deal with. I was

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scared and confused, but now it gives me joy to know that there is help out there. I've connected with HIV organizations, a specialist and lots of other people living with HIV/AIDS (PHAs). Some of these people are now my "family."

I find joy and peace in practicing yoga and meditation and dancing to my Botswana music, belly dance and salsa.

I find joy in wearing my sexy high-heeled shoes and little black dress, doing my hair and make up, and looking fabulous.

I find joy in getting together with my girlfriends—talking, laughing, connecting and forgetting for a moment that I'm a PHA.

I find joy in looking at pictures of my sister, who's in Botswana, before I go to bed.

I find joy in looking at myself in the mirror and saying: "*Gatela pele*

*ngwana wa mosetsana!*" ("Keep going, girl!")

I find joy in being in Canada—a safe place where I trust I have the best medical attention, a place where someone will do something if I ever experience any type of abuse. I was raped back home and for a long time I was very angry. I worked very hard to get to where I am. I'll never forget the incident but I've put the anger aside and look forward to great things to come.

I find joy in sharing my story. A while back I could not say the words *rape* or *HIV*.

I find joy in understanding that I deserve joy and that I don't owe anybody any explanation of what happened to me and what's going on at the moment.

I find joy in knowing I got my power back.

Above all, I am so overjoyed to have this understanding: Look forward, don't look back. +



*I find joy in wearing my sexy high-heeled shoes and little black dress and looking fabulous.*