



“It Felt Like I Was Having an Out-of-Body Experience”

Larry Davis reflects on the day he was diagnosed with HIV.

July 26, 2023 By Larry Davis

Rock Hudson died of AIDS on October 2, 1985, and my fate came 10 days later on October 12, 1985. My life changed forever that day—a gorgeous fall day with a brilliant blue sky. As I drove to the health department to get my results, I remember thinking, Oh, my test will come back negative, and I’ll be fine. After all, this is North Carolina and AIDS is only hitting big cities like New York and San Francisco.”

As I pulled into the parking lot, I became nauseous, feeling like I couldn’t breathe. I sat in the car for what seemed like eternity trying to calm myself down. I finally went in and waited to be called. My name was called by a young woman who took me to a small windowless examining room. She was as nervous as I was, and I could tell by the look on her face that this wasn’t going to turn out the way I had thought it would.

She opened a folder and looked straight at me and said in a low, calm voice, “I’m sorry, but your results have come back positive.” She paused and said, “There is someone here I want you to talk to.”

As she continued talking, time stood still, and it felt like I was having an out-of-body experience, as if I was watching all of this play out from above, like a movie playing—but it was a silent movie. I remember the young woman was still talking, but I couldn’t hear her. The only thing I could hear was a voice in my head saying, “I need to leave. I need to go. I have to go now.”

Floating in that surreal moment I found myself in my car, driving home, not in a panic or sobbing but just driving with tears gently running down my face. The sky was no longer blue, and the silent movie was still playing. The rest of the world disappeared as I drove home.

What three adjectives best describe you?

Humorous. Resilient. Courageous.

What is your greatest achievement?

Surviving HIV for 38 years and receiving a heart transplant eight years ago.

What is your greatest regret?

Not finishing my studies at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts.

What keeps you up at night?

Being strong enough to keep going.

If you could change one thing about living with HIV, what would it be?

Living with advanced leg neuropathy.

What is the best advice you ever received?

Get a second opinion.

What person in the HIV community do you most admire?

Karl Schmid.

What drives you to do what you do?

Living with my partner as long as I can drives me every day.

What is your motto?

"Those of afraid of dying never live."

If you had to evacuate your house immediately, what is the one thing you would grab on the way out?

My partner, Jim.

If you could be any animal, what would you be? And why?

A dolphin. They seem to be carefree and always stay together. Plus, they always seem to be smiling!

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