



When Opportunity Knocks, Answer!

Like many long-term survivors, protease inhibitors changed the course of Michael Varga's life.

February 15, 2023 By Michael Varga

I was diagnosed with HIV when the test first became available in 1985. I was working abroad as a diplomat. In the mid-1990s, I had to retire, as my T cells had dwindled to single digits. The introduction of protease inhibitors changed everything. Suddenly, there was the possibility of living longer when doctors had advised that life expectancy was a mere 18 months.

What three adjectives best describe you?

Resilient, persevering, loyal.

What is your greatest achievement?

Despite my HIV, being a caregiver for my dad until he died and for my sister until she died.

What is your greatest regret?

That I couldn't be as great a caregiver for my sister during her 10 long years in and out of hospitals.

What keeps you up at night?

The worry of the end of American democracy as one political party strips Americans of voting rights.

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

To make more people aware of the continuing stigma that surrounds HIV.

What is the best advice you ever received?

When opportunity knocks, answer! (It may not knock again!)

What person in the HIV Community do you most admire?

Doctors who have been with us from the 1980s in our struggle for health.

What drives you to do what you do?

It's important to find new ways to help others and to share stories of long-term survivors and all that we have been through with so much death in the 1980s and 1990s.

What is your motto?

Don't be conventional. Follow your own path.

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

Family photos.

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

A giraffe so with my long neck I could see the repercussions of events long before they arrive.

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