

[Tommy Chesbro] I was 25 years old. There were a lot of emotions that, you know, came up after finding out I was infected. I sort of, I've often said, 'I kinda felt like I got hit by truck.' My whole life was turned upside down and the only thing that I could think about was the fact that I was going to die. I had an ex-partner at the time that I knew needed to know. And so had to call him and let him know so that he could get tested. That was a very tough conversation. There were a lot of tears. I would drive to Wichita every three months to have my blood drawn because of the fears of anybody in Oklahoma finding out I had HIV. My family was pretty well known in sports in Oklahoma. So I was very, very frightened that people would find out and it would become, you know, a news story. I didn't tell my family until 1989. And that was a whole, really, really hard conversation as well. And I said, 'I need to tell you that I have HIV.' And, it was the very, very first time I ever heard my father cry. And he told me on the phone, he said, 'Tommy you've got to promise me that you'll fight and won't ever give up.' And, so I made that promise- and been fighting that fight now for 29 years. We started really supporting each other and became like an extended family. [Pamela Jumper] I'd been working in the HIV field since about 1987. And, he impressed me because he was so open with his story and so willing to share and so willing to educate us as providers. Their life isn't over. It will be changed. But, they still are going to be able to probably live a fulfilling, long life and be an active part of their community. One of the biggest fears I hear from a lot of people that newly found, have found, or newly found out they were infected is that they will always be alone, that there won't ever be that special person in their life because of people being afraid of HIV. I give them an example from my life. My partner Chad and I are in a discordant relationship. I'm infected and he's not and we've been together for 19 years and he knew that from the very, very beginning when we first met. To stay away from shame, blame and guilt, because that's not healthy. The native community, we had a, we don't have high numbers, but we have high rates and so it's a big, big issue for us. It's an infection that affects everyone in the circle, and you have to be able to share, network, talk, talk, talk. One of the things that I think is really key to a healthy community is to get tested. And for our native people testing is something they're very afraid of. It holds a high level of stigma and yet it's a message we must get through that, if you get tested, early detection saves lives. And it's very true. Tommy is an example of that. Let's stop HIV together. Get the facts. Get tested. Get involved.