

June 15, 2003

It hasn't even been two days since I first heard the news that I was HIV-positive. The last 46 hours almost seem surreal, only I know that it's not a dream. I have to say, I seem to be handling this fairly well. I've only told a handful of my inner circle of friends and two of my managers at work. Today, I'm going to try to summon the strength to tell my cousin Jackie and my aunt Nancy. Nancy not only lives with me, but has always been a second mom to me. My biggest fear after hearing the most devastating news of my life wasn't how I was going to cope with living as an HIV-positive man, but how my family would handle the news. I knew that I had experienced enough life that I would be strong enough to fight the ignorance. I wasn't even afraid of dying, because the new Terry doesn't believe in death, at least not in the way that most people do. Most importantly, though, I was and still am determined to beat this disease. In an encouraging email my mom sent me a year or so ago, she said, "Terry, you have the God-given tenacity to conquer anything you set your mind to. That's been your gift since you were little. I could smack your hands until they were red, but if you wanted it, you didn't care." Well, now I've got a new goal to set my sights on, and a very vested interest.

I'm trying hard not to beat myself up for creating this experience, because as "unfortunate" as becoming HIV-positive is, I understand now that **EVERYTHING** happens for a reason, even when we can't see the reason. Even though I've come to grips with the situation thus far, I intuitively know that this path I've chosen isn't going to be an easy one. Amazingly, even before I found out my diagnosis, I was trying to find good no matter what the outcome of the test results.

Maybe I'll use my keen intuition to help find a cure, I think. Or, maybe I'll use my organizational skills and people skills to organize events to raise funds for research and awareness to the cause. I'm trying to flow as much feel-good energy to the situation that I can muster, because whatever happens, I know there will be greatness to come of it. Another outcome that I'm grateful for is at least I will have more respect for my body and who I share it with. I'm also determined to eat a healthier diet and start working out in addition to the exercise I get at work. From the literature that I've read, a lot of people go on to lead better and healthier lives post diagnosis than before.

Still, I kept coming back to the question, "How did all of this happen?" There are many answers to that question, but they all boil down to a low self-esteem and high ideals. I've always tried to believe in the goodness of people, and even in the face of disappointment, I will probably always trust others more than I should. I don't believe the "How did I get here" question is as important as "What do I do now that I'm already here?"

I realize that for the most part I'm a pretty autonomous person. I sincerely hate to burden anyone with my problems. I always feel as though I should be helping them solve their problems, instead of complaining about mine. Sometimes, like now, even I am feeling lonely and needing a shoulder to lean. But "now is not a time for me to be weak," I tell myself. I'll get by. I always do! I can even see how the events I experienced over the last year: the books I read, the people I met, have all prepared me for experiencing this.

Now comes the true test of my character. Could I open myself up enough to allow others to help me, or would I continue to be the stubborn independent person as before? One thing was a given: I had a brand new perspective on everything in my life.