

# HIV Does Not Define Me!

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Lotus Bend Sanctuary

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# Why Stories Matter

- Stories build human connection and deep empathy.
- They help us step into another person's world.
- They challenge stereotypes, reduce isolation, and validate shared struggles.
- They can become a foundation for building community.

# Living with HIV and learning how to build resilience go hand-in-hand

Resilience means:

- Adapting positively to your diagnosis,
- Maintaining a strong quality of life, and
- Buffering yourself against stigma and social/psychological distress

# Presentation Roadmap



# Spring/Summer 1979 - Leaving the Seminary

- Preparing for novitiate and graduation from UC Riverside.
- Shared the truth of being gay with a spiritual advisor.
- Experienced rejection, shame, and the painful loss of belonging.
- Discovered the message: “In order to love your neighbor, you must love yourself.”

# First Contact with the Emerging Epidemic

Met Harry Hays, the Founder of the  
Mattachine Society, and the Radical  
Faeries

Volunteered at the Los Angeles Gay  
Community Services Center.

Worked in an outdoor clinic screening  
for STIs.

Heard early warnings about GRID and  
symptoms being tracked in New York.

Recognized that transmission could be  
silent despite appearances of strength  
and invincibility.



# Austin, Community, and the AIDS Crisis

- Moved to Austin in 1981 and entered a different social and cultural landscape.
- Met Alan in 1984 and began building a life together.
- Served as the Executive Director of Waterloo Counseling Center from 1987–1989.
- Watched HIV/AIDS overwhelm LGBTQ mental health and community resources.
- Community leaders, clinicians, advocates, and volunteers became essential sources of care.

# Love, Loss, and Public Health Purpose

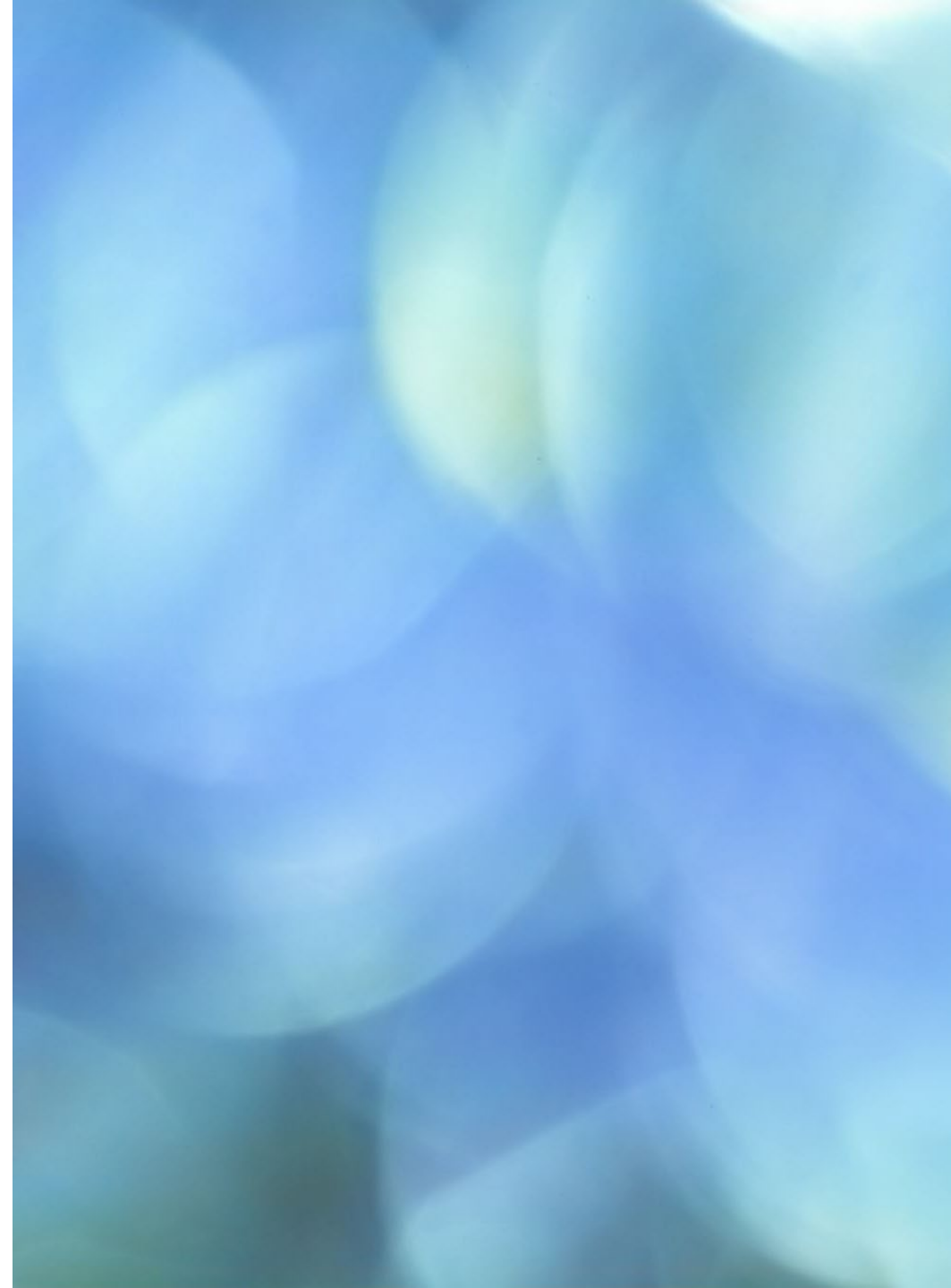
Alan passed away in July 1989 from AZT toxicity and AIDS.

Loss, grief, and displacement shaped the next chapter.

Work in landscaping became a way to survive grief.

Public health work followed: HIV testing, health education, training, and project leadership.

Professional service became a bridge that later became part of my personal support





# 2013 — Crossing the Bridge Personally



After years of HIV education and advocacy, I received an HIV diagnosis in 2013.



Experienced shame, guilt, and the weight of a professional identity.



Felt the impact of loss, longing, intimacy, and vulnerability.



Reached undetectable status within six months through effective treatment.



The diagnosis became a call to advocate from “the other side of the wall.”

# Objective 1 — Challenges After a Life-Altering HIV Diagnosis

Shock, shame, guilt, and self-blame can surface immediately.

A diagnosis may disrupt identity, routines, relationships, and future plans.

Medical monitoring can feel unfamiliar, especially for someone who has not faced major health concerns before.

Finding a provider with whom you can be honest is essential to receiving quality care.

# Objective 2 — Psychosocial Impacts

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Fear and stigma can shape how people view themselves and their choices.

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Disclosure requires intention, timing, trust, and emotional readiness.

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Isolation may increase when people fear rejection or judgment.

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Family, partners, neighbors, and community may each require different disclosure decisions.

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Supportive responses can be deeply healing.





# Objective 3 — Medical Care and Support Networks

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Immediate care creates a plan when life feels uncertain.

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Ongoing follow-up helps restore a sense of agency and stability.

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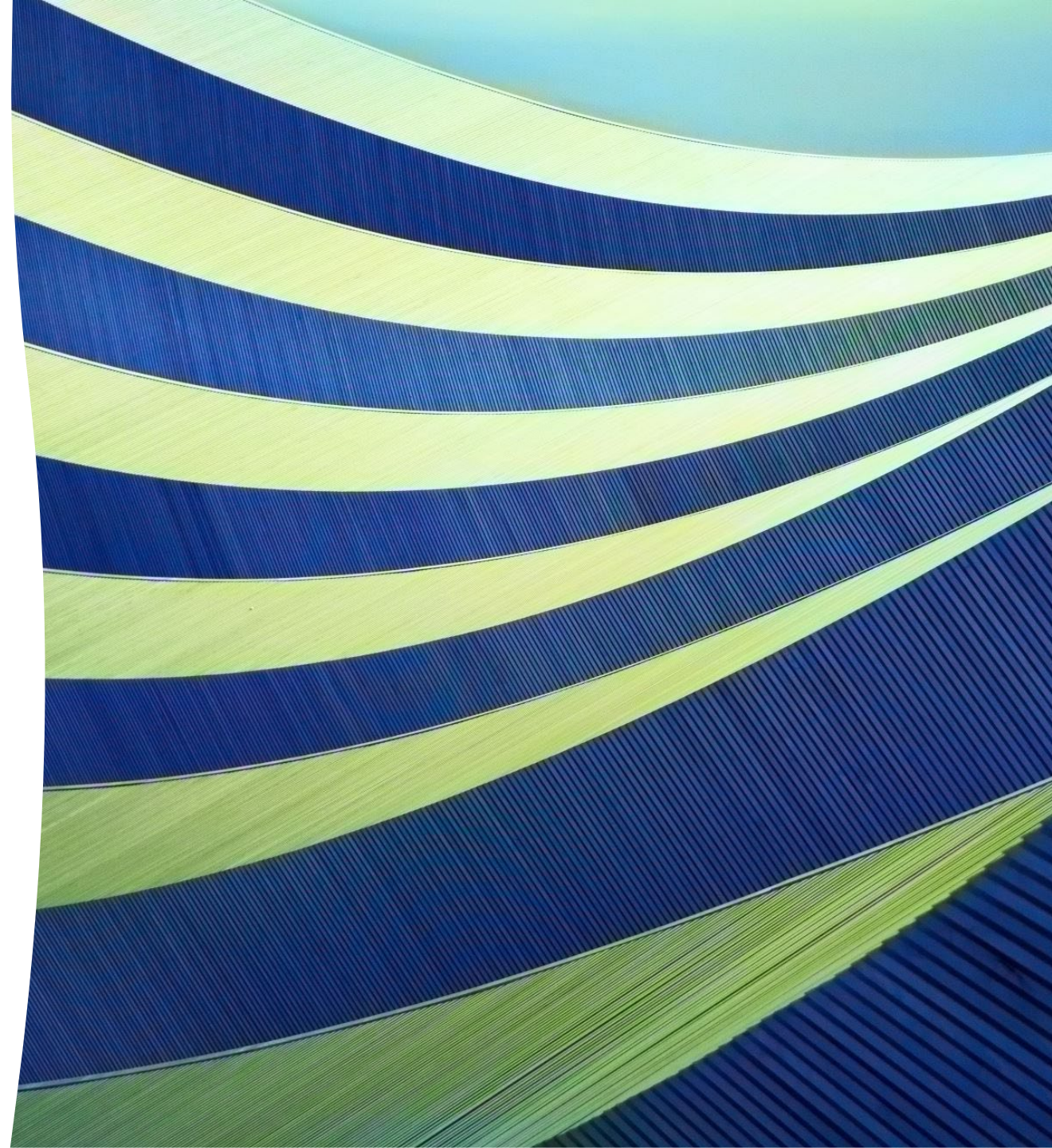
Medication routines, side effects, and health changes need compassionate guidance.

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People living with HIV need providers who listen without judgment.

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Support systems must also address mental health, addiction, grief, and trauma.





# Five Core Pillars of Resilience

- Disclosure strategy: Decide when, why, and with whom to share your status.
- Supportive network: Build care and connection that cannot be carried alone.
- Mental health: Prioritize therapy, mindfulness, creativity, and emotional reflection.
- Social connection: Break isolation through community and shared experience.
- Identity reformation: Remember that HIV is part of the story, not the whole identity.



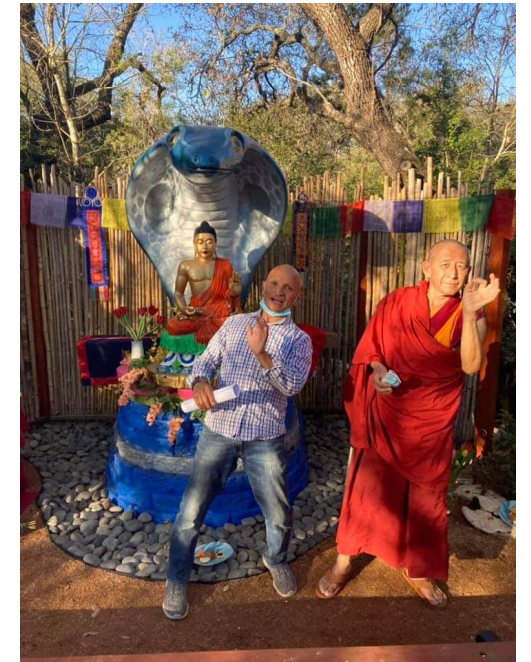
# Community support-Art for healing!





# Benestrophe: Finding the Positive within Catastrophe

- Opposite of catastrophe
- Coined by Jonathan Van Ranson, 1983, Context Institute
- Way of seeing the opportunity in challenging times







# HIV and Personal Identity

## Identity Beyond HIV

HIV does not determine a person's worth or potential. People living with HIV can and do lead successful, fulfilling lives.

## Challenging Stereotypes

Breaking down stigma and misconceptions helps create a more inclusive and supportive environment for everyone.

## Empowerment and Hope

Education and awareness empower individuals to take control of their health and embrace their full potential.



# Thank you!!! Q & A

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