

## Introduction:

Charles is originally from the Netherlands. Charles moved to Honolulu in September 2009 to study for a Ph.D. in clinical psychology. Charles previously lived in the Los Angeles area and worked for Being Alive, a non-profit AIDS organization.

## Charles' Story:

When I talk with people who have recently been diagnosed with HIV, I tell them to just be with your feelings, embrace them. Some days you will feel good and some days you feel bad – it is both. I remind people that having HIV does not mean your life is over – you are going to have to *live* with HIV, so be part of a community and make a difference, empower yourself, if you have a dream, live it because you only live once and any dream is possible.

When I was diagnosed with HIV, I felt like I was given a death sentence, and I was scared. I felt isolated and thought about committing suicide. I called my friend, a doctor, and I went and visited him and I talked to him, over a weekend. He was a great emotional support for me during that very tough time. Another help for me was around that time I went to a hypnotist and recorded a tape of the experience. I still listen to it to remind me of where I have been and of the ongoing journey my body was, and is, going through. I have come a long way since I was diagnosed with HIV.

For me, being diagnosed with HIV was also a turning point in my life. It has made me more aware of the importance of improving my overall health –eating well and living a healthy lifestyle. I always remind the members of Being Alive – the non- profit AIDS organization that I worked for and whose members I am still in touch with - that being diagnosed with HIV can spur them to change their life for the good and to take better care of their overall health.

I think one of the most important things to staying healthy is talking with your doctor to find the treatment that is right for you – it needs to be a mutual decision. For me and my doctor, that treatment has been a VIRAMUNE based regimen. On VIRAMUNE in combination with other antiretrovirals, I have maintained an undetectable viral load. My experience may not be the same as yours. It is important to ask your doctor about the benefits and risks of the therapy you are taking. My doctor also told me about the common and serious side effects of VIRAMUNE, which include rash and liver reactions.

**[Voice Over: “VIRAMUNE can cause serious liver damage and skin reactions that can cause death. Any patient can experience such side effects, but some patients are more at risk than others. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information and see the important safety information provided below on this website.”]**

Please consult [Full Prescribing Information](#), including boxed WARNING, [Medication Guide](#), and [Important Safety Information](#) for VIRAMUNE.

Taking VIRAMUNE based therapy is an important part of my health regimen. I also take a holistic approach to my overall health including yoga, acupuncture, hypnosis and a balanced diet to keep both my mind and my body healthy.

Communication and being open has also helped me to stay healthy because of the emotional support I get from talking to those around me – but it is not always easy to talk openly about living with HIV. It was actually my partner at the time who first told my mother I was HIV positive. At first, I denied it and said that he was lying because I was scared it would be too much for her to handle. Eventually though, I told her the truth and she has been incredibly supportive. While this way of sharing my status worked for me, it may not work for others. I also have a lot of friends that I can talk to if I am having a tough day.

For me, working at a non-profit AIDS organization has also given me support because I can connect with the people I am counseling – I understand their experiences. It is a great feeling to be able to help people and when members come in who are struggling, they know I'm positive, that I'm gay, they are more comfortable exploring issues related to treatment and sexuality- they can be really open with me. We also encourage them to really learn as much as possible about living with HIV.

Being diagnosed with HIV really changed my life by reminding me that my life is precious and that you only live once. Since being diagnosed I have quit smoking and been able to be an inspiration to others and established a healthy lifestyle. I have also found my calling in life through counseling people who are newly diagnosed with HIV and I am going back to school to get my doctorate in clinical psychology. I always tell people that it's a big world out there. You need to believe in yourself. Go through the process and you will find there is support out there for you. You just have to realize it and speak up and give yourself credit. It's about making a difference and empowering yourself - you only live once.