

## **Introduction:**

Michael currently lives in Washington, D.C. and works for a global healthcare communications company.

## **Michael's Story:**

Being HIV positive means I need to be more vigilant about my health - getting my blood work done, seeing my doctor, ensuring that I maintain a healthy diet, taking my medication and making sure my blood pressure and cholesterol are okay. It is so important to take care of your overall health when living with HIV.

Growing up in a small farm town in Ohio, I always knew I wanted to live in Washington, D.C. After graduating from Ohio State University with a degree in journalism, I packed up my car up and headed to D.C. where I began working on Capitol Hill. Since then, I have worked for a variety of public affairs companies and travelled all over Africa and South America as a staff member of the Peace Corps.

In 1998, I was working in Delaware at an HIV prevention program. I was newly single at the time and decided to get tested for HIV. I was stunned when I found out I was HIV positive. I was scared because I had buried dozens of friends and kind of thought, wow, this is it.

What really helped me to accept my HIV status was the support I received. The day I was diagnosed, I called my doctor and he provided a tremendous amount of support for me, talking with me for more than two hours. Also, working at the Whitman-Walker Clinic was a great resource because there were a lot of people who were HIV positive with whom I could have open, honest conversations about living with HIV.

I then began to really embrace the opportunity to be an HIV/AIDS advocate and an educator and to become more involved in the community. One of my favorite things to do at the Whitman-Walker Clinic was go to high schools in the area that requested someone to speak about what it's like to be HIV positive. We'd have very frank conversations with young people about the importance of HIV prevention and safer sex and so that was always very important to me. I think being open and having honest conversations about HIV/AIDS is so important, especially with young people.

But as easy as it was for me to talk in the community about HIV/AIDS, the hardest conversation for me was telling my family. I had been living with HIV for several years when I was interviewed by Sheryl Gay Stolberg of *The New York Times* for an article about 20 years of HIV and AIDS and I realized, "This is *The New York Times* - I need to tell my family I am HIV positive before they read this article." From the very beginning, my family has been really supportive.

One of the important things that has helped me manage this disease is my HIV medication. My doctor and I decided on a VIRAMUNE based combination therapy and for me, it works. I'm happy to say I have an undetectable viral load. It is important to talk with your doctor about the benefits and risks of the medications 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*.

I think living with HIV has made me appreciate my health more. I know I need to take my VIRAMUNE based combination therapy everyday exactly as prescribed by my doctor and that I need to take care of myself – eating well, exercising. I want to be around for a long time. I have my woodshop where I build furniture and I have a partner of 10 years who is also HIV positive. All of these things keep me going.

When I talk to people who were just diagnosed with HIV, I tell them don't let this beat you. I also tell them that you need to have a good relationship with your doctor. Other than your personal relationships with your significant other and your family, it's the most important relationship you'll have if you want to remain healthy.