

## Introduction:

Thelma currently lives in the Los Angeles area and volunteers as a treatment advocate. She spends her time with her four children and seven grandchildren and connecting with other people living with HIV.

## Thelma's Story:

I have gotten to meet a lot of fascinating people in my life and experienced so many wonderful things like playing the violin for Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King. In my life, I have also had to overcome enormous challenges and, as a person living with HIV, I have dealt with the whirlwind of emotions starting the day I was diagnosed. I have accepted that HIV is a part of me, but it does not define me. Along with the acceptance and support of my friends and family, and my faith, I appreciate everyday as a gift and focus on looking ahead.

I would describe myself as a “people person” – and working with people who are also living with HIV has been a great source of strength and support for me. After I was diagnosed with HIV, I began taking treatment advocate courses to understand the journey my body was – and is – going through. This ultimately led me to get involved with different HIV/AIDS organizations – many of which I am still involved with today.

I have kept journals since I was diagnosed in July 2000, so I can see the emotions I was dealing with at that time – and how far I have come since then. I also see a therapist because it is so important to talk about the feelings and emotions we are dealing with, and my therapist has helped me to accept myself and adjust to living with HIV.

When I was diagnosed, I had actually been hospitalized because of other health conditions – conditions I now know are associated with HIV – and was asked if I wanted an HIV test, to which I said yes. At the time, my children had me hospitalized because they thought I was suffering from conditions associated with aging. I was surprised to learn I was HIV positive, yet the support I was given from my healthcare team gave me hope. My healthcare team has continued to be an integral part of my support system. For me, after God, my healthcare team is my greatest support system.

When my healthcare team and I discussed my treatment options, we talked about my health history, my ability to take my medications as prescribed and the benefits and risks of different treatments. And we agreed that VIRAMUNE in combination with other HIV medications was a good option for me. 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.

For me, VIRAMUNE in combination with my other HIV meds has helped to decrease my viral load, but everyone is different, so it's important to talk to your healthcare team. However, it is always important to stick to your treatment regimen. I use a pill dispenser to keep track of medications. I also learned the hard way that, when you travel, it is important to make sure you have enough medication with you, so I like to remind people to always make sure you have your pills with you wherever you go.

Living with HIV can be tough, but I find with my faith and my family in my corner, I am looking towards the future. I would really like to go to graduate school to become an HIV/AIDS therapist to help other people. Also, I have seven wonderful grandchildren who are the love of my life and I look forward to being around for them as long as God wills. There is still a beautiful life out there for you and for me, just reach out and grab it!