

“Because of you, new beginnings are possible!”

Dear friends,

My life started over when someone offered me a place to sleep.

I was 50 years old and HIV positive.

My story could have had a completely different ending.

But generous and caring people stepped in and got me a place to rest for the night. They helped me get back on my feet again.

As you read on, I am asking you to hold in your heart this question: Please will you make a special donation this holiday season? Your support for people living with HIV in our city is urgently needed.

I want to tell you a story. About me.

I always knew I was different. I spent my early years as a misfit trying to fit into a regular school in rural Quebec. The only thing bigger than my personality was my heart. (I blush a little bit when I say that. I don't like talking about myself). I was bullied mercilessly, and school was not a happy place for me. My adoptive parents were caring people, but they were very traditional in their views.

My first taste of freedom happened when I arrived as a young adult in the big city of Montreal. I could do what I wanted without people judging me. I was slowly discovering myself and started frequenting gay bars and meeting people.

I could do what I wanted. I could express myself. It was awesome!

I liked my life in Montreal, and I settled into a long-term relationship with a partner. But when I was 27 years old, we broke up. I was very depressed after that.

I left town and escaped to Vancouver for a few months. Why? Because it was as far away as I could get from everything and everyone.

About one year after I came back, I found out that I was HIV positive. I was 28 years old at the time and I refused the HIV meds. I wasn't sure they would make a difference, and I was worried about the side effects.

The years between 28 and 40 were transition years for me as **I was learning how to live with my HIV diagnosis.** In my 40's I was in another long-term relationship and I got very sick. So sick that I had to be hospitalized.

I had no choice but to take the HIV medications to save my life.

I was very lucky to be alive.

But once again, I was deeply disappointed by a partner. When I needed him most, he was not there for me during my illness. We broke up.

But wait! I promise you that this is a story of hope! Please continue reading.

Once I started taking the HIV medication, it took 3 months for me to start to feel better. I left Montreal in November 2015 as I was depressed for a long time and was being bullied at work. I decided to move to Ottawa.

As soon as I got to Ottawa my luck started to change.

I was 50 years old and determined to make the most of the years ahead of me. A kind person introduced me to the good people at Bruce House. Good fortune was shining on me that day!

I was so relieved to be able to get a bed in their Transitional Housing program. ***I was worried that without a place to live, I wouldn't be able to take my medications consistently.***





Without that program - and the kindness of donors who support Bruce House – I would have been living on the streets.

And the streets are not an easy place to survive.

Like many people living with HIV, my mental health ebbs and flows, and I have other medical challenges that I have to manage daily. I wish I could work more than one day a week, but my health makes that impossible.

My life started over that night, at 50 years old, with the gift of a warm bed, and a kind person saying “It’s going to be ok. We’ve got you.”

And it was.

Today I am really good. I live in my own apartment - they call it the Bruce House Supportive Independent Living Program - I have my disability income and I am super proud that I work at Bruce House one day

a week.

*It’s a dream team here. **It’s the best work I have had in my life.** I just wish everybody could love their jobs as much as I love mine. The world would be a happy place if that was true.*

This is important: the people that Bruce House helps need YOU. So many people are hurting. Without your donations and your generosity, people living with HIV in Ottawa won’t get the help they need: an apartment to call home, food to help them stretch to the first of the month, and help accessing the medical system.

I don’t need as much help anymore. I do my little part every day and I am so grateful for the support I have had over the years at Bruce House. I was so lucky to get connected to help when I needed it most.

Please will you make a special gift this holiday season to help people like me, living with HIV and working every day to get by, and live their lives?

Thank you for reading my letter. Your gift will be a powerful reminder to someone who’s down their luck that new beginnings are possible.

If new beginnings are possible for me, then they’re possible for anybody.

Dominique Grondin

Bruce House employee and peer advocate

P.S. Right now, people just like me are waiting to access programs that can give them a second chance at life. Your compassion can bring them the hope they are so urgently looking for.

P.P.S You can make your donation online at **BruceHouse.ca/HA**, or scan the QR code, or complete the reply form and place it in an envelope with your cheque made out to Bruce House. Thank you for your caring heart!



Scan me to give!

