

## DAN

What a survivor! Dan was diagnosed with AIDS in 1991 and along with his health, began losing his eyesight. Today, with the help of his best friend, Scout, Dan's health has improved immeasurably, including his dental health, so much so that he now volunteers with us.



Although Dan loved his job as a financial analyst for production with US West Dex, he was unable to continue working after 1994. With a T-cell count hovering around 0, other opportunistic infections began to invade his body. (T-cells are the white blood cells that play major role in keeping your immune system healthy – the higher the count, the better). His overall health, including his lungs, eyesight and teeth started a downhill slide.

With the loss of sight in his right eye in 1998 and his left in 2001, Dan entered vocational rehabilitation and was taught the skills necessary to prepare his meals and move about with a cane. Because he became so attached to his first dog (a puppy that passed away at age nine), Dan decided to get a guide dog in 2007. He and Scout are now inseparable.

Dan was suffering acute oral pain when he found us in 1995. Because of the dental care he received and the respect with which he was treated, he has become a model patient, taking care of his oral health so that his overall health remains good.

To hear, Dan tell it, **“Due to a facial disfiguring opportunistic infection (molluscum), had the staff not been so warm and welcoming, I would probably never gone to the dentist in the first place. It was their kindness and unflinching attitude which made me feel so comfortable and welcome, when others as well as myself, viewed me as such an outcast and grotesque...I think all AIDS sufferers sometimes feel as outcasts, but when you look like the elephant man to boot, that is a harsh reality to bear.”**

## DON



It's been 20 years since Don was diagnosed with HIV. He will be the first to tell you that he didn't do well the first 10 years after the diagnosis – he was planning to die. Obviously he didn't, but he sank into depression and found comfort in drugs. The resulting lack of medical and dental care took a toll on his body.

Don arrived at Howard Dental Center over 11 years ago with his mouth and his overall health in shambles. Cocaine and methamphetamine use, combined with the ravages of AIDS had finally destroyed his teeth. Now all that has changed since Don committed to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Don says the credit goes to the staff at HDC where they understood his needs from the beginning. Also, the continuity of care and stability of the staff was important to his commitment to health.

Since receiving new teeth, he realizes the benefit of being able to eat a variety of healthy foods. As a result, his weight has stabilized, his T-cell count is up (meaning his body can fight illness more effectively), and he's healthier all the way around.

To hear Don tell it, **“My new teeth have added to my sense of confidence. I feel better because I look better and it has made a difference in the way people perceive me.”** *And he's going back to school!*

## GERALD

Without a doubt, Gerald is *paying it forward* today, although his story would suggest otherwise.

Gerald grew up in a poor area of Washington DC without many options. While he chose to get involved with drugs before his stint in Vietnam, his IV drug use escalated upon his return. He was shooting up heroin, but naive about the transmission of HIV through needle sharing; It was 1985 and he thought only gay white males got the disease. But, then *his* HIV test came back positive. Gerald was told he only had six months to live, so he thought that was a good excuse to forgo any HIV medications, and instead *go for broke*.



That decision led to many overnights in the county jail, then federal prison, culminating in a court-ordered trip to Denver in 1989 for a three-year drug treatment program. While he got clean during the program, he relapsed upon his release and spent 1991-1999 in and out of jail, homeless, and without medical treatment for what had converted to an AIDS diagnosis.

Fast forward to 2002, Gerald met two people who would inspire him to face his diagnosis and seek treatment, both for the drug addiction and AIDS. He began to see positive change in his life and his health problems stabilized. He wanted to give back and started volunteering. In 2007, Gerald faced another setback in his attempt to improve his and others' lives in the African American community – he was diagnosed with lymphoma.

Gerald didn't give up. After a year of chemo, he is in remission and continues his chosen work: to help stop the spread of HIV & AIDS in the black community - where it is growing disproportionately. And he continues to work on improving his own health, including his oral health. After receiving new dentures at Howard Dental Center, Gerald comes regularly for his hygiene appointments. But that's not all, because of his commitment to the community, Gerald was invited to join the board of HDC and is our spokesperson on the importance of good oral health care and its connection to overall health. He's walking the talk!

To hear him tell it, **“I have nothing but good things to say about Howard Dental. I've gotten care there I don't think I could get anywhere else. They are specialists and they care.”**

## SANTIAGO



Santiago has the most wonderful smile now and we love to see it. But that wasn't always the case. Santiago came to the United States to marry his childhood sweetheart. As part of the immigration process, he had to update his medical records with a check-up. That's when he discovered he was HIV+. He realizes now he could have died if not for that discovery because he might not have gotten treatment.

Santiago was referred to Howard Dental Center by his doctor and he is so glad for that referral. When he arrived, he was missing several teeth because of lack of care. In Mexico, teeth are pulled rather than restored. So, we set about to give Santiago a new set of teeth and a new smile.



But, his biggest thrill is that he can eat his favorite foods again. ***To hear Santiago say it, "Thanks to the great staff at Howard Dental, I am now able to eat healthy foods and nourish my body so I can stay healthy."***

Despite his fear that his new wife would leave him as a result of his HIV+ diagnosis, they are still happily together.



### FALON

*"If fate hands you a lemon, make lemonade." Dale Carnegie*

Our patient, Falon chose to do just that, *eventually*. While her life growing up was anything but ideal and many of her choices got her into trouble, at age 24 she has turned her life around. Many of our female patients become infected with HIV by boyfriends or husbands who either don't tell their partners they are positive or don't know themselves. At 17, that's what happened to Falon. Combined with a crack-cocaine habit and a criminal record, it looked like she was doomed to a life of bad choices.

Then Falon chose to turn her life around. When she found out she was pregnant, she stopped the drugs and started taking care of herself and her unborn baby. She came to Howard Dental Center last fall in severe pain with a mouthful of decayed teeth. Under the expert care of Dr. Preston, Falon endured seven root canals. Now she has a healthy mouth and a beautiful smile again. ***"Dr. Preston has been really great...I'm very thankful to her and thanks to Margaret [HDC case manager] who helped me get in [to Howard Dental Center]."***

And now for the rest of the story... Falon enrolled at Community College of Denver, got her GED and plans to enroll at Metro State College to get her undergraduate degree. She had a healthy baby in February who is *not* HIV+. She chose to put the baby up for adoption and was able to choose the adoptive parents. Everyone is thriving!



### SEAN

Sean is a tall good-looking young man - too young to have lost most of his teeth. He didn't lose them to a terrible accident; Sean lost them to a six-year methamphetamine addiction.

We first saw Sean in August of 2008. He arrived at the clinic in crippling pain from oral infections. Sean remembers the compassion with which the staff told him what needed to be done. However, his dentist at Howard Dental, Dr. Last, also told him she would do her part, but he must do his - *he had to get off the meth.*



Though the drug had been a part of his life for a long time, Sean gave it up in October. Through improvements in his oral health, his overall health, and new teeth, Sean began to see the benefits of being clean. He had a new sense of reality, stability and *real* friends. Some of his real friends are the staff at Howard Dental, where he knows everyone by first name *and* he knows they care.

***To hear Sean tell it, "These people really care about what they do. They helped me look in the mirror and be OK with what I see."***

### KEVIN (in his own words)

*"My name is Kevin. I am a patient at Howard Dental Center. When I came to HDC, I had only 5 teeth left because of years of drug abuse. The meth turned my enamel into mush. I am going on 3 years clean & sober now and I am given a new life. I look forward to being able to smile again and eat foods that I haven't been able to for a long time. My favorites are steak, ribs (I'm from L.A.) and salad (lettuce and carrots are a problem without teeth). Howard Dental Center has also given me the confidence to go to a job interview or interact with people again, things I would never have had to think about if I had good teeth. I will always be grateful to the people of Howard Dental for my new teeth and my new look."*



### JOE

Joe is a HIV survivor since 1989 and one of our favorite patients. After the dedicated staff at Howard Dental, brought Joe's teeth back to a healthy condition, he has been a regular, committed to maintaining his good oral health.



In the fall of 2007, Joe came in for his routine check-up. However, this particular check-up was *anything but routine*. David Zamboni, our dental hygienist found suspicious white spots on Joe's tongue. After consultation with Dr. Sally Preston, one of our dentists, a biopsy was advised. The biopsy confirmed a diagnosis that could be deadly: *squamous cell carcinoma*.

The cancerous cells were removed at a specialty clinic and Joe continued his normal cleaning routine at Howard Dental. All was good... Then, in July of 2008, our dental hygienist found new white spots. The subsequent biopsy revealed the cancer had returned. This time Joe had more extensive surgery to make sure they "got it all." We're happy to report they did!

Because of the thoroughness of Howard Dental Center's staff *and* Joe's trust in us, he followed the staff's recommendations and sought treatment. Otherwise, Joe might not be with us today.

***As Joe tells it, "Dave and Sally pay particular attention to things other than just teeth. This clinic has saved my life more than once!"***

## **TERRY**

And as one of our patients discovered, it's more than appearance. As a child, Terry never went to the dentist. He had missing teeth (lost to decay), teeth that needed fillings, and gobs of plaque. Terry was self-conscious and embarrassed to smile *or even look at people*. He quickly realized they didn't look at him and certainly didn't smile at him.



Terry was referred to Howard Dental Center through the Colorado AIDS Project. He has been one of our favorite patients for almost five years. A favorite because Terry never stops smiling now. Through the expert care AND compassion of his dentist, Dr. Preston, he learned the importance of taking care of his teeth, his gums, *his entire mouth*. Now, with new, gleaming teeth and a bright smile, Terry has learned that people are more apt to make conversation with him. It has opened up a whole new life for him.

***To hear Terry tell it, "With a smile, people really communicate more."***