

PHILL WILSON

b. 4/29/1956

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“AIDS has always been personal from the very, very beginning,” says Wilson. “In 1980 I discovered that I was gay. It just kind of happened, and I began to figure out what that meant. In that process I met Chris Brownlie, and we fell in love ... and began a relationship that lasted until he died. In 1981 we moved to Los Angeles, and by that time we guessed that he had been infected along the way, and consequently we guessed that I was also infected, but we didn’t know.”

Wilson didn’t know for certain that he was HIV-positive until he was 27. At that time, in the 1980s, a positive test was assumed to be a death sentence. Wilson watched countless friends become ill and die. After Brownlie’s death, he channeled his anger into work for HIV/AIDS prevention. Wilson developed AIDS in 1990, and nearly died in 1995, but the introduction of the new antiretroviral drugs enabled him to recover.

By 1999, when he was well enough to return to the frontlines of activism, Phill Wilson founded the Black AIDS Institute. He has helped found several other HIV/AIDS advocacy organizations and has worked on HIV/AIDS policy and treatment internationally. He is credited with being the primary force in mobilizing the black community against HIV/AIDS.

On celebrating his 50th birthday in 2006, Wilson said, “I didn’t think 30 was an option, so to be 50 is amazing.”

“I have lived an unbelievably blessed life,” says Wilson. “Now people may think that’s a bizarre thing to say for someone who’s lived almost his entire adult life with either HIV or AIDS. The truth of the matter is that I’ve lived a life where I’ve had the privilege of pretending that I can make a difference, and if I can hold onto that illusion, it doesn’t get much better than that.”

Phill Wilson founded the Black AIDS Institute. He is one of the most articulate spokesmen addressing HIV and AIDS issues in the black community.

