Not Lost in Translation

March 21, 2013 By Trent Straube

Devarah “Dee” Borrego was diagnosed with HIV a few weeks after her 21st birthday. That was in 2005. “I was poorly educated about HIV, and I was of the opinion that I would be dead within three years,” recalls the Boston resident. “So I thought, ‘Well, then I’m going to come out as trans and be happy for three years because that’s all I got.’”

Today, she’s a devoted HIV advocate juggling her time between a slew of speaking engagements, groups and causes, including the U.S. Positive Women’s Network (she is a founding member) and the North American affiliate of the Global Network of People Living With HIV/AIDS (GNP+NA), where she’s involved in the Young Leaders Caucus. “I’m motivated to work with youth,” she says. “Kids don’t have any understanding of what it means to live with a chronic but manageable illness. I feel that if people knew more about [HIV], they would be better able to protect themselves.”

Borrego also wants to empower those who are already living with the virus. “The first years of my diagnosis, if my doctor told me something, I just went along with it. But I’ve learned that it’s my life and my body,” she says. “The doctor is there to help me—but not to run my life. That’s been a major lesson.”

More education is on the horizon. She’s hoping to go back to school and study languages (she’s a bit of a linguistics wiz and also knows sign language). POZ asked Borrego to put down her beloved knitting and cross-stitching—“My friends joke that I’m like a 70-year-old lady,” she says—so she could answer a few questions.

What three adjectives best describe you?
Compassionate, fastidious, sensitive.

If you could change one thing about living with HIV, what would it be?
The stigma, especially when it comes to dating.

What person in the HIV/AIDS community do you most admire?
Cecilia Chung [who was on the cover of POZ in September 2012]. I admire the work she does for the trans and HIV community by being an outspoken voice.

What is your motto?
A Norwegian saying, “Ting tar tid,” or in English, “Things take time.” Its underlying message is to be patient.

If you had to evacuate your house immediately, what is the one thing you would grab on the way out?
My purse.

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