Playing (for Keeps) in Poughkeepsie

Positive mom Marcy Zadanowsky Yearby and son Ricky are celebrating Mother's Day no.15-and counting

May 1, 2002 By Marcy Zadanowsky Yearby

Poughkeepsie, New York, 2.25.02

This Mother's Day, I'm thinking of what the journey has been like for my son, Ricky, and for me. I was diagnosed two months shy of his fourth birthday (he and my husband tested negative), so I never imagined living to see him turn 5, let alone 15. I am proud of the young man he is becoming. Recently he was asked what he would wish for if granted three wishes. He said, "Become a professional athlete, attend a division-one college and that my mom didn't have AIDS."

When I was first diagnosed, I told my husband, who stood by me, but I didn't tell Ricky. I felt sorry. I thought Ricky would grow up without the person who loved him more than life itself. I let him get away with anything so he wouldn't remember me as a terrible mother.

Ricky has only known a sick mom. He has had many reactions and emotions. At 4, seeing me lying sick, he placed his blanky and stuffed bear on me and kissed me. But it wasn't until he was 8, when I became deathly ill, that my husband and I decided to tell him I had AIDS. We feared his childhood would be lost, but we had no choice.

We invited a social worker he trusted to help break the news. He proudly showed her into his bedroom and introduced her to his pet gerbils. My husband and I sat in our living room nervously staring at each other. But Ricky's door opened too soon. He walked toward us and said, "I already knew." He knew little about the virus other than that Magic Johnson had it and people were dying from it. Because of the secrets and whispering, he was terrified to inquire about it. But even at 8, not knowing was harder than knowing.

I didn't die. I went public, speaking out at colleges and high schools. Ricky is happy that I am making a difference -- as long as I don't speak at *his* school. I'd like to believe it's because he is at the age where he's embarrassed of his parents, not that he is ashamed of the virus, ashamed of me.

After learning of my diagnosis, some of Ricky's words were heart-warming: "You are the best mother." "I love you." "I pray for you every night." Some were terrifying: "Don't die." "Don't leave me." Some were knife-cutting: "You are so stupid not to have protected yourself." "I hate

you.”

Ricky was pained to find that his best friend’s mother wouldn’t allow her son to enter my home. Because of the education that I do about HIV, the boy’s mother has dealt with her fears. He is now even allowed to sleep over. Most of Ricky’s friends are aware of my status. Generally he hasn’t had any problems. There have been exceptions. He was once suspended for fighting when some students jested about my having AIDS. I asked the principal to have AIDS sensitivity training. He told me I shouldn’t have gone public.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/Playing-for-Keeps-in-Poughkeepsie-857-1087