Evel Dick’s Most Unusual Diagnosis Story

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Evel Dick on VH1’s Couples Therapy

There’s never a good time to learn you have HIV. But imagine getting the news while filming the reality show Big Brother. That’s what happened in 2011 to “Evel Dick” Donato. The celebrated villain had won the same contest four years earlier and had returned for another go. Shortly after filming started, producers pulled him off set to privately tell him there was a problem with the blood samples he had submitted. “The show doctor said they did two HIV tests, and one said I was negative and one said I was positive,” Donato says. “So he took more blood samples and left me in the green room more than six hours. I was going nuts in my head. Then he comes back and tells me the test came back positive, that it’s not the death sentence it used to be, blah blah blah.”

To cope with the life-altering news, Donato left the show. But because he didn’t divulge why, paparazzi began stalking him to get the scoop. One of the first places he went for treatment, he recalls, “was in downtown Denver, and on the outside is this giant green awning that says ‘HIV/AIDS.’ I’m like, Oh my God, if someone sees me go in there, it’d be everywhere.” As it turns out, he was directed to care at a university hospital, which offered more privacy. Soon, he was on meds and undetectable.

He told only two people about his diagnosis: his then-girlfriend, Stephanie Rogness-Fischer, and his mother. Both were supportive. In fact, Rogness-Fischer, who tested negative, even stayed in the relationship.

Fast-forward to fall 2014. The now-separated couple appeared on VH1’s Couples Therapy With Dr. Jenn to see if their love could still be salvaged. Turns out, it couldn’t. But Donato did use the show as a platform to disclose his status to the world. The response, he says, has been “unbelievably supportive.” Better yet, “because it’s all on the table now, nobody can hold anything over me. I don’t have to worry about going into a place with a big awning that says ‘HIV.’”

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