Pass the Mike

Sharing the stage—and the limelight—with HIV

January 1, 2008 By Ionel Belfiore

Who am I to be giving speeches and preaching about life to others? Why should I, a 19-year-old kid, have this great honor? The answer is that I acquired HIV at birth. This was in Romania, where I was abandoned to a poor orphanage with steel cribs and no diapers or hot water. I was adopted at age 3 by American parents and am now a freshman at Catholic University, in Washington, DC. I am healthy and lead a wonderful life. So, yeah, I speak out to help others who aren't as fortunate. But that's not the only reason.

My strongest motivation to speak is a pretty powerful memory I have. When I was 8, another boy who knew I was positive told me that by the age of 10, I would be dead. I kept this bottled in for a while, but eventually I broke down and my mom comforted me. My parents decided then that I should learn more about the virus.

I have often found that the hardest thing about giving speeches is not the speeches themselves but not letting all the attention get to my head. When I was younger I often felt delusions of grandeur and, to be honest, still do occasionally. I began to despise and attack myself for sullying the good nature of the cause. I now realize that it's human to enjoy attention and it motivates me to give speeches and help raise awareness. So, I will accept this and use the part of me that enjoys the spotlight for the benefit of others. I don't see any problem with it; it seems to me that everyone wins.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/ionel-belfiore-hiv-13790-3909