Learning From Love

Leanna Kinney gained knowledge and understanding about HIV from her fiancé.

April 25, 2022 By Leanna Kinney

My name is Leanna Kinney—soon to be Leanna Bryant. At the age of 18, just after my high school graduation, I joined the United States Navy, where I started my career in health care. I was lucky when it came to deciding what I wanted to do or be when I grew up. For as long as I can remember, I have always wanted to be a nurse and that is what I am today. I used to define myself as a divorced mother of two, with five wonderful stepchildren from a previous marriage, all of whom I adore. As I have grown, personally and professionally, how I define myself has also grown. Professionally, I am a registered nurse working in technology, leading a team of individuals through development, implementation, and innovation for one of the largest home health care providers in the United States. I am a woman, a mother, a sister, a daughter, a friend, a fiancé (soon to be wife) and so much more.

I met my fiancé completely by accident on social media. In January 2012, I was helping to plan my 20-year high school reunion and while searching for former classmates I mistook my fiancé, Larry for another classmate and sent him a Facebook message. After a little persistence and a few more messages he responded with a polite declination. By then the damage was done and we were connected through the ‘small’ world of social media. At the time I was living and working in Texas, and he lived in Washington, DC. We grew to learn more about each other over the years from a distance, interacting through social media posts, photos and occasional comments. In October 2018, I had an opportunity to travel on a business trip to DC.

I suggested we have dinner. On October 8, 2019, we met in Lafayette Park across from the White House, and walked to dinner and enjoyed great conversation. Larry said he thought he would never see me again. I remember thinking, “I have to see him again,” but I was not sure how or when.

Needless to say, we saw each other again and here we are today, planning to share our vows on April 25, 2021.

Our story is instrumental to how HIV has impacted my life. I have worked in health care for 28

years, most of my experience has been in pediatric intensive care, trauma and home care. I had very little exposure to anyone with HIV or AIDS outside of work. Until I met Larry, my knowledge and experience of HIV was based on clinical information I received or sought out as a clinician. Larry was interviewed for POZ magazine in 2007 and shared his story again in 2017. As I learned more about him through social media, I became more appreciative of his advocacy work and saw how sharing his story had the potential to benefit others, either through shared experiences or just the reassurance that they were not alone.

While this story is not about him, he is living with HIV and has been my reason to seek additional understanding, education and information about the virus. Terms such as long-term non-progressor, undetectable and viral load have become a common part of my life, as they have been a part of his life for more than 34 years. Loving and healthy relationships are just as real and possible with an individual living with HIV/AIDS as with those without and to think otherwise is senseless and unnecessarily limiting.

What three adjectives best describe you?

Thoughtful, passionate, determined

What is your greatest achievement?

My children

What is your greatest regret?

Not having as much confidence in myself at an earlier age.

What keeps you up at night?

The safety and well-being of those I love, more so lately with the COVID pandemic and racial tensions.

If you could change one thing about living with HIV, what would it be?

The stigma that is associated with those who are living with HIV/AIDS and the pain that stigma causes those individuals.

What is the best advice you ever received?

Don’t be afraid to love.

What person in the HIV/AIDS community do you most admire?

Larry Bryant who spends countless hours advocating for, educating and sharing with others who are impacted by HIV

What drives you to do what you do?

I want a world where my children, grandchildren and loved ones can be accepted and loved for who they are regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation and/or health status.

What is your motto?

Live life in a way that leaves a positive and lasting impression on those you interact with.

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

Our dog.

If you could be any animal, what would you be? And why?

A Hummingbird. They are small and beautiful creatures, moving at such a furious pace that seems to be effortless to those of us watching.

Editor’s Note: Leanna’s story was originally submitted to POZ in March 2021. Today marks Leanna and Larry’s first wedding anniversary.

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