Tried and True

November 13, 2012

The support of family and friends is indispensable for all of us, but it's especially so for people with HIV/AIDS, who often deal with rejection, stigma and discrimination. The following excerpts from POZ bloggers Anonymous, Aundaray Guess and Shawn Decker give testimony to the importance the support of others has in our lives.

What Friends Are For

An acquaintance whom I had always been attracted to began to show interest in me.... He made me laugh; we talked on the phone as if we had been close friends for years; and when we spent time together he showered me with affection....

After I broke the news to him [that I have HIV], he held me, shared some secrets of his own, and expressed kindness and empathy with both his words and his touch. He told me he wasn't sure if he was prepared for all that came with my status, but said he wanted to be there for me and hinted that he may just need some time to get used to the idea....

He did slowly distance himself from me, revealing his conflicted emotions, and it became increasingly evident that he was not able to think of me in the same way he used to, now that I had disclosed my status.

Throughout all of this, I was lucky to have the incredible support of a few trusted friends and a new peer support group, which I started attending earlier this year. I can't say enough how crucial finding a support group has been. Connecting face-to-face with peers who are dealing with similar issues, and who could truly empathize with my struggles and fears, helps to lift some of the heavy weight off my shoulders (and heart) this disease often brings.

—Anonymous

blogs.poz.com/anonymous

You Are Not Alone

My best friend Tracy opened the door, and although I tried to put on a happy face she could always read me.... We sat on the edge of her bed and she put her arms around my shoulder.

Up until that time I felt like I was all alone in the world, but that simple contact between me and her opened up the floodgates of everything I was hiding. It was so powerful because up until then I didn't allow anyone to touch me or hug me as I felt dirty. Even if it was the shaking of hands, I didn't want human contact. It had been two years since I was told I was HIV positive, and I never

told anyone, not even myself. I was scared. I was scared no one would love me. I was scared of the rejection, and I was scared of the secret I carried. And although Tracy and I had been good friends for many years, I was scared of what she would think; she was a rock to me in this crazy world.

With no melodrama I just told her I had HIV, and the tears fell like a monsoon. The hug she gave me didn't get weaker but stronger. She held me like I was a baby, which is no surprise since I was crying like one. I was no longer in this battle alone.
—Aundaray Guess
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Gay OK
My beloved hometown of Charlottesville, Virginia, hosted its first-ever Pride festival.... I couldn't resist being a part of this event to show my support for a community that has shown me so much support since I decided to speak out about being HIV positive....

Undoubtedly the result...will make this an annual event, one I look forward to attending every year.

Why? Because my life today wouldn't be possible without my "gay allies" (a.k.a. friends). When I was just a confused, 20-year-old straight kid in Waynesboro, Virginia, with a website, it was a group of gay men at POZ magazine that opened my handwritten letter and invited me to New York City. It really was a portion of the gay community that gave me confidence in knowing that, as a positoid, I was a catch as a single man. And when I wrote My Pet Virus, once again it was the gay community that pulled the strings to get that book published. I am forever indebted, and forever grateful.
—Shawn Decker
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