30 Years of AIDS, A Personal Timeline

June 5, 2011 By Shawn Decker

Today marks 30 years since the first report on what would become known as AIDS was published. Poz interviewed the doctor, Michael Gottlieb, who penned that report for the latest issue of their magazine. Poz has also compiled a timeline of the epidemic, which is worth taking a look at.

30 years of AIDS. That's a lot to chew on. As an educator, I'm happy to see more and more people willing to be out with their status. I really think individuals can change public perception of this by letting people know that we walk proudly, HIV status and all, as fellow members of society. As someone living with HIV for well over two decades, I hope there are some real scientific answers in the pipeline. There must be continued interest in a cure, or at least an outright suppression of this virus' ability to do damage. I don't want to be blogging in 20 years about "50 Years of AIDS!", where people are still taking meds, trying to take meds, and public schools are skirting around the life and death issue of sexual health education.

When I'm in my mid-50s, I want to be doing something age appropriate, and talking about sex with teenagers isn't where I want to be. Instead, I'd rather be touring with Synthetic Division as a wise elder statesman singing songs about an epidemic unknown to the teenage hipsters in the crowd.

All that aside, I am inspired to compile my own personal timeline as someone who has entered his fourth decade (80's, 90's, 00's, 10's) with HIV. So sit back and enjoy!

1984-85: In the 4th Grade I get shingles, the first huge sign my immune system is compromised. Soon thereafter, I hear my first AIDS joke in class. "What do you call Rock Hudson on a skateboard?... Roll AIDS!"

1986: Enjoy my first kiss on the lips. A peck, but a

kiss nonetheless. I am hooked for life.

1987: Diagnosed with HIV in March. Kicked out of the 6th Grade due to concerns over my HIV status. Allowed back just in time for the beginning of Junior High School.

1988: Ask my doctor if HIV can be transmitted through french kissing. He says without the flow of blood or open sours, it is highly unlikely. Soon thereafter, I have my first french kiss. I am hooked for life.

1990: Meet Depeche Mode through the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Almost outlive lead singer, Dave Gahan, as the 1990s progress. Against all odds, we both end up surviving the decade.

1992: I am crowned Waynesboro High School's first HIV positive Homecoming King.

1996-97: I go public with my HIV status with one of the first web sites on the internet about living with HIV. Invent the word “positoid”, which means “someone living with HIV”. Begin writing the Positoid column for Poz magazine, and blogging about my daily experiences.

1999: Diagnosed with AIDS. Start HIV medications. All that is overshadowed by the fact that my new girlfriend, Gwenn, decides to move in with me.

2000: Feel good enough to start traveling the United States with Gwenn, educating about safer sex at colleges and universities.

2002: After a few years on HIV medications, I start a week on/week off HIV drug regimen to combat side effects. It works for me: t-cells remain high as viral load stays low.

2004: Gwenn and I get married. Too tired to have sex on wedding night.

2006: *My Pet Virus*, my humorous memoir, is published by Penguin. (check out Poz's Bookstore)

2011: I grow tired of thinking about items for my personal timeline on HIV/AIDS while blogging about 30 years of AIDS.

I'm sure I missed some milestones there, but it's been quite a ride. I'm looking forward to more adventures, and I thank you for making my blog one of your little stops on the internet. Stay well, be your own hero and let's all do our part to make HIV a permanent part of history. I'd love nothing more than to live to see that day.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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