A Boy, A Virus and the Education of a Community

January 20, 2014 By Shawn Decker

Recently I was contacted by Brian Bridgeforth, a fellow Waynesboro, VA native and the little brother of a longtime classmate and friend, Patti. (I believe Patti and I met in Kindergarten in 1980, and graduated together in 1993.) Brian works for the Waynesboro Heritage Foundation and invited me to write a guest blog entry about how my testing positive for HIV at age 11 affected our hometown.

(To read the full post, please visit The Waynesboro Heritage Foundation website!)

"Despite being born with the bleeding disorder, hemophilia, I enjoyed a pretty typical childhood growing up in Waynesboro. I lived in a quaint neighborhood, just a few skips down the sidewalk from my best friends. Summers were spent swimming at my grandparents' pool and many hours were dedicated to the latest Atari games when I wasn't outside pretending to be Rambo in a game of war.
Yes, I am a child of the 1980s.

And one of the most impactful events of that decade was the emergence of HIV/AIDS. It was during a time when there were gaping lapses in blood safety standards. Due to my reliance on blood products for treating my hemophilia I was at risk for HIV infection. There were signs that my immune system was compromised in the 4th grade when half of my body broke out in shingles. I did not receive a standard HIV test until two years later in 1987. It was the spring of my 6th grade school year and, aside from a bout with strep throat, it was one of my best years until I failed that "pop quiz."

After I tested positive for HIV my mom informed my teacher of the results. My teacher had concerns about the risk of transmission to my classmates, and when she spoke with her doctor it started a chain reaction of fearful reactions that led to me being kicked out of school. I wasn't allowed back in class for the last four weeks of the school year..."

(To read rest of the post, click HERE!)

Positively Yours,

Shawn

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