# Back to School Special: Why Sexual Health is Still Relevant #DoingItMyWay

August 31, 2018 By Shawn Decker

School is back in session, and sexual health should be included among the many things that teenagers and young adults are learning about. But unfortunately, it isn't a priority. The CDC recently reported an increase in Sexually Transmitted Infections, with half of new cases occurring in those ages 14-24.

Over the last twenty years, Gwenn and I (collectively known as Shawn and Gwenn) have educated on sexual health from the perspective of a sero-diverse couple: me being HIV positive and her

being HIV negative. We've answered every type of personal question and we've been very effective in reaching people. Humor is an important aspect of how we present our message, and we make sure to set people at ease with some self-deprecating jokes on the difficult topic of sexual health. It truly is the gateway to a wonderful conversation- speaking to strangers is the same as speaking with friends, doesn't it always work out best when you laugh together before getting into the serious stuff? Showing that we have a healthy relationship gives people the courage to get tested, too. It's why we wanted to be a part of the Doing It My Way Campaign to encourage HIV testing. (find a testing location by clicking on the picture below!)

Recently, though, we haven’t been educating as much in that way. A few years ago, we decided to stop promoting ourselves on the speaking circuit: it takes a lot of energy and, quite frankly, I needed a break. Of course, if anything came up we’d do it. But it terms of actively seeking

anything, we took a passive attitude about it.

But now, we are ready to get back to work. The big question is: does anyone care?

In the last few weeks we've revamped our website, reached out to contacts and are hoping to plan a speaking tour from Monday, Nov. 26 through Friday, Dec. 8, all taking place around World AIDS Day 2018. I'm optimistic but guarded. World AIDS Day is the time of year that groups could secure funding to bring us in- one year we spoke 10 times in two weeks. For one of the talks we flew into San Francisco, spoke, then took the red-eye to New York for a talk the next day... insanity!

Part of my willingness to give this another shot is because I know we have something to offer. I have a perspective that spans from getting kicked out of the 6th grade as a result of testing positive for HIV, to having my life saved by effective treatments in my early 20s, to now: living in the modern era of U=U, where science has shown that my undetectable viral load makes it impossible for me to transmit HIV to Gwenn. That's a long way from not being allowed at sleepovers with my friends after testing positive, when some parents thought it could be spread from sharing a Nintendo controller.

So, will we be successful in our attempt to educate on sexual health? The next two months will tell the tale.

Positively Yours,

Shawn

For more information on how you can have Shawn and Gwenn speak at your event, go to: http://shawnandgwenn.com

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