Christmas Wish

December 12, 2013 By Aundaray Guess

Dear Santa
I know you're probably making your list and checking it twice but if it's not too late I would like to add several items to my Christmas list. Now I want you to know I've been a good boy and taken all my HIV medicines so I think I'm justified in making several small requests. Besides you still owe me for the time I asked for an Easy Baked Oven and instead I got an etch-a-sketch. Yes I know that was many years ago but maybe next year I can receive the gift of letting small things go. So as you look at what to load up in your sleigh and keeping Rudolph's nose warm, if you can just hear my cry as I come to you with my wish this Christmas.

First thing I ask for is a huge table that can seat all. I ask for this as I know that there will be many observing this season alone having being rejected from family and friends because of their HIV status and sexuality. This season is supposed to be one of merriment and joy but the sad reality is that it's a reminder of how individuals don't have a place at the table. I know this feeling all too well as I once felt I wasn't welcomed at the table and if I was, it was with a cautious breath. But no one should have to feel alone anytime of the year and no one should have to be shunned because of their status. So while you're at it if you can bring as many chairs that will fit into your bag for all those who feel they don't belong and by coming together they can see family isn't always just your blood relatives but the many people who come together for you.

My second wish is for increase funding of HIV/AIDS. I think someone opened the wrong gift and got the impression that the battle of HIV has been won and see no need for increased funding. The war chest you gave them many years ago when toys soldiers were painted white have seemed to been shut when the paint on the soldiers fell off and the exposed colors of the black and browns started to come through. Maybe Christmas came early for others but I know in my neck of the woods it's still Halloween as the scary reality is that people who hold the key to the toy chest have been blind to the fact that since HIV/ AIDS is manageable we can all relax and move on. If you have a mirror you can probably gift that as well so they can see that this is still very much an issue that needs immediate attention as needed services are being cut, especially services for people of color who are making up the majority of new cases. For this gift if you can allow me to open right away as we don't have time to wait on this issue.

On my list I would also like to give a pair of shoes made of HIV stigma to the HIV negative community, especially those unaware of the impact stigma has on an individual living with HIV. Perhaps as they try on the unfamiliar footwear they will experience the uncomfortable steps many living with HIV have to experience. Give them roads of discomfort so that they can experience the

real emotions of shame and rejection that comes with stigma. And the purpose is not to harm but create awareness. Make the soles full of lead so when they try to jump over the many barriers that block them from healthcare and services that can improve their life, they can relate to the hardships. But as stated before I don't want this gift to be one of cruelty. So as they try to walk a mile in steps already taken leave them not with aches and pains but a better understanding of stigma and the need to end it.

While I'm speaking of stigma, if for one day you could give my brothers and sisters with HIV a tailored shirt free of stigma. Hopefully those who have been unable to do so can put this shirt on their back and truly know the freeing experience of embracing one self and how much richer their lives can be without living in the shadow of stigma. And as they prance in their new look they can look at their reflection and see themselves for the true god and goddesses they are. Make it a magic shirt that they can fashion into a parachute that glides them over the barriers that they thought was forever built in place to stop their dreams. And while in the air let them know that their dreams are no longer grounded by their status but their dreams and goals are unlimited like the sky. Make this shirt of the finest material so they can wear it every day and no one can take it away from them.

Now I know my Christmas list is longer than most but If you have some room can you hand out picture books of knowledge to the young gay and questioning men in the community and let them know that their body truly is their temple and choices made in the heat of the moment can last for a lifetime. But don't make it a book of lessons. Instead in that picture book have plentiful images of gay men not defining themselves by their physical attributes or sexual abilities in bed but flourishing by the healthy love they have discover with others and finding the love within themselves. Leave pages open so the young men can place positive pictures of themselves for others to see as they are our future. For some they don't know what a healthy relationship may look like so overfill the book with snapshots of those images to guide the young men and let them know and experience the love that they may have not thought existed. Give them bookshelves so they can create a library of books that open their minds and in the revealing chapters, despite the reports, that they are aware each one is more than statistical deficit numbers related to HIV. In fact the library room can be called, Teach not Preach.

So as I get to the bottom of my request I hope you don't feel I'm asking too much of you. Based on the situation and the dire need it's the only reason I ask. HIV has taken away from so much and so many it's only fair I ask for something in return. I hope you agree Santa.

And finally if the elves have any tape left over from wrapping gifts, can you use the extra to cover Don Lemon's mouth. I'll pay you for that gift.

That's all and hope you like sugar cookies with rainbow sprinkles and chocolate milk. I'll have some waiting for you. And that is my Christmas wish!

Merry Christmas Santa

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