“That” Day at the HIV Clinic

When the doctor broke the news to me.

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In the beginning, people often say they can take it as deep as you can give it. They don’t take into consideration that maybe it’s too soon to go that far, that fast. My story is going to start all the way in there. Take a deep breath, and let’s start this ride.

I sat in that chair one day in August 2011, and I was in shock. I was invincible two minutes ago, and now the results came back “reactive” for the preliminary HIV test. I just sat quietly. Quickly after the shock, I started to fill with shame.

I had walked into the clinic for a routine check up. Well, maybe I had a case of gonorrhea. I mean, with the symptoms and all, I kind of assumed.

As I got screened, I was sitting down listening to a doctor tell me about safe sex and why it’s important to wear condoms, even during oral sex. A knock at the door interrupted him. “I need to see Richard before we close, if you could finish up.” Of course, I didn’t think anything of it as I was there to get treated for gonorrhea. Then five minutes later, the nurse returned. “I really need to speak with him before we close, it’s important.” Okay, so I must admit, at this point I started to sweat a little bit, but I still didn’t think it had anything to do with HIV.

As we finished up and the nurse walked me over to the opposite end of the clinic and sat me in an office and closed the door, I had a smile on my face. Then it happened, it was *THAT* day at the clinic.

She told me so casually, and then followed up by urging me to speak with the counselor, but everything was so rushed because it was closing time.

I left and called two friends, and then my mom and my sister. One of the friends worked at a restaurant and told me to come for dinner and I brought the other friend along with me for companionship. We had a lovely meal and I tried to think about other things. I remember the salmon being the best fillet I had ever had; at the time, it felt like my last meal.

The most significant decision of the day had been choosing to get tested. But sitting at dinner, I thought it was right in front of me: the moment I picked up the glass of wine and took a sip to settle my nerves.

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