Disclosing After Sex

May 17, 2013 By Aundaray Guess

Many issues have been asked about HIV and when to disclose your status. I think when it comes to HIV this topic is one of the most difficult to answer as it's different for every person. Also everyone has a different situation so there's no pact answer that will fit every situation. I know when I was diagnosed I was determined that no one would ever find out and when it came to sex, I would choose to be celibate if that was the case. For myself when I realized how difficult a life of celibacy, especially in my peak years of my twenties, I knew I had to shift gears. So my new solution was that I told myself I would have sex but that I simply wouldn't share my status, that instead I would practice safe sex where there was no risk involved to my sexual partner. It worked for a while as it was fun sex with no expectations of truly getting to know each other, so no risk no foul. I soon discovered It may seem to work especially for those one night stand or booty calls but what do you do when you start to have feelings for someone after the sex. And how do you disclose knowing you were intimate yet didn't reveal your HIV status. I was confronted with this sticky situation when I finally found love.

When I met my current partner we didn't take it serious. You can say it was simply for sex and therefore it appeared that there was no reason to divulge my status as it seemed that we had no emotional ties that went beyond the bedroom. Then something unexpected happened. We started to feel for each other. It was an uplifting moment in my life as I felt that finally this felt like someone who I can build a life with. It was also unexpected as I had these walls up to not let anyone in to hurt me. The walls came from previous rejection where I did the right thing and disclosed only to have people run away. So my non-disclosure was more for my benefit than it was for others. So I was surprised that someone came along and found a crack in my wall.

When we entered the dating mode we made an unusual agreement that I think helped solidified us even today. We agreed that we would get to know each other during the next three months and during that time we would not have sex. I think for most people this would be a deal breaker but for me it had two advantages. The first was that I could get to know this person beyond the act of sex and second I wouldn't be in a position where my status made a difference as we weren't having sex.

The fear of losing a good thing was still there in this getting to know each other moment as I couldn't find the words to tell him of my situation. But I know that my heart was now invested in him and him in me. What should have been a fairy tale romance had this single dark cloud that only I could see hanging over us. I can tell you that the act of hiding your status is some stressful shit. You find ways to explain the doctor visits or the not feeling so good moments. You come up

with creative ways to hide your medication and you develop a prayer that they don't come across a stray pill or if you were so bold, that they don't look in the medicine cabinet. You also start missing evening dosages as it's hard to take your pills when you're out for the evening with company. To do so mean placing them in your pocket for later and hoping they don't accidentally fall out.

For someone outside they could elicit no sympathy for your trials but if they knew the emotional journey one has to endure when disclosing their status to anyone let alone a partner, they may understand somewhat. You actually do disclose but it's a private conversation you have in your head as you play out the scene in your mind. You see yourself doing the reveal as well as imagining their response. One scenario it's a Disney moment where everyone is singing a song of relief and the next scenario it's the worst case scene as they pack your bags and kick you to the curb.

My moment of final truth came when we decided to move in together. All the secrets of my status now made it harder for me to keep concealing my status. From my medication, to the reminder calls from the clinic reminding me of my appointment to the mail bearing my clinic name, it was now not a matter of if but when. The hard thing about disclosing is that it makes you feel powerless as someone with the information has the power to either stay with you or to call it quits. It makes it seems like the choice no longer belongs to you. The very act of disclosing sometimes makes you hold your breath waiting for someone else's reaction, response. A humbling moment when this disease makes you feel less than.

Before telling I reviewed our relationship and was hopeful as based on character traits he had I felt he would understand. I also had to check myself and accept that he may be hurt I didn't trust him and accept my role in that feeling. But no matter what I realize that once the information was given I couldn't be responsible for how he react but could take ownership over my own feeling. So rather than play the 'what if' game I laid it on the line and decided to tell him my secret. It involved many factors such as the right time, the right reasons and the right way. So basically I told him during a quiet moment when we were attuned to each other and there was no hostility. And delivering it to him in a clear non-dramatic way with no attitude or flippant tone, as I knew I was doing it to get his support and hope that the love we developed over the years would let him know that I had no itinerary but to be completely honest with him and most importantly with myself.

"I have HIV" that was the beginning of my dialogue and from there were endless questions of how long and when. From there a honest dialogue started and then something weird happened. It made us closer as the last remaining bricks of the wall came crashing down. I could finally be honest with not just him but also myself. He was able to see beyond the disease and still see the person he fell in love with. I was not a three letter acronym but Aundaray. I was also encourage as practicing safe sex he remained negative and it's a testimony that practicing safe sex a person with HIV can be in a relationship with someone negative, something he remains to this day thirteen years later.

I know there are others in my shoes and like me can’t find the words. For someone who may not understand it’s not a case of having your cake and eating it to. It’s a case of feeling someone will not accept you fully for who you are. Yet sometimes that thing call love shoots an arrow and you find yourself in unfamiliar territory with no map on how to navigate it, learning as you go. In that lost moment it’s comforting to find that someone that says no matter what the journey is I’m there with you. A true power and benefit of knowing there’s love after disclosure.

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