Disclosure to Family and Friends

February 29, 2012 By Aundaray Guess

It was two years since I had found out that I was positive. Two years of carrying the secret of what I was going through. I was not out at the time and wanted to tell just anyone what I was going through so I didn't have to carry this burden alone.

I had family which I was close to in some ways. I was raised in a single parent household and my mother filled both parenting roles. Looking back she made sure we had a roof over our head and food on the table. We had struggles and days when a bowel of cereal was dinner, but we had each other. She grew up in a religious household as my grandfather was a preacher--so church was a huge part of our family. It was what got us through the difficult times.

When I was in my early teens, I remember for no particular reason she pulled me aside and told me in a direct voice, "If you ever turn out to be a faggot, I'll kill you." Even to this day I don't know why she told me that, as I had not acted out on my sexuality let alone identify. But she sensed something and gave me a pre-warning. I grew to fear her following through on her threat.

Many years later, what she saw came to pass and now I was not only gay but I also had HIV. So although I was in my early twenties I had no fear of her hurting me physically, but I did fear her emotionally as I wanted to share my new diagnosis. Yet I felt to tell her meant confirming in her mind that I got it because I didn't listen to her and now here I was coming back to her crying. I really felt that she would say, "You made your bed, now lay in it."

Family is such a difficult concept. We all have them, but we sometimes don't want the family we have. We accept from them behaviors we wouldn't dare let everyday people do. Yet we keep searching for function in the dysfunction. So here I was wondering how I can get support in this social structure.

But at the end of the day family, despite their failings, keeps us connected. Make us feel part of something. And even though I had this virus, I still wanted my family.

Because my depression was starting to get the best of me, I found myself one day making my way to my best friend's house, another person who I hid my secret from. When she opened the door she saw it in my eyes that something was wrong. She let me in and asked me what was wrong, but my words were stolen. They were lost in the mirror where I endlessly practiced what and how I would tell the people close to me. Then she reached out and touched me on the shoulder.

That's when my dam broke and just that touch released all the days of walking around with this mystery called HIV. Two years of tears came from me as I lay cradled like a child telling her that I had this disease. As she rocked me back and forth she just told me it was going to be okay and she made sure I knew that she loved me no matter what.

I was no longer going through this alone.

That release gave me the strength to tell my family. Rather than tell my brothers and sisters before telling my mother, I decided it was time she knew. It was at that time I just put it in God's hands and trusted Him and knew that I had someone on this earth who had my back.

Telling her of my status meant that I was telling her I was gay. When I told her it wasn't the same release I had with my friend. But she didn't try to kill me as she promised. She simply asked, "What can I do?" It wasn't what I was expecting. She still let me know she wasn't happy but wasn't going to turn her back on me. Maybe sensing my heaviness and trying to lift me she told me, "That doesn't mean you'll try to go after my boyfriends?" It worked as I let her know, "You don't have to worry, I've seen your boyfriends."

It was so important to have her acceptance because I felt that if my mother was okay with who I was, I didn't give a damn what others felt. It lessened my shame. The chain of depression that was dragging me down was coming unshackled.

Now that I'm older I can see why my mother said what she did those many years ago. A mother naturally wants to protect her child. Whether it's telling you to look both ways before crossing the street or don't talk to strangers. But when it comes to being gay or having HIV they may not have the tools to protect you and fear they won't be able to protect you as they don't know much about the enemy. They just know that people out in the world want to do harm to their child.

My disclosure to my family will be different from others as some may have no issues and some may experience out right rejection. For me telling family was important as they were a part of my life that was going to be with me until my last days. I didn't want to live a life in a lie.

Family is not only made of blood relatives and even though we may feel like we don't need anyone in this world, we all want to be connected to something or someone. If the family we're given quit on you, we sometimes have to create our family from a collection of people in this world who accept everything about you.

For me this virus took so much from me in my early days but as I got more of a handle on my life I knew one thing. This virus was not going to make me feel like an orphan.

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