Father’s Day

June 13, 2012 By Aundaray Guess

Chuck was a man who clearly had dreams just like anyone else. And like everyone else he was also a person who wanted to love and be loved in return. In honor of Father’s Day, I reflect on Chuck and recognize that it will be close to a year since his passing.

I met Chuck or rather Chuck met me at an HIV support group. I later learned from him he had intentions once he read a recent story written about the group with a photo of me published along with the article. Whatever his intentions were, we hit it off despite the fact that he had twenty years over me, me being in my early thirties, he in his fifties. It wasn’t like he was robbing the cradle, but it was my first time dating someone older. There were reservations because of the age difference, but since we had so much in common, and not just our status, we become a couple.

I had always admired Chuck as he was a driven person and refused to let his status stop him from living a full life. He had a successful career of which when Mondays came around he welcomed it as he loved what he did. He shared his love with his dog Tasha who didn’t give me that same love right away, as she would yap at me and keep a clear distance. But one day after slipping her a whole beef rib, she warmed up to me right away. The power of the rib! And the bulk of Chuck’s love went to his son. A young man that could brighten up and remove any bad moods Chuck would experience. As a single father, his son was always first in his life.

Chuck was known for many things, but there were two that stood out. One was his cooking. He loved to get in his kitchen and whip up a gourmet type meal without the need of a cookbook. Although the meal may sometimes be served close to midnight, as it had to be perfect, it was always worth the wait. I would joke that he should stop calling it dinner and call it breakfast. One of those meals consisted of me and him sitting in the kitchen while he did his magic making sure I stayed out the way. He was limping that day as he would sometimes have trouble with his back. Noticing it, I told him I could order out. You would have thought I stole his check as he gave me a look that telegraphed, “Are You Crazy.” Even offering to help prepare the meal he gave me the same look with a playful tightened grip on the knife that warned me that if I dared moved off the stool I was sitting on; there’d be hell in the suburbs.

He explained it was one of his new meds giving him a slight numbness in his leg but he’d be damned, as he told me, to let a pill smaller than his pinkie stop him from enjoying what he loved to do. I then asked him something that was always curious to me. In a tactful way I asked him was it hard to have HIV in his fifties and did he worry about the future. I’ll never forget how he stopped and real plainly told me, “Ain’t nothing in this life easy, you going to have things that will want to make you give in. But that’s when you start living. And I’ll be damned if anything think it’s

going to come along and make me give in. I have a son to raise" As for the future, he let told me, "Until the future get here, live the life you have now". Even in his time of need it wasn't about him, but his family.

It was one of many things I admired about Chuck, the honesty he had with his son. His son knew he was gay but because Chuck made himself available to answer any questions, he erased the mystique of it. Chuck shared that the hardest thing was trying to explain why he needed to take the many pills he did and why sometimes he didn't feel so good after taking those same pills. He assured his son that he was not living a death sentence. He did when HIV wasn't considered a disease that would be one you could manage as protease inhibitors were not available and side effects were more the norm. Yet he would never let any of his ills stop him from his fatherly duties and spending time with his son.

I used to never allow myself the thought of having a family. Especially being diagnosed in my teens, I had a harder time believing that I would be alive in my thirties. But now that I met that age benchmark and realizing I wasn't going anywhere, Chuck opened my eyes to the possibilities and in a way he modeled to me how to have a full life in my fifties and beyond without my status draining the enjoyment of my life.

Eventually Chuck and I broke up but we didn't part ways. Even after it wasn't a friend with benefits situation; it was simply a friendship that recognized, although we shifted our relationship on one level, we could still be friends on another level. Soon after, Chuck's son grew up and moved out of the house. Then after, Chuck's beloved dog crossed the Rainbow Bridge into another life.

I can't say how the silence of the house affected Chuck; I just know he was a person who loved to be surrounded by laughter. Luckily the laughter was replaced with the help of his grandchildren. He was truly one of a kind.

Chuck went home at the age of 68. He will always be missed. I know Tasha is glad to see him. To me, he wasn't just a good friend. He was inspiration; he was a person in love with life, he was the greatest cook in the world. But most of all, and as we will recognize on this special holiday for men like him, he was the greatest father.

Happy Father's Day Charles.

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