

Friendly Faces at NACA

March 1, 2010 By [Shawn Decker](#)



I'd posted about Gwenn and I showcasing at the National Association for Campus Activities (NACA) conference a couple of weeks ago, but I haven't really said what a big deal that was. We got a much coveted 15-minute slot to do our thing, selected from hundreds of submissions, because you're basically speaking to representatives/students from hundreds of colleges at one time.

No pressure, right?

The good thing is that Gwenn and I had done a NACA regional conference last fall, so we'd already whittled down our hour-long program to a lean, mean 15-minute fighting machine. Basically I axed my entire love life before Gwenn, and instead of a Q&A session we just blazed through the most common questions- do we have sex? How condoms work for us? Is Gwenn scared to have sex with me. (Short Answers- 1. Yes 2. Well, never had a break or slip 3. No.)

It's funny, our program is deeply personal... but we've been speaking about our relationship now for a decade, and how the "program" has evolved is something I am proud of- in the beginning, we were focused on what we do and why we care about HIV education. Now, it's all about throwing those skills out to the audience, and also explaining why we aren't scared, why we are safe and that they and their friends may not be, based on assumptions (I can tell by looking at someone if they have something). In the last year or so, I've also made it a point to advocate for those who are living with any lifelong sexually transmitted infection. As it is with HIV, the job of preventing further infections lies with us. And of course, one has to know their status to begin with, which is why testing is important since symptoms for just about everything that is out there often don't reveal themselves.

It's complicated. And it's not.



Going to NACA also meant we had the opportunity to see more of our speaking friends. [Joe and Bil](#) do a program called "When the Gays Move Into Mr. Roger's Neighborhood", which is all about being in a same-sex relationship in a world of hetero privilege. They are also hilarious, at the conference they had Joe & Bil pink scarfs and were raffling off a pink toaster. At NACA, you see, giveaways are a must, because everyone is bombarded from all angles, and you gotta have your name on something that gets back to their school so someone says, "Hey, Joe and Bil were awesome! I loved them," and begins the process of sharing that program on their own campus.

We gave away Joe and Bil-approved pink Screw Smarter t-shirts.

At NACA we also ran into Todd Murray, whom I've been in net communication with over the last several years. It was great to shake hands and thank him for all he's been doing to show that HIV looks like all of us. Check out the organization he founded, [Does HIV Look Like Me?](#) On the way to Boston and NACA, we also [got to have coffee](#) with the co-founder of [>Just In Case](#), Marsha, while in Los Angeles. She gave us some condom-carrying compacts to take to Boston, and they were a big hit. It's nice to see how perfectly style and safety can go together.



Aside from those of us who work in the educational field, there are also a myriad of bizarre pop culture icons. Mr. Belding from *Saved By The Bell* is a mainstay, and there was a sighting of Ruthie from the *Real World Hawaii*. Our friends Sue and Melissa at the College Agency weren't above being starstruck when Snookie happened by- there was even talk of asking Snooks to be an alternate for Gwenn in our "A Boy, A Girl, A Virus" program. (JUST KIDDING. God, I am KIDDING.)

So yeah, NACA is huge. That's why Gwenn and I freaked out when we were selected for one of 14 showcase spots, because we know tons of people apply for them. Joe and Bil got one, and so did our friend Erin Weed, founder of [Girls Fight Back](#).

When Erin's college friend, Shannon, was murdered, Erin dropped her post college career plans, learned about women's self defense, and embarked on a mission to educate women about the fine art of kicking ass. Not only that, in recent years she's branched out, training a handful of young women to go across the country as part of the Girls Fight Back team.

After our nerve-racking showcases were over, we had dinner with Erin and Megan Norwood, one of her GFB'ers. Later that night, we went for a drink, but the hotel bar was closed, leaving hundreds of NACA attendees in the lurch. There was a "bar" across the street that happened to be a bowling alley. It didn't look open, and there were a few sketchy guys standing around outside smoking.

I'd never felt safer in my life than I did walking in between Megan and Erin.



The guys were cool once we got closer, and they informed us that the bowling alley was opened. It was actually packed, name tags from NACA dangling about as people unwinded a bit after the hectic 5-day conference was beginning to officially end. After chatting with Erin and Megan, screaming over bad music, we retired for the evening. Oh, that's Erin and Megan with Mr. Belding, by the way, their booth at the conference was right across from his, and Erin couldn't resist getting a photo.

The next morning it was back home, we beat another snowfall to get onto the plane- perfect timing once again. This semester has been so busy that it's been hard to keep up with blog entries to tell all the stories... but I'm happy about that. 2009 ended roughly, and I've been put to the test this year and have passed with (literally) flying colors.

And if anyone at NACA cared about what Gwenn and I had to say about sexual health, next year will prove to be even busier. If that's not the case, I'll just have to hit the weights, wax my chest and apply for Jersey Shore.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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