Happy Birthday, Steve Schalchlin!

October 4, 2012 By Shawn Decker

That’s a mug. It’s where I keep my tooth brush and toothpaste in our downstairs bathroom. And that’s me and Steve. We came upon a cubicle in a mall-type situation in 1998, and decided to get our

likenesses plastered on a coffee mug and a t-shirt. Steve gave me first choice: I choose the mug.

Today is Steve's birthday. I posted this photo on his Facebook Wall. I post Happy Birthday messages on there from time to time, but truthfully, I don't check in every day and I'm sure I miss some key birthdays... for that I am sorry. I am grateful that I caught this one. When I first went online in 1996, armed with a desire to share my HIV status with whomever would listen, Steve was one of the first people that I found. He was one of a literal handful of people blogging who were HIV positive- if there were more than 3 I couldn't find them.

He encouraged me to join in. I didn't want to copy him. He assured me that as a young straight man, I wouldn't step on his older, wiser gay toes. I took his advice. Steve was the first guy with HIV that had a sense of humor that matched my own. (A shout out to Bret Turner, who I met shortly thereafter!) It was a game changer for me. I was in my very early 20s, and Steve gave me advice and friendship and assurance that I had a place in all of this- that I was a relevant voice and that I should keep talking about my reality as someone living with HIV.

When I met Steve, he was very sick. He'd just started on Crixivan, a drug that saved his life. A few years later, when I got sick, he vehemently told me that I needed to switch gears and start meds. It was jolting. He didn't pull any punches, and it scared me. I started meds, and it saved my life.

I love you Steve. Happy birthday, my friend.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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