HIV Stops With Me

July 25, 2011 By Shawn Decker

Late last year I was approached by HIV Stops With Me, a campaign that utilizes those already infected with HIV as soldiers on the frontlines in the attempt to stem new infections. I love the concept, it's empowering and allows for the discussion of the reality that- yes- people with HIV can have healthy sex lives. Every month I answer a question for their web site, and I just realized I haven't been cross-posting my answers to my blog. Silly me. So here's a few of my Question of the Month answers from HIV Stops With Me.

How has your relationship with your family changed since you came out about being HIV positive?

Being diagnosed so young- at age 11- I believe my situation really helped to inform my family about the realities of the HIV crisis in the earliest days of the epidemic. I was born with hemophilia, so my family knew what a lifelong medical condition was all about. After HIV, however, there was a change in that I needed to be protected from HIV as well as the stigma attached to it. For instance, I was kicked out of school in the 6th grade, so my family had to learn how to stand up to discrimination. It made us all more compassionate people.

What is the biggest life lesson HIV has taught you?

The biggest life lesson that HIV is has taught me is not to discriminate. I learned early in life how this feels due to my HIV status. After I tested positive at age 11 I was kicked out of school, many of my best friends' parents were no longer comfortable with me hanging out with them, and there was just so much fear and misunderstanding about how much of a "danger" I was. At the time, it was difficult, but subconsciously the groundwork was being laid to make me a better person for those trials. At my core, I just can't understand discrimination based on sex, sexuality, race, religion and all of the other things that can distinguish us on a surface level from one another. Life would suck if we were all the same, wouldn't it? I value the life lessons that HIV has taught me and I am thankful for the person I have become.

Have you ever been surprised by the love or support you received from someone after disclosing your HIV positive status?

I went public with my status on the Internet in 1996 at age 20. I was fully prepared to face the same fears that I encountered when I was diagnosed nearly ten years before, particularly with the anonymity that cyberspace provides. But on the contrary, I found a kind response, and that really helped in wanting to continue to educate by sharing my experiences as someone living with HIV. Before "going public", I never really disclosed my status. After high school, though, when I was hanging out with my brother- then a college student- and his friends, I did disclose to one of his hot friends in a private moment. To make a long story short, she let me feel her up. That really surprised me. Looking back, it really was a

turning point in that it made me realize that often I was the one who was making a big deal about my status by thinking that I had to keep that information to myself.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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