Holiday Spirits

December 19, 2007 By David Weiss

Last night, Cupcake and I entertained two of our neighbors, Vincent and Jane, at our apartment here in Manhattan. Vince is an epidemiologist at New York Hospital. Jane is a fitness coach at the Crunch health club down the street. As we sat around the table talking about HIV and other diseases, I found myself secretly amused by the fact that neither Vincent nor Jane had the slightest idea that I am HIV positive.

I?ve been incredibly fortunate. In 28 years of living with HIV (and Hep C) the only scars I bear are the emotional ones, and I''ve become very good at keeping those hidden. My skin gets a little dry this time of the year, and my lower back is acting up, but hey, I'm 57 years old; if those are the only health issues I have to contend with, I'm a happy camper. Sometimes people even remark that I look distinguished, and there are even moments when I believe that being HIV+ has helped me grow.

I?m not completely convinced that I deserve my good fortune. There are so many men and women in this community for whom survival with HIV is a daily struggle - and yet manage to soldier on in spite of it - that not even Oprah at her best could comprehend and praise them enough for their courage. When I began to write this entry today, I intended to describe the lives of the many HIVers who post in the forums, but they are all so incredible that it was too daunting a task. There are men and women who have been to the brink of death and returned; men and women who have lived year after year overcoming one health crises after another; men and women whose faces and figures have been assaulted by our unseen enemy.

I probably shouldn?t admit this, but Cupcake, the HIV+ vampire I?ve been shacking up with lately, is a metaphor for long-term (if not eternal) survival. Ginger, the HIV+ ghost who now lives with us and whom I may have infected, is the avatar of my survivor?s guilt. The two of them make for very interesting company. I hope that those of you who enjoy reading about our colorful life together will forgive me for blowing the punch line, but I figure that the three of us may be living (?) together for a very long time, and I thought that a proper introduction was in order.

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