I’ve Learned More About HIV/AIDS Than I Ever Wanted to Know

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Unfortunately, I learned it all the hard way . . . by being infected. When I first tested positive in late 2014, I was in denial, and I stayed that way for close to a year. After all, I’d been married to one man for nearly 25 years and I’d never been unfaithful. And I’d never engaged in any other risky behavior. As a white heterosexual female of 70, statistically, I was one of the least likely people on the planet to become infected. So, my current husband (who’d tested negative while I was in the hospital) and his daughter did some research and quickly found out that I needed two more tests to confirm that I wasn’t negative. The best place in Bakersfield, CA, to get the tests turned out to be Planned Parenthood. I’ve never been one of those people who thought that all PP did was abortions, but HIV testing? Who knew? So, I got the next two tests done. When the first one also came back positive, I started to lose it. And then the next one came back positive as well. What was going on? The counselor at PP spent a lot of time with my husband and me and was very helpful. She wanted to know where I might have gotten it. I told her I had no idea. Even though my step-daughter had already suggested that it must have been her father, I wasn’t ready to accept that as a possibility. But at the end of the day, I had to accept it. There just wasn’t any other plausible explanation.

So where did that leave me? I had no idea what to do next or who to turn to. At the time, I didn’t even know anyone who was HIV positive. I tried to find some kind of support group in Bakersfield, but I wasn’t able to. (I’ve since learned there were lots of resources available, but I wasn’t able to find them.) I spent a lot of time crying and feeling sorry for myself. And I spent time in physical therapy to regain my motor skills. We had Christmas dinner with local family, at a Coco’s restaurant. My husband had to push me up the handicap ramp in a wheelchair. I couldn’t even get out of the bathtub my myself. My mental condition wasn’t much better. I always paid the household bills and they simply didn’t get paid for the first two months. Gradually, all that went away and I was left with only the questions and the despair. And that one pill a day. . . .

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