Let Me Introduce Myself

May 12, 2015 By Jay Squires

My name is Jay Squires, and in February 2014 I became a Contributing Writer for PositiveLite.com, one of Canada's leading websites addressing in a holistic way the issues of life with HIV/AIDS. I wrote 35 posts on many topics, and now I blog for POZ.com. If you care to encounter my writings visit my ugly website, jaysquires.com. If you only want to read my future work, read me here.

I already know you. I have followed POZ.com for years. This post and the next will introduce me to you. I hope you enjoy them. We will be seeing a great deal of one another.

I had my first same-sex encounter in 1981, the year AIDS surfaced in California and New York. My life has been framed by the epidemic. I began in guilty self-denial and now live as a middle-aged man with AIDS.

I have had an interesting life. I trained as an attorney but largely set that aside after seven years. I was a professional vagabond moving from one corporate engagement or stab at self-employment to the next. The work was profitable.

I became a gay activist when I came out at 20 in my sophomore year at William and Mary. Over the years in Richmond, Virginia, I became involved with organizations providing services to or advocating for those I considered my people. I reached the senior level of our movement in my state.

In 2006 I was jointly the chair of the board of directors of Equality Virginia, the state's primary LGBT voice, and campaign chair for the statewide ballot initiative where we battled against the enactment of Virginia's bigoted constitutional amendment outlawing same-sex marriage.

My passion for equality swallowed my life. The work damaged me because I let it do so. Today I try to separate myself from a fight that has disillusioned me. I have not succeeded.

In 2008 I founded the Gay Community Center of Richmond. I became the highest paid professional gay in Virginia. This was my last employed work. I was fired in 2012 because I was not doing the work I was paid for. My disease had crippled me.

In February 2012, after being admitted through the ER, I was diagnosed with AIDS. My CD4 count was 90. My viral load was in the hundreds of thousands. Two of my physicians tell me today that they believed I would die. *I did not*. I began a new life.

Through the next three years, to and through today, I lived a life of freedom and imprisonment. I traveled widely, fell in love, moved to New York City and was married. I overcame obstacles and challenges. I was braver than I had ever been. I decided to take life rather than receive it.

At the same time, I was battling my disease and its offspring. Research on websites like POZ.com told me what I should expect. I expected to be undetectable within six months with a CD4 count over 300 in a year. I bought into the propaganda and began what seemed to be an endless circuit of small improvements followed by setbacks larger than the progress. I had no side effects as they are traditionally described. Instead I developed “conditions.” My legs spasmed and ached. Many afternoons I drifted into a listless state that immobilized me. I had other conditions including one too humiliating to write of even for me, a writer who never fails to invite his readers in.

My personal life was uproar. Angelo and I married in October 2013, and within months our relationship began to self-destruct. Angelo is diabetic and untreated. We believed his disease was the cause of his terrible troubles -- like flipping a switch, he turned from a kind, caring man into a beast who abused verbally and on three occasions physically.

Without work I was aimless. I was employed since I was 12 years old. Of course I felt like a failure. How could I not? All my life I gauged my success on position, on influence. I craved the respect that these brought. As I began my recovery, I felt my greatest loss was not my health but instead my influence and my ability to shape my people’s actions.

These factors combined to spin me into a deep depression, which today is the most difficult result of my disease. Depression followed quickly after my diagnosis and only ebbed temporarily with therapy and later medication. I was being treated by talented practitioners, but for 2013 through most of 2014 my depression ruled my life. At times it brought what I call “dark thoughts” as I am afraid to utter their true name. These days were the lowest of my life. They have ebbed but remain.

I chose to begin my POZ blog by explaining my troubles, because those troubles have forged the man I am today. I am tougher than I ever imagined I could be. I am resourceful and always believe there can be a solution to even the greatest challenge. For me the trick is to find that solution in the fog of pain and despair. Life can be better although improvement is sometimes delayed.

In my next post I will discuss the good, the actual miracles I have lived. I have never wanted to be a writer who is blinded to the good by the bad. One of the great goods in my life today is this opportunity to write for you. Stick with me. I will make you smile.

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