Let’s Talk About Sex Education

February 2, 2011 By Shawn Decker

My life is pretty damn good- as a default setting I walk around on Thankful. The universe has taken care of me every step of the way and, although I’ve had some serious obstacles along the course, there’s never been the absence of a giant safety net underneath of me. Whether I could see it down there or not.

That’s how I survived childhood. As an adult, I’m proud of the work that Gwenn and I do in HIV prevention. For the last ten years, we’ve been speaking at colleges, and pretty much started up the minute I was healthy enough to do so after starting on HIV meds. We’ve shared the realities of living with HIV, and dispelled the fears of transmission for couples like us by discussing how to use condoms effectively and not to fall into the trap of “I can tell someone has a Sexually Transmitted Disease by looking at them”.

Most of all, I love breaking down the stigma of sex and sexually transmitted infections. Above all else, I feel like this is what I was meant to do. On a personal level, meeting Gwenn has been the highpoint of my life. She’s such a great presence in my life, that I almost feel greedy to have her by my side as both my best friend and my lover. But beyond the personal, I’m glad that we met as educators, and have been able to shed a new light on HIV/AIDS by talking about what a lot of couples like us already know- safe sex is possible. Healthy relationships and the presence of HIV are not mutually exclusive.

We’ve reached a lot of people in a lot of different ways- via this blog, our talks, magazine and newspaper articles and My Pet Virus. Ultimately, I wish we could do more- but the sad truth is that the demand for sexual health education isn’t a huge priority for colleges and universities, and getting into high schools is a real tough sell. We also speak at HIV/AIDS conferences and AIDS Service Organizations, but often times the budgets don’t allow for the travel costs (plane tickets, rental car, hotel) it takes to get us there. It’s why I laughed when a couple of morons on Facebook said that Big Pharma was flying me all over the world.

Recently, Gwenn applied for a full-time job doing something other than HIV/AIDS. I know it’s tooting our own horn a bit, but I think that’s fucking stupid. Not of her, of course, but that we aren’t speaking as much as, say, a juggler or magician is being booked to entertain 19-year olds with tricks that are more suited for toddlers. But it shouldn’t be a surprise, our country’s relationship with sex has been a joke for quite a while. We use it to sell everything, but never speak of the realities of sexual health or admit that teenagers have libidos and sexual curiosity.

When Obama was running for president, he spoke about addressing the issue of sexual health with younger people, as a means of making it more likely that children could report instances of sexual abuse. The intelligent and honest addressing of a serious issue was met with an attack- and he was scolded for “wanting to show children pornography in public schools”, or however moronically it was framed by his

opponents. As president, George Bush made federal funds available for abstinence-only education, and the nation thought that was a great idea I guess, until teenage pregnancy rates went up.

These days, we blame teenage pregnancy on an MTV show, as if it never happened before 16 & Pregnant aired. We don't blame ourselves for taking sex education out of public schools, or ignoring the facts about when we as adults had our first thoughts and questions about sex.

For me, HIV/AIDS education is the only thing I feel qualified to do. For Gwenn, she had a life and an education before she got interested in HIV, before she fell in love with a guy with a pet virus... she has the kind of mind that any business would love to have on their team. She's the one who figured out all the ways that we could educate together, and was smart enough to pinpoint the topics we should address with college students. That's why I encourage her to see what else is out there, because she deserves to be doing more than just twiddling her thumbs while I blog...

Which, at the time, is my main way of educating about the virus. I'm honored to do it, I'm lucky to be alive and I wish that everyone with HIV could find the happiness in their lives that I've been able to find in mine. I want to do more, I'm always on call.

It's just that the phone isn't ringing.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

Watch, Friend and Follow me on:
YouTube, Facebook and Twitter
Website: ShawnandGwenn.com
Also check out the lovely Gwenn's Fashion/Coffee Blog
My CD, Synthetic Division, A Symptom of Life, is on iTunes!

SHARE THE BLOG. NOT THE VIRUS.

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