Playing the Guessing Game

A passionate romance soon began—and so did my HIV story.

March 26, 2018 By JMV

The summer of 2011 was full of passion and romance with this guy who was visiting from Australia. He was trying to move here when we met, and there was no stopping our youthful lust. The moment I set on eyes on him, I knew I was in trouble.

I logged onto Grindr one day and saw this profile of a handsome man that said he was looking for drinking buds, and I messaged him. It was a quick exchange that ended with us agreeing to meet at Elmo Restaurant for a drink and an appetizer. We sat down in the booth in the back of the restaurant and started talking. After several minutes, in an attempt to break any awkwardness that may have existed, I made a suggestion, “How about we each take five minutes, no interruptions, and tell each other about ourselves?” He liked the idea so, we did exactly that.

The time passed quickly, but he soon had to leave because he had to fetch a friend at the airport who was arriving for holiday from Melbourne. After a hug and promise to meet again, he hopped in a taxi. I couldn’t help sending him a text: “I don’t know how to gauge this.”

“What do you mean?”

“I wanted to kiss you.”

“Dude, I was seconds away from reaching across the table to kiss you.”

After a few days we had moved from conversation to lunches, spending a lot of time together with or without our friends. We held hands walking down the street, but he refused to kiss me until the time was right, and when he did about a week after meeting, I felt like I was floating. We had gone outside to smoke and we walked me down the street so we were alone. He set the scene. The clouds parted and the sun shined in that late hour of the night. It was magical and it took a few more days until he asked me to be his boyfriend. We were inseparable. He was taller than I am, so I melted into his arms. It felt right. He felt right.

We were responsible about safe sex and always had condoms on hand. In early 2011, I had been tested for HIV, and everything came up negative. One night we were in bed after a long night out, and I had run out of condoms, so we talked like adults and I said, “I was tested earlier this year and I’m clean. (The term “clean” and my understanding of it, will come up again in the future) He was negative, too. Being boyfriends, we didn’t think anything of it. The feeling of us being as close

as we were that night only made the relationship stronger.

A few weeks later, he had to move back “down under” and I cried and cried. I didn’t want him to leave. I wanted a fairytale. And it had been one up to this point. I wrote him a goodbye letter to read once he boarded the plane. We said our farewells outside my apartment on 35th Street, with his promise that he’d be back for me. He hopped in the airport shuttle and I watched it pull away. I waited until it was out of sight to go upstairs. I was alone in the apartment and cried into the night.

Within a few days I noticed something was off “down there,” so I went to get tested. I had sex with guys before we were boyfriends, but I definitely wasn’t expecting the results I got. Gonorrhea was one thing, not much of a problem if I had it treated, but HIV was the last thing I imagined it would be.

After I left “that” day at the clinic, and after calling my mom, I sent my former fairytale boyfriend an email, telling him of the results and alerting him to get tested, even though I assured him he was probably fine. Later that night, by the time I arrived to dinner at my friend’s restaurant, I received a reply: “I’m shaking. I hate you. I’m going to get tested today. My mind is swimming. I just threw up. You’ve ruined my life. Never talk to me again. I fucking hate you.”

I was shattered.

Young and broken, and alone and full of shame. I didn’t understand. I didn’t know. How could I be going through this? How could he say all of these things to me?

I have since learned that it’s not unusual for people to contract HIV and not even know it—that’s why it’s important to talk about it and to get tested regularly.

Anyway, his results came back negative and we spoke after that, and we are even kind to each other these days. But this just goes to show: Know your status so you can protect others. Talk in-depth about sex, and use protection. In today’s world we have PrEP, but “the talk” is still important to have with each partner.

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