On Being Loved

It’s been 18 years since Gwenn and I got married. Lately I’ve felt a deep appreciation for the love I’ve experienced on this entire journey.

October 23, 2022 By Shawn Decker

Our marriage is old enough to vote. Yup, that’s right, it’s been eighteen years since Gwenn and I got married on a lovely, overcast fall day. “This is great for pictures!” our photographer yelped with joy in her eyes and passion in her lens. The weather was beautiful, and horses frolicked in the background at the vineyard where we tied the “not”... that is, basically, agreeing not to bolt on each other.

I wasn’t too worried about that happening. Soon after we met I got so sick that I wouldn’t have blamed anyone for being scared out of new, exciting albeit unproven-by-time relationship. No matter how hunky I was, I was bringing a lot to the table, like a seven-course meal dropping down when you, maybe, were just looking to start with an appetizer.

But Gwenn not only hung in there, she helped inspire me to start on HIV meds after years of dragging my feet. See, I was 23, had been diagnosed with HIV for more than half that time. At some point I think I decided I was a “long-term non-progressor”. I’d read that term in POZ and I wore it well. Plus, most of the HIV-positive friends I’d made in the three years before I met Gwenn and three years after I decided to open up about HIV often discussed how annoying the side effects of the medications could be...

But I digress. Just wanted to provide some backstory for anyone who is stumbling on this blog for the first time.

Really, those details are important if I’m trying to convey how thankful I am to have met Gwenn. That it would have never happened if I had not opened up about HIV. See, she was an HIV educator looking for someone young and HIV positive who could educate about HIV in high schools. After a chat on the phone, she’d ruled me out because she was looking for someone that wasn’t diagnosed as a child. Fate stepped in a month later. I drove an hour to see Jeanne White-Ginder speak at James Madison University and, while waiting in line to say “hi” to Jeanne after her talk, Gwenn overheard me talking to my friends.

Sometimes being a loudmouth is a good thing! Glad I wasn’t afraid to flap my gums a little that night.

After giving Jeanne a hug and a thank-you-for-being-awesome hug, Gwenn introduced herself. “I

think I spoke to you on the phone last month." She was cute and interesting in that way you can't quite put your finger on. We exchanged email addresses and set a date to go see portions of the AIDS Quilt that were on display at JMU, where Gwenn was embarking on her second and final year of graduate school. As time went on, we hung out more and became friends. I had a new friend in the area, not 400 miles away on the internet, interested in HIV issues! As time went on I discovered some of that interest, thankfully, spilled over to me. Because I was crushing on her pretty hard.

That was the lingo back in my daze. What a daze it was... I guess if I want a younger readership I would say she was a snack. That's probably outdated but I like it so I'm gonna stick with it. Heck, I'll even upgrade Gwenn from a snack to a Happy Meal... and I couldn't have been happier that she returned my affections. And has ever since. We've now been together half of our lives. We've walked with each through so many of the joys, and disasters, that this life can bring. I feel fortunate for so many things in my life, but the one thing that stands out above all else is Gwenn.

And I will undoubtedly and forever be...

Positively Hers,

Shawn

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