Meeting a Favorite Positoid, Losing Another...

April 22, 2011 By Shawn Decker

Big thanks to the Student Global AIDS Campaign for inviting me and Gwenn to speak at the University of Wisconsin Madison this week. We spoke in the Memorial Union, in the middle of a bar... was the first time a contact said, "If you want to grab a beer before the talk go ahead!" At the moment, I had an iced mocha so I was all good.

The talk was unique because there was more than a bit of background noise and I thought- as Gwenn introduced herself and confidently spoke- that doing this for so long was really going to come in handy here. We both stayed focused, delivered our message as best we could even though there were several tables there to drink beer... I thought how surprised I would be if I were a college student and my drinking time were interrupted by a couple of sex educators. But everyone was pretty respectful, and there were quite a few people listening intently. Plus, I kinda liked the idea of getting information to some folks who wouldn't normally seek it out, it was a challenge that I believe we passed.

It helped having one of my positoid heroes in attendance- Bob Bowers. AKA One Tough Pirate. I named Bob my 2010 Person of the Year, because his spirit and energy as someone living proudly and loudly with HIV inspires me, and has for quite some time. Bob has been really under the weather recently, but he and his lovely wife Teresa made it to the talk, and it was so great to finally meet them in person and share a non-cyber hug and chat. One of the highlights of doing this work is getting to meet the people who give you the encouragement to keep at it. No one sends more of that energy my way these days than Bob.

Thanks, buddy, I really appreciate it!

Check out Bob's incredible work at OneToughPirate.com

What I didn't know until the next day was, as Gwenn and I were speaking in Memorial Union, one of my positoid pals back home was fighting for his life. After a long morning and afternoon of travel back home, I got the news that Bryce had fallen ill and passed to spirit. Over the last few years, I knew Bryce vaguely from the local music scene; it wasn't until after he had tested positive about a year ago- which I heard about via mutual friends because Charlottesville is such a small community and all- that we were introduced to one another.

We had coffee together a couple of times, and I learned very quickly that Bryce had such a great attitude about his diagnosis. His spirit was unshaken- he was so far ahead of the natural process that many newly diagnosed people have to go through. We laughed a lot during that first encounter, when I was really expecting to go in as more of a counselor but instead was greeted as a new friend. A musician and a DJ himself, we joked about forming an all positoid dance project and scaring the audience with fake blood. He had a sense of humor about it all, and I knew that would be crucial for him going forward. After that day, I loved running into him afterward and seeing that smile that told me he was dealing with everything just fine.

Bryce, I wish we could have met under different circumstances. But we met- and I'm very thankful for that even if our friendship was all too brief.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

Attention Charlottesville Area Friends: Umlaut (at the R2 space at Rapture on the downtown mall) is doing a fundraiser for Bryce's funeral costs and to honor his memory. Here's the Facebook event page which will be this Tuesday, April 26, from 10 pm until 2 am. Hope to see you there.

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