New Issue of POZ, The POZ Army and 25 Years

May 25, 2012 By Shawn Decker

The new issue of Poz Magazine is all about the Poz Army and why advocacy within the AIDS community and beyond is essential in finding a cure. And why the time to act is now. Check it out here.

I've been a little holed away in 2012, so joining the Poz Army has been a good kick in the jockstrap. Privates Decker is ready for the fight and this year holds special meaning for me in my journey with HIV- it's been 25 years since I tested positive. Has it been a war? Well, it's been battles in stages...

The first battle - **Stage 1**- was coming to terms with my status. I spent those early years ignoring it, defying it's presence by dedicating as little thought and energy to it as possible. It was my only recourse.

Stage 2 was disclosure- when I turned the corner from giving HIV the silent treatment to shouting my status from the rooftops, that was the defining moment of my life with this virus. It opened up reserves of support from friends and family and also introduced me to a whole battalion of new friends. It was, dare I say, fun. I was having fun with my HIV status and doing my best to educate people through blogging and writing for Poz.

Stage 3 was when HIV decided to stand it's ground. That when I got sick, lost most of my t-cells and watched as my viral load skyrocketed. Physically I was weak, mentally I was coming to terms with the fact that the tools I'd used to combat HIV effectively during Stages 1 and 2 were not going to cut it anymore. I started on HIV medications, realized I had to eat better and drink more water, and began to take care of myself as my health returned.

Stage 4 Energized and feeling better than I ever had before, I took my educational efforts national, speaking alongside Gwenn about what it's like being in a relationship where one partner is HIV positive and another is HIV negative. Honest, fun discussions with young people about sexual health and how healthy our relationship is despite the presence of HIV. I also had the strength to write *My Pet Virus*- very proud of the rallying I did here in Stage 4.

Stage 5... I guess I'm in it. It's the endgame. It's maintaining my health and waiting for a cure while doing my best to keep educating about HIV. I won't lie, I've felt quite burnt out on HIV

recently. In one way or another, it's had a huge presence in my life for a quarter of a century now. Stage 5 is all about finding new ways to keep motivated- daily I realize that so many people are just entering their Stage 1. It's a scary place to be. Part of holing away this year has been working on the screenplay for My Pet Virus, which is another avenue to educate about HIV and discrimination by using humor, and also working on some new music. Music is my yoga. It re-energizes me.

I hope you'll consider joining me as I embark on Stage 5. Check out the Poz Army site and find out how you can help!

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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