Out of the Darkness

February 6, 2013 By Aundaray Guess

As I'm writing this tomorrow will be the first of February. Time really flies when you realize that just a month ago many of us were ready to tackle our New Year's resolution. Some of these resolutions we really mean this time as previous attempts to fulfill them came short. The list is usually the same for everyone. We are determined this year to eat healthy. By a certain date we want to have a certain body weight or we want to finally physical do something we have avoided such as ride a bike or join a gym. Yet one resolution that seems to never be in the top ten of life changing choices are to know what our HIV status is. A resolution that only takes twenty minutes to complete yet for many is one of the hardest things to do. Why? What makes knowing our HIV status a low priority when it should be our number one main concern.

I will readily admit before it sounds like I'm standing on a soapbox that I was in the darkness when it came to knowing my status. HIV was something that happened to other people and not me. Only white people got HIV I felt at the time. For others their list may say that only young people get it or only gays get it and the newest rage, only blacks get it. I held onto the stigma of thinking I knew what HIV looked like on a person. Ignoring the knowledge that in actuality no matter how skilled you think you are in diagnosing someone with HIV just by looking at them, truthfully HIV has no look. If that was the case then we'd all be aware of what our HIV status was.

Many are under the perception that it takes several sexual partners for you to become infected. That ties into the belief that you have to be promiscuous or as my mother would call you 'fast'. For me that was not the situation. In fact I was the very opposite as I was a shy introverted boy who had heard of this thing called sex and had yet to try it. It was my first experience that introduced me to the darkness of non-acceptance as it was my first sexual experience that I became HIV positive.

I believe back then I asked why did someone who had professed to care about me do something like this to me. Why give me a disease that you knew would turn my life inside out. Is this the way you show love? Anger is such a tricky beast as it blinds you to critical think about your situation as it colors your thought process. When I was able to move aside the clouds I came to the acceptance that in truth the person I had my first sexual encounter with probably didn't know himself that he was HIV positive. He probably had the same stigmas that I had of knowing what to look for when it came to HIV. And worse we also use that same HIV diagnosing look on ourselves. We look to see if we lost weight or if we have any sores on our body we can't account for. We see if our diet has changed or maybe glance in the mirror not for vanity sake but to see if we have the 'HIV look'.

I should have simply taken a HIV test but there’s a certain false comfort in not knowing. There’s a safety to putting our heads in the sand and telling ourselves a line so common on the street, ’don’t start something, won’t be something.’ And if we had to list how high a priority HIV was to us, it would probably be far down, overshadowed by paying rent, getting or keeping a job, being financially secured. It may feel that if we put HIV on the top the process of getting tested will stir the bee’s nest so it’s best to just let it lie. This goes again to our resolutions we set this year. Is knowing your HIV status one of them?

Ironically the not knowing was the hardest part for me. The knowing was actually easy as I knew what I was dealing with. If I was negative I would look at my sexual practice and if it was using condoms that was keeping me negative I would continue to have that part of my sexual health. If I wasn’t using a condom and still was negative I would ask myself how long I want to continue to dodge the bullet and place myself in this high anxiety state. But still learning my results no matter what it was meant that I was in a place of knowing and could make clear solid decision instead of my life being a guessing game.

Coming out of the darkness of knowing my HIV status and stepping into the light of the truth of my situation I regained the control I thought was denied me. It’s a light I want so many especially my African-American brothers and sisters to bask in. By stepping into the light we can truly become aware of what HIV means to us and knowing is a resolution I can now say I completed!

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