



Spending Time With Ryan White's Mom on My Mom's Heavenly Birthday

The chance to see Jeanne White-Ginder speak again was enough motivation to get my scrawny ass to DC. What happened next was, well, magical.

September 19, 2025 By [Shawn Decker](#)

September 5, 2025 would have been my Mom's 75th. She passed to spirit at the end of June in 2022, with Dad by her side. I swear, she held on, tough to the end... my brother was on a vacation with his family (her family, my family), I was in Roanoke serving on the judges panel for Miss Virginia. Mom and I had lots of surprises for each other in life.

That was the last one I could deliver and, boy, did she light up. Sure enough, Mom passed just a few days after me and my brother were back at our homes. I had the news of her passing pinned to my FB profile for three years. At her request there was no service, so I wanted anyone who knew me to know.

Because if you know my heart—in any way—you knew Pam Decker's.

I unpinned it to put up my dramatic return to the cover of POZ Magazine. "Go get your flowers, Pookie," I heard her say as I became my own new Pin Up.

While the issue is the latest issue, I've decided to challenge myself to, well, be braver. Which has meant doing a lot of things that once came easier. It's the price and the reward of aging, I guess.

That challenge is what helped get me to DC for the national conference on HIV/AIDS, where Jeanne White-Ginder was one of the speakers. I've had a few chances to hang out with her, first with Mom, just after I opened up in 1996. After the talk Mom invited Jeanne to join us at Ruby Tuesday's... when Jeanne said, "Sure!" we rode outta there like bandits.

I let Mom do all the talking.

Ryan was her hero. And this was her Depeche Mode Make-A-Wish moment. I was happy to return the favor, to be in a place where I wanted to go to an HIV-related event. How could I have known that, a couple of years later at JMU, Gwenn and I meet, by chance, at a talk given by Jeanne White-Ginder?

Our first "dinner date"?

At the same Ruby Tuesday's in Charlottesville.

In [My Pet Virus](#), I credit Ryan with helping me out from beyond. After the book came out, I finally made some inroads in the hemophilia community. My health today wouldn't be where it is without that. As a result, Gwenn and I were speakers at a national hemophilia conference—and so was Jeanne.

That time, I really got to talk with Jeanne. Gwenn and I had a solid thirty or so, alone, just having the best conversation with her about the happenings of the day, circa 2008.

So, going to DC, I didn't expect to get a chance to talk to Jeanne. Because conferences are total chaos. A friend with hemophilia who lives in DC saw my post about going, and I had to be honest about getting together another time and not making a plan that would likely get canceled.

Sure enough, I didn't have an extra moment of time to spare, which was part of the anxiety I had to overcome to go to DC. But I was happy I could be honest with a friend about being stressed and already a bit in over my head. And from the beginning, it seemed to be one moment leading to the next...

Friday late morning, Gwenn and I are heading to get some breakfast before the lunch session, because travel offers enough intangibles and "free" meals are something that, the older you get, you pay for one way or another.

On the way, there she is: Jeanne White-Ginder. Her daughter, Andrea, and another gentleman is with her, chatting. Gwenn and I stood to the side, waiting our turn. When it came, I went to Andrea first, my mom always got fired up over no one talking about how things impacted Andrea back in the day, because Mom had a frontrow seat to how my brother, Kip's life was affected, by my bad break.

Also, I was sort of nervous—I wasn't expecting this and I can be socially awkward these days.

Gwenn started talking to Jeanne and, after a brief chat with Andrea, I joined them. A magical third chance to share real time with Jeanne. On what would have been my Mom's 75th Birthday. I hugged Jeanne a couple of times, told her I loved her and probably awkwardly mussing her hair before her incredible talk at the conference...

Then, on the way to breakfast, I had to stop walking.

"Are you okay?" Gwenn asked, looking me in the eyes, eyes filling with tears. I stammered, explaining what I hadn't told Gwenn, that I didn't expect such a moment. Being in the same room, with hundreds of others who get it, was well enough.

In the best way, I had to recollect myself. Like the first time I met Gwenn, who overheard me talking loudly with friends in 1999, in line waiting to talk to Jeanne. I'd only found out she was speaking that day, and skipped a local board meeting to attend because, well, I was 22. I wanted

to see Jeanne again and, well, hang out with my friends, not knowing I'd meet the best one of my entire life thanks to my youthful irresponsibility.

Once a rebel without a cure, always a rebel without a cure, I guess.

From many of you still reading.

Keep believing, hang in there.

You are loved.

Missed loved ones, I think we can still stay connected to their spirits. Mom talks to me all the time. She never liked having her birthdays celebrated while she was still physically here but, on September 5, from the best angle in the hotel, I'm hoping she treated herself to our reunion with Jeanne. I don't know, I have a hunch Ryan was probably hanging around, too.

Assuredly, in my heart, I felt both.

What a surprise. Life is full of them, isn't it? We just have to keep scootin' along, to the best of our abilities and, in some cases, to the worse our disabilities offer. With love for ourselves, we are then able to direct that energy to others.

In person, in posts, there's no shortage of people that need the nudge.

Mom, thanks for nudging me to nudge you off my FB pinned post, and for the push to get to DC, not to mention those first gruesome pushes that marked my debut. In closing, Mom, I love you. And thanks for finally letting us celebrate you on your birthday- surrounded by love- in a way even my wild imagination couldn't have foreseen.

Positively "Pookie", Your "Young Son" Always,

Shawn

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