Springing into Love

April 1, 2014 By Aundaray Guess

The arrival of spring signifies many things. It means out with the old and in with the new which can involve tossing out old clothes, shedding winter pounds or finally putting the television remote down and heading outside. This is also the season when we're open for something new in our lives. We're looking for love.

But how do we find love?

This is one of the most difficult questions in the world for many to answer. Some have it easy while others may resort to extreme measures such as giving their heart to someone unworthy; settling for whoever comes along first or attaching ourselves to another so mismatched just to change our relationship status from single. I'm going to add another layer of difficulty. How do you find love when you're HIV positive? How do you make the effort, despite what you have inside of yourself, make that move to find someone? This question is an important one as love is a universal feeling we all want to experience. Finding someone to love is a task which can seem insurmountable in any circumstance. Adding the stigmatization of the disease and feeling less valued, makes one ask; why bother?

I speak from experience as I've lived with HIV for the past 28 years. When told of my status, the two things I immediately questioned were; when I am going to die? The second was, will anyone ever going to love me again? At the time how people viewed HIV was entirely different from today. HIV was such an unknown entity in 1986, the year I learned about my status. There was such a huge public fear which resulted in ostracizing people from their homes and sometimes communities. My fear was wondering if my HIV status was making me next on the list of a witch-hunt. I decided I didn't want to be emotionally hurt and the best way to avoid such pain was to not let anyone in. My only option it seemed was to build a wall around my heart. A wall so strong it prevented people discovering my HIV status and also had the ability to keep anyone from getting close.

As the years past I was finding out hiding behind this wall wasn't so fun after all. Yeah no one could do harm but at the same time I was lonely and miserable. Without realizing it, depression had made its way through the cracks and kept me company. Was I ever going to find love?

Luckily times have changed and many living with HIV negative now find no problem loving someone with HIV based on an increase understanding of the disease. I'm a personal witness to this as I'm now in a relationship with a person who is HIV negative and loves me unconditionally. I

would never been able to meet this person if my walls had remained up. By removing myself from a place I thought would keep me safe, my reward was finding love. Placing a wall up is easy, tearing it down is hard. To receive love one must learn, brick by brick, how to step into the faith someone is out there waiting.

These are some suggestions which helped me tear down my wall

1) **Do it for you**. The first thing one must learn is to give permission to love self. If you're moving from a place of isolation, don't do it for anyone else but you and your happiness. You will never learn happiness if all your actions are simply meant for the benefit of someone else. Know you're worthy and embrace the feeling. Like the commercial states, 'Love the skin you're in.' It's so hard for someone to love you when you don't give yourself the same love-so start with you first.

2) **Stop seeing yourself as a negative.** When we look in the mirror we're always looking for what's mistaken. It may be a hair in the wrong place or a glance to see if our waistline has expanded. No matter the reason, we're looking for the bad. And sometimes we look in the mirror an seeing only HIV looking back. As a task start to look in the mirror and find all the great things about you. It doesn't have to be physical attributes but also features of your personality people can't see. Discover affirming words about yourself and redefine who you are. Embrace those words and the image looking back. So no matter what happens to you during you know how wonderful you are. What are your words of affirmation?

3) **Accept you have HIV.** I know this may not make sense but sometimes we're in so much denial and won't accept our HIV status. I used to stick my head in the sand and act like it didn't exist. It was my own showing of shame. By coming to terms with your HIV you can start to move forward and make the positive changes which remove you from the darkness of denial and place you into the light of truth. It's hard to start any relationship when you can't be honest with yourself. Shame is such a strong destructive device which can hold the strongest person back. For whatever reason you are HIV positive but you're still a good person. Don't carry shame based on your situation; you're stronger now and can live the best healthy and happy life possible. This is not minimizing the impact of having HIV but to create a greater awareness your identity is not a three letter acronym.

4) **Don't let past rejections make you one who rejects**- When we have someone walk away from us for whatever reason our natural response is to close ourselves off. We develop a mantra which states, "Never again". When you do this the other person win as they go off and find happiness and you're left alone with resentment. I personally have experienced so much rejection around my HIV status, it took me a long time to realize it was never about me but spoke more to the other person. Flip the script and realize if someone doesn't want you for you, they are intimidated by your strength. If anyone rejects you, they've just made room for someone who loves you to fill. This isn't a mind game but something you have to believe. Everyone we meet is not necessarily meant to be in our life no matter how compatible. Don't morph into the one who now rejects. Always strive to be the one who loves.

5) **There’s no King Arthur.** Sometimes we wait for the person who has the strength to pull the sword from the stone and tear down our walls. You will be sadly disappointed and remain in a place of loneliness if it’s your litmus test. While waiting for the shining knight you’re probably missing out on the many suitors who have sincere attraction to you but because you made loving you so challenging you’re missing out. You’ve created a long laundry list of qualities you don’t possess yourself but expect others to have. Be realistic and accept sometimes your Prince Charming is right in front of you.

6) **And last-There’s not an app for everything.** I don’t care what anyone says but apps like Grndr and Adam4Adam are strictly for sex. Period. If anyone says they have found true love they are not the norm. Solely depending on these apps will set you down the long road of bitterness as you’ll become convinced all men have the same characteristics on the mobile app. Too many of these encounters; good or bad, you’ll develop the mindset that everyone simply want sex or start believing any form of a relationship is superficial. What happens next? Yep, up goes the wall.

Declare you’re ready. You’re ready to tear down your wall and find the relationship you’re meant to have. Finding love won’t happen overnight, or the process of tearing down your defenses. But the reward is so great when you finally say to yourself, I’m ready.

As I enter my 15th year with my current soul mate I’m so glad I didn’t deny myself the ability to love. It took a deep understanding of my life with HIV but in general it took me not hiding behind a wall. Experiencing self-love stopped blocking the full life I desired and helped me to find love.

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