SUPERBLOG Finale: St. John’s/St. Benedict, University of AZ and NYIT

December 13, 2007 By Shawn Decker

No word from Camp Huckamania in regard to the challenge. I guess they chose to ignore their Google Alert. Which is good, because instead of doubling down on protein shakes, I can finish up SUPERBLOG!

I blogged about December 1st, World AIDS Day itself, the day after it happened, but there weren’t any pictures... that’s why that blog was not annointed with SUPERBLOG status. We drove the first half of World AIDS Week, next up was the flying portion.

We drove to the airport, and on the way I stopped at Kohl’s to pick up a sweat holiday sweater vest. But they had NONE. So we went to Macy’s and, just like two years ago, I hit the jackpot there. I didn’t go with the one above because of the sleeves, but to be honest, I’m kind of kicking myself over that decision now.

For World AIDS Day, we were invited to speak at a Catholic University, St. John’s and the College of Saint Benedict. Here’s a group photo of our new pals, who survived the snowfall. (One student had a close call on the icy roads just after we left... yikes.)

Gwenn and I usually arrive about an hour or so before our program is set to start. The time is best spent mingling with the folks who brought us, but sometimes you can get in the way of things. It’s a fine line between being polite and “hovering”. Gwenn often says to me, “You’re hovering!”

Well, when Bree and Andy, both instrumental in bringing us to campus, said, “We have a little room if you want to relax before the program,” I thoguht, “That’s nice.” But you don’t want to be

all Rick James and not be with people. Sure, we'd just driven in the aforementioned snow, but really, we were cool. It wasn't that bad.

Then they suggested again, and again. Maybe I was hovering?

Then Gwenn smiled, "Shawn, we should go." We'd (she'd) finally gotten the hint, and when we went in the room they'd written "THANK YOU" on the chalkboard, had some nice little treats including Christmas-themed yogurt pretzels available and two shirts for us. Jackpot!

I call this Don't Suck Insurance. Just kidding. It was very sweet, literally, and I gorged myself on pretzels before the talk.

Since we share our lifestories, the talks can be pretty similar, which is why the Q&A section is a life-saver. The issue of whether we can have kids comes up (we can, check out Sperm Washing on Wikipedia), and usually devolves into us explaining that we're not ready for kids. Or pets.

And then I said I'm not even sure if cats are safe for me in relation to hemophilia (a joke, you'll get it when you view the clip below), and asked if anyone had met Pinky the Cat. The students had not, and I told them to YouTube him:

Pet of the Week. God God, who did Pinky beat out for that honor?

What's best about how Gwenn and I do our thing is that it's loose. I have fun speaking, and so does Gwenn, and students have fun interacting with us. Oh, before I forget, I really had fun with Gwenn at the Virginia Tech talk.

We both had mics, and had not done a soundcheck before. The sound module was right there beside us, so as Gwenn's doing her intro I'm hooking up my wireless mic, clipping it to my shirt. "TESTING... ONE TWO... TESTING." I sold it, and people thought, "She is going to kill him," as Gwenn glared at me. People love awkward humor, once they realize- thank God- it's a gag and not the real deal.

Everything at St. John's/St. Benedict went well, and left our friends with some HIV/AIDS and Pinky the Cat information before hitting the road to the airport in Minneapolis, where I desperately wanted to find the Larry Craig bathroom and get a photo. Instead, I got a sandwich.

The day after World AIDS Day, we spoke at the University of Arizona, and in terms of weather the climate was much more friendly. Just before the program as we were driving onto campus, we noticed tons of

people walking to the university, and Events staff and cops and cars parked everywhere: obviously a football game or something.

“Wow,” I said to Gwenn. “People are very excited about coming to hear us speak!”

Well, some people were, at least. And shirts, shirts came into play again. When we arrived, a lot of the event organizers were wearing Boy, Girl, Virus sweatshirts, as worn below by Stephanie:

The back reads: “Shawn Has HIV. Gwenn Does Not. They Keep It That Way.”

Then it was home to lose a game of Star Wars Monopoly SHAWN RULES to friends before heading to the last talk of the year at NYIT in Old Westbury on Long Island.

We took the train, and then got off near our hotel, which no one had any idea where it was. We ate at a Olive Garden, then went to a Borders. “Hampton Inn?” It was strange, everyone worked in the town, but didn’t live there. Like a spaceship dropped them off and picked them up from above.

So we called a cab. It picked us up and drove us about 1,200 feet to the Hampton Inn. OK, half a mile, but still. It was just off the main road, where all the businesses were. When we arrived, the Inn was overbooked, and as regular customers (Gold Members! Rick James was a Gold Member I bet) we’d been bumped even with a confirmation number.

Which is not supposed to happen! What did happen was we were arriving late, around 11:15 PM, and they thought we weren’t going to show and gave our room to someone else, probably a couple of hours earlier.

What’s funny about traveling so much and being young is that everyone thinks it’s the first time we’ve stayed at a hotel or flown. The manager was stunned when he saw we were Gold Members, then did what any good night-time manager would do in this situation: he lied to us. Apparently, according to him, the 150-plus people staying were Gold and Platinum members too. Incredible!

So another cab took us to another hotel. The next afternoon things were looking up, and we spoke at NYIT for the second time in as many years.

Having a laugh with Mark and the NYIT gang.

I gave away a signed book (that I bought at the Borders) after the talk to anyone who could answer a key trivia question from the book.

Who did I choose to meet through the Make-A-Wish Foundation in 1990?

Our friend who came to see us speak said, “Michael Dukakis... isn’t he the white supremicist?”

“No, that’s David Duke.”

First person said Hulk Hogan. Wrong. Next person said Dukakis. Wrong. Last person was just in the right place at the right time. was shellshocked that anyone thought I’d meet Hulk Hogan as my wish.

I really enjoyed this year’s World AIDS Week travels and talks. Everyone was so welcoming, and I understand that this time of year is- in many ways- the one big shot I have at raising awareness about this topic.

Since we wrapped up the speaking, I’ve thrown myself into the holidays. Gwenn is trying desperately to find a Wii, and I’m sporting my new holiday sweater vest... which will be revealed in the next blog!

Positively Yours,
Shawn

PS: Any schools or students interested in having us speak at your school: you don’t have to wait until World AIDS Day! HIV and sexual health are issues that are relevant all year long.

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