Talking the AIDS Talk on College Campuses

November 11, 2010 By Shawn Decker

Last week, Gwenn and I were on the road speaking, and it was a leisurely trip as far as travel is concerned. We packed up our own car, forgoing airplanes and rental cars, and drove to Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia.

After a great program there, we went to the University of Delaware, and then on to Harford Community College. Everyone treated us well, and we answered questions about how Gwenn and I handle HIV in our relationship. The work we do is really fulfilling, and it's hard to believe this year marks our 10th year of traveling the country educating about HIV prevention and sexual health. In that time, I've turned into a bit of homebody, and admittedly it is hard to peel myself from my own bed sometimes, but it's always the travel I dread, and never the work I try to do.

I see that work as equal parts prevention *and* letting people know that- if they are already living with an incurable STI (Sexually Transmitted Infection)- they can find love and are capable of having healthy relationships. Sometimes in prevention work, the importance of this is lost, and I'm glad that we focus on that aspect of things. I do so, because I can still remember the feeling of seeing HIV prevention messages in the late 80's, when I was a teenager. Already diagnosed, I felt awful whenever I saw someone say that HIV was a death sentence, or that there was no hope of ever having a normal existence again after a diagnosis.

I'm extremely grateful for my life, that I have just enough energy to do what I can to help out in all of this. Sometimes, when the fatigue really sets in and I wake up after a full night's sleep feeling completely unrested, it's frustrating as hell when I think about it too much. But last month, when that first 6 am flight came up, I felt good. I guess with Gwenn, I always feel safe- that can't be understated. I know that if I'm pushing myself too hard, she'll be there to keep me in check.

And that support goes both ways.

Guess I'm going in lots of different directions with my train of thought here. But that's how it goes sometimes. Basically, what I'm trying to get across is that I'm more than happy to do my part, and my hope is that everyone who is newly diagnosed can one day experience the peace of mind and feeling of being loved that I never take for granted.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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