The Day After World AIDS Day

December 2, 2007 By Shawn Decker

This day is somber. It's when positoids realize they are no longer the top story, and are once again relegated to the CNN scroll. Perhaps every 14 hours or so, a little tidbit of info rolls by, in between NFL groin injury reports.

For me, World AIDS Day is always World AIDS Week. Like Carnival, but without the half-naked dancing Brazilians. The week involves speaking at several universities, and this week alone Gwenn and I have spoken at 6 schools. (I'll be posting more when we get home, including pictures.) For now, I want to reflect on World AIDS Day, 2007.

The alarm was set. Gwenn and I were at The Holiday Inn Express in St. Cloud, Minnesota. Later int he day, we'd be speaking to students at St. John's University and the College of Saint Benedict: yes, we spent World AIDS Day at a Catholic University. Getting invited was one thing, getting to the school would be another. See, we were in the midst of an impending snow storm, so we set the alarm extra early to give plenty of time for the short drive to the school.

What we didn't know is that we'd be getting a wake-up of a different kind.

The walls of the Holiday Inn must have been thinner than my blood, because it sounded like the woman in the next room was in my bedroom. Groaning. The groans that can only mean one thing. I looked at my clock and wondered, "Who in the hell is having sex at 7:30 AM?!" Then I heard that Staind song, "It's been a while..."

Then I fell back asleep.

Then I was woken again to the same sounds. And I thought. "Who in the hell is having sex at 8:50 AM?" Then Staind again. I wondered *why this song*, then I thought of the poor sheets in the hotel room beside me.

And then Gwenn and I made the drive to the school, driving very slowly. Every World AIDS Day, we seem to be traveling in the dead of winter, and the chances of dying on the way to speak about

AIDS far outweigh the odds of ever dying from AIDS itself.

After speaking to a very receptive and kind audience, we got in the car and I tried to pull out of the parking lot. The acceleration pedal did nothing, perhaps the two hours of snow was too much? Gwenn let out a sigh. Then noticed that I was still in Park. Once I got into Drive, we were good to go.

We made it to the airport, and flew out after a lengthy de-icing process which caused us to miss a connecting flight from Phoenix to Tucson. At the US Airways gate, we informed them that we were going to be renting a car and driving. Then the older guy to my left, who also missed his connection, asked in an accent I couldn't decipher. "Are you driving to Tucson tonight?"

Crap.

I hate that the first impression I have of a stranger is what the expression on their face will be when they are slitting my throat. And it didn't help that his accent reminded me of Jeff Bridge's character from The Vanishing. But this guy was shorter than Jeff. And when I found out he was from Iceland, I warmed up to him.

So off we went from Phoenix, with Pieter from Iceland in tow. If I was going to be killed by a madman, then at least I'd go out in a blaze of altruism. Plus, I'd be immortalized! That story would have to be picked up by the national media. "Young AIDS educator killed by Iceland's top serial killer on World AIDS Day." The movie adaptation would be a boon to the career of Jeff Bridges and James Van Der Beek as Shawn Decker.

Of course, Pieter was fine. And his sister and niece were very happy to see him. And he floated us some money for the rental car. And then Gwenn and I made it to our hotel and went to sleep, happy that we made it out of the snowstorm and that we weren't going to be miss a speaking engagement.

And I wasn't dead. A very happy ending to a day that started with at least two happy endings.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.