# The Need For Hospital Visitation Rights

April 20, 2010 By Shawn Decker

**Poz recently posted an article online, Obama Extends Hospital Visitation Rights to Same-Sex Couples, that is worth checking out. It's about how the prez is extending a helping hand to a community that is not yet able to legally wed, which can cause problems in the current system should one partner fall ill.**

This issue came to my awareness right after I disclosed my status at age 20, a time when I started reading *Poz* magazine religiously, which replaced my longtime magazine of choice, *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*. Back then I was a huge fan of The Real World, particularly the infamous season that introduced us all to Pedro Zamora- whom we watched fall in love with fellow positoid, Sean Sasser.

Before I spoke out about being positive, I had yet to meet an openly gay, young couple. Pedro and Sean were my first gay friends- and I desperately wanted to be their pal, having connected to them through the TV screen like any fawning TV addict. But their relationship really resonated; I hoped that I would find an accepting partner just as they had. That I could be as open about my status as each of them had been with the other.

Pedro and Sean gave me hope.

A couple of years after Pedro passed, I opened up about my status and my life changed forever. I always wondered what happened to Sean Sasser, and *Poz* magazine delivered the answer in my mailbox with a cover story on Sasser's life post-Pedro. He was smiling on the cover, he looked healthy- I was thrilled. I kicked back in my bedroom at my parents house, and was horrified to read what Sean went through as Pedro got sick after the the Real World had finished filming their season.

Sean wasn't allowed to see Pedro. The family closed rank and kept him out. And they could. The commitment ceremony that was so genuine it made me tear up had as much legal weight as a Bachelor passing of the rose. In the eyes of the law, there was nothing Sean could do to see his partner, who was too ill to vocalize his desire to see his loving partner.

It tore me up to read that... to realize that the same scenario had happened to unfortunate couples many times over.

I'm so thankful that Obama is confronting this issue. Sure, getting shut out during end-of-life matters can happen to straight, unmarried couples as well, but this safeguard really is long overdue and much needed for a community that has too often been bullied. No one should have to stare down death without the ability- the right- to look into a loved ones eyes one last time, just because of a toxic combination of ignorance and legal loopholes.

Thanks to the president for offering up an antidote.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

*Last year when MTV's biopic, Pedro, came out I blogged about having the privilege of meeting Sean Sasser just as I was dipping my toes into HIV education.*

Shawn on: **Shawn's Sick Days in 2010: 8** Shawn's book Decker's Daily Coffee

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