The Number Game

February 28, 2011 By Aundaray Guess

Numbers

It seems that the first day I was diagnosed my life suddenly became consumed with numbers. It was like an introduction of numbers that equation equal fear, stigma and my own belief that I was no longer a human but someone ruled by sets of numbers.

It started with me checking my weight everyday. I was diagnosed in 1986 and at that time the belief was that you could tell if someone had HIV based on how thin they were. It didn't help that I was thin to begin with yet everyday I stepped on the scale to see what numbers it was going to give me. I recorded the numbers and was elated when they rose and scared when I lost several pounds. This was an everyday event that never occurred to me that I was stressing myself out. So of course on those days of anxiety the numbers were lower. I quickly learned that the scale could one day be my friend and the next, my enemy.

My number crunching continued when I learned about t-cells and the importance of what they meant to someone who was HIV. Before I was exposed I could care less and actually didn't know about t-cells but now I was checking them regularly. Like the scale they were never consistent as they dropped and rose taking me on a roller coaster that I felt I could never get off. It got to the point that I told my doctor on my visits I didn't want to know my t-cell numbers as like the scale, it was sending my anxiety through the roof.

Can we talk about pills? Now that's where the number crunching really begins. Take two of the blue pill in the morning but only one at night and if you take the white pill make sure this many minutes has passed. Also remember before taking this number of set pills make sure to take them all at the same time of the day, which of course meant always being mindful of the numbers on the clock. And of course remember you can only miss a certain number of days taking your meds.

Even dispensing them were a game of numbers as you count each pill bottle and especially for long-term survivors, seeing how the number of bottles in you medicine cabinet take up real estate along with the other bottles for other ailments that doesn't directly involve or may assist in the side

effects of your HIV. Pretty soon your cabinet starts to look like you can give your local drugstore competition as it starts to resemble a Duane Reade or Walgreen’s drug aisle.

The number game continued...

30 days before my next appointment..

Under 50 is the goal so I remain undetectable..

560 is my current t-cell...

Fewer than 200 is the number that means I have AIDS...

8 times I’ve went to the bathroom today because of side effects

1 hour I get to nap and don’t think about it...

3 bumps that wasn’t there yesterday...

5 days and the doctor still hasn’t returned my calls

The hardest numbers were the count of people that I knew who had passed away from the disease. It seemed that the number of funerals was becoming a number I wanted to forget and deep inside I wondered when my number was going to be up.

Then like I did with the scale I had to tell myself, you’re lucky you’re still here to count the numbers of days you’ve been on this earth and instead of counting all the negatives how about counting the blessings.

Next month this time I’ll be 44 and the greatest set of numbers I’m now focused on are the ones that I can say, thank God for getting me get this far and to realize that my days are not numbered but instead are bountiful.

It’s what I do with that bounty that determines the joy in my life. I can continue to crunch numbers that I have no control over or I can live my life with one number in my mind. That number is one and knowing that it’s the number of lives I have to live and with the blessing of God I know it’s going to be a long set of numbers before I leave this earth. I don’t know that for sure but I like to think my glass is full.

That’s something I can count on.

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