# Thirty Years Since Magic Johnson Disclosed His HIV Status

November 11, 2021 By Shawn Decker

I was a junior in high school. Coming off a sophomore year that had been defined by some drama where HIV was concerned. I'd really fallen in love, and was experiencing my first dose of sexual activity. I didn't disclose my status, but I thought if we were just having oral sex and I didn't ejaculate then things would be ok. Well, they weren't. When it all came out about my HIV status, my girlfriend had to get tested for HIV. The tests came back negative, but to say the whole thing didn't traumatize all involved would be an understatement. Needless to say, the relationship didn't survive the whole ordeal.

I came out of it all knowing that I would never repeat that mistake again. If my little fellow was ever getting set to introduce himself into a relationship again, I was going to make sure I took ownership of my HIV status before things got complicated. That basically meant I'd snuff out any potential relationships as a way to keep them from going too far. Not that I was fighting them off or anything. My junior year, I felt just fine going it alone. At that point, I'd have rather been alone than to have to disclose my HIV status to a lover.

That November morning when Magic Johnson appeared on TV and disclosed his HIV status gave me some hope. I thought if people saw a revered athlete with HIV, they'd soften their prejudices. That thought was quashed when I heard a Magic Johnson AIDS joke before the day even ended. I know classmates were heartbroken at the news, but I also know that teenagers process those feelings in different ways. When cruelty meets confusion, you usually get a poorly delivered AIDS joke.

That morning, thirty years and some odd days ago, seems like a distant life. That junior, who had no idea how he'd ever break his own news to someone, saw a megastar disclose his status to the world. He had no idea that he'd educate one day, too. No idea that he'd meet his ultimate match (in a good way!) because he was public about his status. He never really thought he'd be around in the friggin' year 2021, either. But, honestly, what 16 year-old can imagine themselves at 46 anyway?

Let's all keep enjoying this ride while we're still here, and realize that today's uncertainties might just be tomorrow's happy memory.

Positively Yours,

Shawn

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