Traveling During COVID

I haven’t flown since the pandemic started. My thoughts on getting on a plane for the first time in three years.

November 8, 2022 By Shawn Decker

This month I got on a plane for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic started. In the twenty-four years since we’ve been together, this is the longest stretch that Gwenn and I have been “grounded”.

And I was okay with it. Okay with being grounded for a bit. Okay with getting on a plane. All things considered, I think I’ve been okay during this whole thing, despite knowingly having COVID-19 on two separate occasions, Summer of ’21 and Summer of ’22, respectively. I’m vax’d and boosted out the wazoo. I’ve been on full lockdown and have played a couple of gigs since this change in lifestyle landed in all our collective laps. My heart goes out to anyone who has lost a loved one, or had their health impacted by the effects of “long COVID”, the myriad of symptoms that people are experiencing post-infection.

The last few years have been a lot to handle, that’s for sure.

I tried to stay as safe as possible early on. I missed a lot of time with my mom, who passed at the end of June, due to this pandemic. I didn’t want to risk getting it and passing it along to my parents, or anyone else. Now? I’m playing it a little faster and looser. I respect anyone’s decision to wear a mask and take as many precautions as necessary to avoid infection. I also understand those that don’t want to be bothered. I’ve had years of living with a life-threatening virus (HIV, the earlier years) and not wanting to be bothered by the details.

As the holidays approach, and infection rates rise and perhaps new variants start to emerge, I’ll probably wear my mask more in public and minimize my exposure. But I gotta say, it was nice to travel and, more importantly, feel okay with traveling. I understand there’s risk in doing anything in public, which kind of takes me back to the early days when I was learning more about what it meant to live with HIV as I was also navigating life as a teenager. My mom would say, "They are more of a risk to you than you are to them!", meaning other peoples’ germs and my weakened-by-HIV immune system.

I think one of the reasons why it feels so good to travel is because I’m not too worried about HIV in all of this. Maybe I have blinders on? Maybe I’m at peace with the gamble that is involved in every aspect of our lives? There’s the good news that most people with HIV respond well to the COVID-19 vaccines. There’s the bad news that suggests that people with HIV may be as much as

four times more likely to experience long COVID symptoms after infection. You can basically seek out whatever information backs up how you are going to approach this whole situation anyway. My own plan is to assess my comfort level with things, and pay attention when Gwenn is telling about any updates that she came across. I try to read articles from reputable sources that are telling me things I don't really want to hear, too.

Last month, Gwenn and I took a last-minute road trip to Cleveland to watch the Browns lose in spectacular fashion to the Jets. I never really thought I'd ever go to a football game, and if you'd told me in 2020 that I'd willingly enter a stadium with 60,000 other people I'd have balked. But, we'd just had COVID-19, we both desperately needed to do something fun... also, some of the final bits of advice my mom gave me were simple: she wanted me to enjoy my life. Do things that I love. She spent a lot of hers protecting me; from my blood-soaked beginnings as a kid with hemophilia to the horror show that was testing positive for HIV in the 1980s.

Through all of it, I'm still here. On the trip to Cleveland and on this current trip to visit friends, I've felt her presence, even if it just in knowing that I'm honoring her request. That I'm enjoying my life and, if she is privvy to that in any way, then she is also living vicariously through the energy I am feeling. I want to be around as long as possible, but I also want to make the most of whatever time I'm ultimately destined to have without being a total idiot in all of this. I think a quiet promise I made to myself in the earliest months of my HIV diagnosis is coming to the forefront. And that is to not allow my life be dictated by the worst possible outcome of a medical situation.

If I did that, I'd just dutifully gobble up my HIV meds and never leave the friggin' house.

Alrighty then. Just to be clear, I'm not sharing this with anything in mind other than documenting where I'm at with all of this. Perhaps I'm trying to process it all through writing, just to make sure I'm really comfortable with all of this. (I am.) Maybe you relate to a little bit of it? Maybe not. Either way I believe that we are all dealing with COVID-19 in our own ways, and how we are dealing is guided, in part, by the degree to which it has landed on our doorsteps. And that some people can take more precautions than others based on their employment situation and lifestyle.

In my case, it's inevitable that a life-long history of dealing with medical conditions shrouded in mystery and doom has impacted how I've chosen to proceed. Ultimately, I hope the vaccinations are dialed in and that future variants are less lethal and transmittable as this pandemic rolls on. I believe in the science, because my undetectable viral and the advances in the treatment of HIV have given me the opportunity to still be here to ponder this new pandemic and all the choices it forces us to make.

Hope this finds you well in your life's adventures.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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