Tribute to Mr. Hahn

March 2, 2011 By Shawn Decker

Earlier this month, I received some sad news via Facebook that one of my Friends on their had passed to spirit. The Friend? My Speech Communications teacher from my senior year in high school, Duane Hahn.

Duane was a Waynesboro High classic, one of a handful of teachers that you remember as vividly as the first day you stepped foot in his classroom. His personality was infectious- and he kept you on your toes with his quick wit. My senior year, I had him for first period. It's a slot I usually skipped out on, cashing in on the "sick excuse" that an HIV diagnosis allowed.

The first semester of my senior year, my attendance was pretty good. That's because the first half of Duane's class was about public speaking. I loved preparing little speeches educating classmates about the return to the WWF of former champion Bob Backlund, and going on the morning announcements where I sang a line from the Modern English song "Pillow Lips" to a confused student body one fall morning. I had no idea I'd apply that stripping of the fear of public speaking to my adult life as an HIV educator, and that's what made Mr. Hahn special... learning was fun.

For the second semester, Mr. Hahn was teaching sign language, and my old habits of missing school and sleeping in allowed me to fall embarrassingly behind in his class. I changed my schedule around a bit second semester, dropping all academic classes because I realized I wasn't going to college. There was a bit of a reality check going on, subconsciously. Since I'd been unable to pick up the basics of sign, I dropped Speech Communications, too. Whenever I saw Mr. Hahn in the hallway after that, he'd give me that Rock-esque cocked eyebrow, as if saying, "Oh, it's *you*." It was in jest, but I could see that I had let him down by dropping his class.

Maybe he thought it was personal? I wish I'd been mature enough to explain to him that I was embarrassed by how far I'd fallen behind, that I just wanted to sleep more. Or that I found the first semester way more interesting.

A couple of days after I read the news of Mr. Hahn's passing, Gwenn and I spoke at a conference for guidance counselors in Maryland. I thought about him all day- and how his class was my favorite that last year of high school. I wished that I'd sent him a message saying so on Facebook when I Friended him a couple of years ago. Either way, I thank him dearly for all the laughs, and for helping me overcome nerves when speaking in front of people.

You will be missed, Mr. Hahn.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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