Walking (and rocking) Across the Country

June 23, 2008 By Shawn Decker

One of the perks of speaking out about HIV is that it's given me the opportunity to see most of the United States over the last ten years.

My friends in Bella Morte have said the same thing about being in their band. Fortunately for me, I don't have to ride in the van to see the country. I get to fly around, albeit in coach. Sure, talking about having AIDS means I don't get panties thrown at me or anything like that... or maybe there's no pantie-throwing because- when I speak- Gwenn is right there speaking beside me.

Either way, I'll take the plane over the smelly van any day.

Last Thursday, the boys in Bella Morte set off to conquer the country on a U.S./Canada tour, and I took this video with my camera:

The song playing in that video is "Party Time" by Bella Morte, a cover of the 45 Grave song, made famous for its inclusion in Return of the Living Dead. It's the same song I used in my pretzel video in the previous blog.

And no, I didn't steal those pretzels. And yes, I do regret it.

Since I'm in a full-disclosure frame of mind today, I have to make a confession. For months I wrote about AIDS Walking in New York, about beating Kenneth Cole and how he didn't even show up to face my challenge... well, one thing I didn't brag about is that I didn't *exactly* complete the AIDS Walk.

Halfway through the 6-mile walk, I hitched a cab. There, I wrote it.

Last year, I was limping around for days after finishing the Walk, and I promised Gwenn I wouldn't

mess myself up again. I was doing fine until a mid-point stop, where our team lined up for the Porta-Potties. After sitting down for twenty minutes, my trick ankle was not having any more of the AIDS Walk.

“But people donated,” I told Gwenn. “Not to torture you!” She countered. Still, I did swallow a little pride there.

So when I heard that a positoid was walking from Seattle to Washington D.C., leaving at the end of this month and arriving on December 1, World AIDS to raise funds and awareness about the epidemic, I had to find out more. Were there going to rollerblades involved? Or a Segway?

All was revealed when I caught up with Michael Moore-VonGaysen to ask him a few questions about his project, thepositivesteps.com.

How long have you been HIV positive?

Michael: Well Shawn, the fateful date would be Jan 27, 2006. That is the date that my little pet entered into my life.

What inspired you and your partner, Mark, to walk across the country?

Well, one night during a chill Spokane winter, we were out on the porch smoking a cigarette, chit chatting about the current stigma facing those living with HIV/AIDS. I shared with Mark my mother’s first reaction when i told her. She asked: “ Does this mean we can’t drink out of the same glasses as of you?”

This memory is truly the initial inspiration. Thinking that a lot of America is isolated from the true impact of this pandemic that faces our nation. And that ignorance breeds fear, and fear breeds prejudice. Most people feel that this disease is limited to metro areas and and high risk groups, but the face of HIV/AIDS has changed over the years, reaching into our heartland. We feel by walking through the heartland we will reach more people and make them to sit up and take notice.

I hope lots of folks greet you along the way. OK, I gotta know one thing: Do you have a foot masseur waiting for you in D.C. on World AIDS Day?

Unfourtunatly no masseur, but i hope a group of friends will be flying out to meet us at the White House and celebrate a job well done, raising us up and carrying us upon their shoulders.

Sounds like a good time!

I feel this will not be so much in celebration but because I don’t know if either of us will be able to walk another step after 3,000 miles.

I couldn’t walk six, so I hear ya, Michael. Thanks for taking this on, and best of luck to you guys on your journey.

Thank you. And you can keep up with our progress on our website, The Positive Steps.

That guy rules. Oh, I met him cyberly, by the way, and you can too if you’re on MySpace. Go here to add Michael as a Friend on MySpace.

I gotta say, I’m glad I met this positoid. I plan to vicariously complete my own AIDS Walk through his journey. Plus, he makes me realize what a bunch of wusses my negatoid friends in Bella Morte are for having to ride in a van to get across the country.

Positively Yours,

Shawn

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