Wearing the Red Ribbon

November 30, 2011 By Aundaray Guess

I remember when I was first diagnosed in the late 80's. At that time not many people were infected so the health department had the resources to send people out to newly infected persons and teach them on how to live with the disease without spreading it.

A nurse showed up at my door and she gave me the rundown on the disease and at one point she asks if I have any bleach. I'm thinking to myself, she does laundry to?! Cool! But no the bleach was for a different reason. It was to show me how to bleach the silverware I used and also how to wipe down the toilet seat after each use. I didn't know it at the time but it was introduction to stigma.

The sad part is that now we're several centuries later and the mentality of fear that still exist of people who have HIV and peoples fear of catching it from a simple touch or handling an item that someone positive has handled.

HIV stigma is sometimes hard to describe. We know that it exists but sometimes for those who are negative, they don't fully understand what it feels like to be stigmatized. Stigma can create barriers to proper healthcare, create negative self-identity and progress often to discriminatory behaviors.

We are now about to recognize those living with HIV/AIDS and those who have passed from the disease as another World AIDS Day is here. I've attended many functions each year and each time I notice something interesting. At each event they hand out red ribbons and a pin for attendees to wear during the function.

At that moment we're all infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. At that moment.

The interesting thing that happens is when the event is over and it's time to go home. You notice the removal of the red ribbon before people leave the building. The removal of the ribbon before they go into the general public or before they get on the subway. Because they know what that ribbon represents-stigma.

Yet for those living with the disease we don't have the luxury of removing the red ribbon. It's something we carry with us everywhere we go. Of course our status doesn't show on our lapel but we blend in as much as we can. in certain neighborhoods or regions of the country we still have that early eighties mentality of ignorance where we have not progressed in our understanding of what it means to have HIV/AIDS.

So this year i throw out a challenge to those attending World AIDS Day events this year. I challenge you to wear your ribbon home. If someone has questions help educate and eradicate the ignorance. Show that you are truly affected and join the chorus of those living with the disease.

Wear the red ribbon with pride and help show that AIDS doesn’t have a certain face or race. That truly we’re all affected by HIV/AIDS.

And as a last note I give pause to those who have moved on to a better place and honor your spirit not just on the first of December but everyday.

God bless

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