Where I'll Be In DC For The Conference

July 20, 2012 By Shawn Decker

The International AIDS Conference is upon us- and for the first time since 1990 it's in the United States. That is both a reason to celebrate (goodbye, stupid HIV Travel Ban!) and scratch our heads (how the hell did the ban last so long?).

In 2012, those dual feelings of elation and confusion are being carried into this conference by a lot of attendees who are once again being romanced by talks of a cure while simultaneously watching drug companies attempt to feed HIV medications to people who don't even have the virus. When the medications work for us positoids, we can have fulfilling and active lives. But we also live in a world where a drop of our saliva landing on a police officer can add years to a prison sentence.

Yes, these are confusing times.

I'm going to DC as a Board Member for MTV's Staying Alive Foundation. Back in 2000, when Staying Alive was an HIV/AIDS awareness program, Gwenn and I appeared and shared our experiences dealing with HIV in our relationship. You can see the program here. Years later I was contacted by Georgia Arnold, executive director of SAF. She informed me of how SAF had grown from a yearly television program to a grant-giving organization, providing funds to young people who are combating HIV in their own backyards.

The MTV Staying Alive Foundation just launched a new web site, and it's worth checking out.

I'm very proud to be an openly HIV positive member of this Board. We meet bright and early on Sunday. Then Sunday night I'll be attending the SERO Project's gathering at Number Nine. Click the image to Like the SERO Project on Facebook, and learn more about how they are are standing up to the injustice that lurks for anyone who tests positive for HIV.

On Monday Gwenn and I will be checking out the Global Village, which is open to the general public and will be seeing the AIDS Quilt on the lawn. Then on Monday night we are going to see the HIV/AIDS documentary, Deep South. The last time I did that was in 1997, I wrote a column for Poz about the experience of taking my family to our first "AIDS picnic". I was one year into this journey of speaking out about HIV- I was still finding my voice. The opposite of now, I know my voice and purpose but lack the enthusiasm I had when I wrote this.

If it weren't for my role with Staying Alive, I doubt I'd even be in DC this weekend. Not to toot my own horn, but Gwenn and I are the only straight couple talking about HIV on a national level. We've been doing this for a decade. We applied to speak at the International AIDS Conference four years ago and were rejected. I don't think I'm crazy in thinking that sero-diverse couples should be a part of the discussion when it comes to HIV prevention. There is so much to learn from people who prevent the

spread of HIV within their own healthy relationships.

Instead, in 2012, the big talk is of feeding HIV medications to the HIV negative partner.

Oh well. I'm proud of the work we do, and I'll keep doing what I can. We are all part of the solution to HIV/AIDS. There's more work than any one of us can handle, and this Conference is about the much-needed reminder that, no matter what we do and who we are, we are not alone.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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