You Got A Friend

September 12, 2012 By Aundaray Guess

As a dear friend celebrates her birthday, I reflect on the value she added to my life and celebrate a friendship that made having HIV easier to bear.

I slowly knocked on her door which was unusual for me as usually when I showed up at her door I would give the door a rapid loud knock with a "Yo what's up It's me! But this time my knock was quiet. My best friend Tracy opened the door and although I tried to put on a happy face she could always read me and knew I was putting on an act. Since she had already had someone over visiting she brought me in her room for privacy. We sat on the edge of her bed and she put her arms around my shoulder. Up until that time I felt I like was all alone in the world but that simple contact between me and her opened up the floodgates of everything I was hiding. It was so powerful because up until then I didn't allow anyone to touch me or hug me as I felt dirty. Even if it was the shaking of hands I didn't want human contact. It had been two years since I was told I was HIV positive and I never told anyone, not even myself. I was scared. I was scared no one would love me. I was scared of the rejection and I was scared of the secret I carried. And although Tracy and I had been good friends for many years, I was scared of what she would think because she was a rock to me in this crazy world.

With no melodrama I just told her I had HIV and the tears fell like a monsoon, and the hug she gave me didn't get weaker but stronger. She held me like I was a baby which is no surprise since I was crying like one. I was no longer in this battle alone.

Tracy and I had a unique relationship. I met her in high school. I was a sophomore and she was a junior and she didn't know why I was always buzzing around her like a mosquito. If she had a can of bug spray she would have showered me in it as I was working her last nerve. She couldn't stand me, but for some reason I kept stepping in her shadow. Maybe it was intervention or she was simply tired of telling me to go away but we started to hang out. Most of the hanging out was playing hooky from a class or watching horror movies screaming in each others arms. We had a common interest in music and would just bop our heads to songs like Midnight Star , "No Parking on the Dance Floor, Isley Brother's, "Between the Sheets" and The Dazz Band "Joystick". Even when she graduated I was there. I showed my friendship in crazy ways, like making sure she got home safety which meant following the city bus she was on for miles while riding my bike behind it.

Outside school we were an 80's version of Bonnie and Clyde. We were always in shenanigans. Nothing harmful, just things like grabbing everyone's circular from the apartment building as inside were a coupon for free cases of soda and we took turns going in the store until we had cases or going to a restaurant and even though it wasn't either one's birthday I would let it

slip to the waitress that we were celebrating her birthday just to get a free desert. One time I unknowingly to her at Chi-Chi's, a Mexican restaurant let it slip it was her birthday knowing it was a lie. The minute we finished dinner the whole staff came out with instruments and balloons, clapping and singing "Happy Birthday". One of them had a Polaroid camera and we had to pose for a picture as they put a huge sombrero on her head. Talk about embarrassed and the look Tracy gave me I just knew it was the last time we were getting free ice cream on her or anyone's benefit.

I always said if anyone truly wanted to know the complete me to ask Tracy because we shared it all. Disclosing my status made me feel less alone. It's a scary thought to make such a disclosure no matter how close they are to you. But I felt the scariest thing for me was to do this alone, something I knew I couldn't do. Admittedly I didn't share with Tracy right away but it was one of the best decisions as it showed me what unconditional love looked and felt like. If I can give any advice to anyone who is keeping their status a secret I would say you'd be surprised at who will not reject you and most of all you'd be surprised and embraced the unloading of the burden.

God has so many angels out there and for me my angel name was Tracy. So thank you Tracy for the laughter, the memories, the tears and your acceptance of me flaws and all. You've shown me what a true friend really is!! And most of all you showed me that I am not in this world alone. The greatest thing is that she probably never knows how special that moment meant to me and in that moment she changed how I felt about myself and helped me to live moments filled with love. Thank you Tracy and Happy Birthday!

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