

A tale of two gay men, AIDS and Family

Written by

Tuesday, 30 November 2004 05:32 - Last Updated Tuesday, 30 November 2004 05:32

A tale of two gay men, AIDS and Family World AIDS Day is a personal day for me, a little like my own remembrance day. It will be a hard day to get through. It will be filled with so many memories of friends that have been taken by AIDS.

I have been working in HIV/AIDS advocacy and awareness for a long time. I had lost friends to this disease and had felt the pain of loss. I found out that I really had not really experienced what many of my friends who had lost partners went through.

It became personal for me on World AIDS Day, December 1, 2002.

My partner Steven was just 6 days younger than I was. Something he never let me forget. Our lives from birth were radically different. Steven was the oldest of four and I the oldest of eight. His family was religious, mine quite the opposite. Steven entered Bible college at a young age and became a full fledged Pentecostal Minister at 17. At 17 I was in high school trying not to get beat up because someone might think I was a faggot.

After school I went on to work for the BC Forest Service, starting a career, coming out as a gay man and getting to Vancouver whenever I could. I became a union and gay rights activist.

Steven took up as a traveling revival show that landed in parking lots in communities all over BC and Alberta in the 70's preaching fire and brimstone. From there he was married, went to the deepest south of the USA to preach the gospel. Steven and his wife came back to Canada a little disillusioned with the Pentecostal movement and took up running grocery stores. They had three children and soon after the birth of the youngest they split it up.

Steven was gay. He moved to Vancouver and made up for lost time and soon was diagnosed with AIDS. During this time I had two relationships with men, each lasting six or seven years, gone on to being an elected union and community leader in small town BC. I travelled to Vancouver often and was excited to join in the gay scene there. Luck or fate seemed to protect me as I did much of what Steven had yet I did not contract HIV.

In the early years of Steven becoming HIV positive, he was all over the map emotionally. Told by his doctor he had two years at most. It was a tough time and as he lived beyond the Doctors expectations, Steven came to believe he had a life to live. He turned his anger and self pity into positive energy. Living each day in the present, not the past.

As this was happening with Steven, I was living life as an open gay man, enjoying a regular life, enjoying my siblings and their children. I came to regret that I would never be a father. My nieces and nephews were that more special to me as a result, yet I had this need to have my own children. My partner at the time was not interested and I resigned myself to being an uncle. That said, being called Uncle Rick is pretty sweet.

Steven's and my life collided with a soft beautiful smile. I was in love the second I saw him. I had just moved to Kelowna and was looking to meet other gay men. I heard about a coffee shop that had a "gay night". I wondered in and ordered a coffee and went about to meet people. Most seemed a little shy or stuck up. I was new and I guess they were sizing me up. I went outside to have a smoke and then the grin was flashed. Steven I discovered was a major tease, though I did not figure that out until much later. He was the first person to speak to me, offering me a chair. I sat down and commenced what would take me six months of dating to get to where I asked him to be with me for the rest of my life.

Steven with me on my knees, asked me if I was sure. "I may only live another two, three years, I may be very sick for long periods of time." I can still hear his words. I said I was very sure and he said yes to me. Shivers run up my arms now, across my back as I recall this moment.

A tale of two gay men, AIDS and Family

Written by

Tuesday, 30 November 2004 05:32 - Last Updated Tuesday, 30 November 2004 05:32

Our life began together like it started o-nly this time there were two amazing smiles and some tears to ensure our souls and bodies were overcome from our love.

Steven told me that night he had just o-ne wish before he died, "I want to love and be loved." I know I have done this now he said.

Our lives went o-n, normal as they can be with HIV. We were family. We talked about our past, and it seemed we were at many of the same places at the same time, yet we never met. Fate said Steven, we found each other when we needed to. He believed we each had something the other needed in this life. I soon learned how true this was.

I became a Dad! Steven's youngest, Stephanie, came to live with us. We were overjoyed to have her. She added a new dimension to our love as we shared our lives with her. I now knew what being a Dad is like, being an integral, trusting and reliable part of some young person's developing life. Steven shared with me o-ne of my greatest desires, to be a father. o-nly his love could match such a gift.

Steven's son Mark was a big part of our lives as well, visiting us often. When work took me to Mark's hometown Steven's former wife Lynn, and daughter Sarah-Dawn did all they could to make me welcome. My Mom became Steven's mom, my nieces and nephews called Steven the weird uncle as he sang all the children's songs and played in the lake with them.

Our life was normal, fulfilling and full of love and then came June 3, 2002.

I rushed Steven to hospital. He was suffering agonizing pain. We had been in to emergency three previous times in the last two months and the pain was becoming worse. That night a cancer specialist was o-n the AIDS Care team. She suspected cancer right away.

Steven was admitted, in the days ahead we heard Steven might live six months, he had cancer and it was very advanced, beyond treating. It was a cancer I soon learned was 100 times more common in HIV positive people. Six months to live, it was not be. It became days. Steven was surrounded by friends and family. We took turns, so he was not alone.

Two days before Steven passed away, before he slipped into a coma, he pulled me close, and gave me that same smile he had when we met. He asked me if I remembered what his o-ne wish was before he died. "Ricky," he said, "I know what it is to love and to know I am loved." Tears and smiles shook our souls and bodies.

[Steven passed away o­n June 9, 2002 at 8:30am](#)

in St.Paul's Hospital in Vancouver. I miss him and I better understand the horror AIDS has brought our world, certainly what it did to mine. You can help me and other remember those that have left us. Whenever you hear Josh Groban sing, "To Where You Are" think of Steven, think of all those that have gone and those still here to remember. If you do this, you can know what love can be and why World AIDS Day is so personal for me and thousands of others.

Rick Barnes

GLBTQ Editor *"...Fly me up to where you are*

Beyond the distant star

I wish upon tonight

To see you smile

If o nly for awhile to know you're there

A breath away's not far

To where you are..." from - [To Where You Are](#)

A tale of two gay men, AIDS and Family

Written by

Tuesday, 30 November 2004 05:32 - Last Updated Tuesday, 30 November 2004 05:32

www.queerthoughts.blogspot.com