Hepatitis C: Who do you love?

May 2, 2015 By Grace Campbell

“Why did you do all this for me?’ he asked. ’I don’t deserve it. I’ve never done anything for you.’ ’You have been my friend,’ replied Charlotte. ’That in itself is a tremendous thing.”
- Charlotte’s Web, EB White

You’ve often heard me talk long and loud about the support I get from my friends and family during my pas des deux with Hepatitis C. So I thought I might delve a little deeper into that idea. (If I ever use the word “unpack” as in “let’s unpack that idea, shall we?” feel free to never read another word I write.)

My family have to support me, they are obligated by ties of blood. Okay, they don’t *have to*, but one of the things I like about my family is that they do get behind each other. And not just to give a little push near a cliff top, either! For them it’s easy to support me, because families are generally held together by unconditional love. They love you no matter how dumb you’ve been, how sad you are, how stupid you appear at times.

Friends are like the family we choose to have. They don’t have to support you, but if you’ve chosen well they will. Often friends are quicker to “call it” than family.

“You look terrible. Are you sleeping?”
“Stop doing all those extra jobs! You are meant to be looking after yourself!”
“LOOK AT YOU, YOU ARE GETTING WORRY WRINKLES! STOP OBSESSING!”

But you can tell a good friend things you might never tell your family. Fears of mortality, fears of failing hep c treatments, the what ifs and what nows. In many ways they are more resilient than your family because they don’t have as much unconditional love invested in you.

Then there are the invisible friends. They mightn’t even know you count them as important people in your life. It’s quite likely that you’ve never met them.

Why is that?

Because their interaction with you consists of binary code. Zeros and ones.

Often the most aware support will come from forums such as the Hep Forum and others in your own country. These people get it because they’ve been there themselves. They’ve often faced the same demons you have, looked at the same jumble of test results and wondered “what the …?”. They’ve already worked out strategies that will be useful for you in coming days, weeks and months.

If you choose wisely, like you choose your friends, you'll get help, support and good advice. (If you don't choose wisely you may get crazy advice, support in areas you don't need and help lightening your wallet.)

Listen to your wisely chosen invisible friends. They have no dog in this fight. They have nothing to gain. They don't have an agenda. They are there because they genuinely want to help you.

Some people are quite anxious about developing a relationship with someone else at the other end of a computer. It can be hard. How do you know if one of your invisible acquaintances should make the move up to being an invisible friend?

Let's remember I used the descriptor "wisely chosen". How can you choose wisely? These are people you've never met. You can't rely on eye contact or body language.

First, look for someone who is widely acknowledged among your other invisible acquaintances as a bit of an expert. Not a guru, an expert. They need to be able to walk the talk.

Second, check that others generally like them. If the majority of others like them, they're usually worth a closer look as a possible invisible friend.

Third, make sure their area of expertise is the area you need. No use having an expert on Louis Quatorze furniture if you need someone who knows a lot about Hepatitis C. Unless they know a lot about both and hey, anything's possible I suppose.

Fourth, converse with your tentative invisible friend. Shoot the breeze, have some fun. Do you like talking with them? If you do, that's a good sign.

Fifth, just like with your visible friends, you generally get a gut feeling about your invisible ones too. And your gut is usually right. Especially when it's telling you to eat more chocolate cake!

Et voila, you have an awesome invisible friend.

I hope your invisible friends are as amazing as mine. I am so lucky to have mine in my life.

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