When Hepatitis C Drapes Us in Shame

June 19, 2015 By Matt Starr

Shame. It's there, draped around me. The root of this shame is based on losing my profession due to hepatitis C and liver problems. My life of responsibility and pride of providing for my family with my top end teacher's salary and benefits for us all is over. Things have changed. My ongoing challenges with hepatitis C, liver disease, and a liver transplant seven years ago finally knocked me back enough to force me to leave my teaching career three years ago.

I'm home a lot now, writing and coaching, making much less money, on disability and Medicare, while my friends drive off to do their important, well paid work, and my egoistic embarrassment and personal shame slowly build. I've caused a lot of pain for those closest to me, and our financial flexibility has changed significantly, while my friends move into their peak working years.

Shame and ongoing questions crawl over me. How did this all happen to me, as a self-assessed golden boy that always got what he wanted and landed on his feet when he went off the track?

But it did happen, and now, here I am. I am not so golden anymore.

I'm sure many feel similar versions of this shame if they contributed to their own health problems. Examples of this are many: lung cancer from smoking; problems from excessive alcohol intake; diabetes from too much sugar and lack of exercise; obesity; HIV; hepatitis from drug use, and other diseases begin from lifestyle choices that eventually came home to roost.

Over the last decade, I have been in a cycle of ups and downs, recovery and descent, when I was hospitalized multiple times, semi-home bound or compromised. It became not just my problem, but affected the ones I love the most: my wife, kids, sister, and dad. I brought this on myself from some mistakes of a short time period over 30 years ago, which led to my current problems. It's hard not to feel sorrow for your family, along with shame, as your friends continue to flourish professionally, physically, and socially while I am, with my wife watching and feeling it all happen, increasingly out of the game.

It's hard; at least it's hard for me. Have you also suffered from earlier choices that affect you present health, and left you feeling guilt or shame?

These feelings don't have to control us though. I've learned to fight back and to love the life I have rather than mourn what I once had. You can, too. Punch that shame in the nose and move towards positive thoughts and actions, and make changes in perspectives as needed. Be kind to yourself, and in the process of moving forward, past the shame and fear, find the learning, growth, health and healing that is available to you.

It's not easy, but to still love life we need to acknowledge the shame while moving past it. Gloves off folks, it's time to fight for what your vision is for a fulfilled life. Go for it.

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