London Calling

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May 16, 2022 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

I had done only a bit of international traveling up until my 30s. I visited relatives in Cuba when I was younger. I had the privilege of attending a summer exchange program in Japan during high school. I also went to Mexico and Canada a few times.

That said, I hadn't yet gone to Europe. Feeling lucky to have survived HIV into my 30s, I decided to break that barrier. For me, the obvious choice for my first time across the pond was London. As a Cuban American, going to Cuba was a sort of homecoming. As a native New Yorker, seeing London was like looking at a mirror image.

So it has been great for me to once again think about London fondly—this time as the home of Adam Castillejo, aka the London Patient, the second person certified as cured of HIV. Both the late Timothy Ray Brown, the first person cured of the retrovirus, and Adam were cured the same way—through a bone marrow transplant to treat leukemia. The transplants had the same genetic mutation that allows the body to effectively block infection by HIV.

But the excitement of finding a cure for HIV has been accompanied by the reality that the cure is simply not widely applicable. The financial costs and very serious health risks make this route impractical at best.

Nonetheless, the fact remains that people can be cured of HIV. That knowledge alone is worth its weight in gold, at least to me. Knowing it is possible should give everyone still living with HIV hope that a cure for each of us isn't a pipe dream. Indeed, that is the message that Adam wants to share. Go here to read about his life after HIV.

In addition to Timothy and Adam both having been cured of HIV, they also share another connection—being proud members of the LGBTQ community. In this special issue about LGBTQ people, we spotlight many others from the community who have been involved in noteworthy efforts on behalf of people living with HIV.

One of them is Hunter Reynolds, a deeply gifted and prolific artist. He's been documenting his journey as a gay man living through the AIDS epidemic since he tested HIV positive. He's an early member of ACT UP and a cofounder of its affinity group ART+ Positive, which battles homophobia

and censorship in the arts. Go here to read more.

Another example is Vishwas Pethe, a long-term HIV survivor and an author. When we meet him in his memoir, Gay Crow, he is 62 and ready to end his life—he was diagnosed with AIDS in 1986 and non-Hodgkin lymphoma in 2001 and suffered a debilitating stroke and fall in 2016. Go here for our Q&A with Vishwas and some sage advice.

Although addiction affects all kinds of people, LGBTQ folks are especially at risk. One drug in particular, crystal methamphetamine, unfortunately continues to ensnare gay men, distorting their sex lives and increasing their HIV risk. Go here to read more about how meth still kills—and how to get help.

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