Madonna Gets Emotional About HIV Activism at GLAAD Awards [VIDEO]

The Queen of Pop recalls the early days of the epidemic and discusses her fight against HIV in Africa.

May 7, 2019 By Alicia Green

On May 4, pop icon Madonna received the Advocate for Change Award at the 30th Annual GLAAD Media Awards in New York City, which recognizes and honors media for its fair, accurate and inclusive representations of the LGBT community and the issues that affect their lives.

In her heartfelt speech, part of which can be viewed above, Madonna said “fighting for all marginalized people was a duty and an honor I could not turn my back on nor will I ever.”

Madonna recalled her move to New York City to become a performer just as the AIDS epidemic was at its peak, Rolling Stone reports. She tearfully remembered loved ones who died from AIDS-related complications, including her roommate Martin Burgoyne and artist Keith Haring and described smuggling drugs across the Mexican border to help her friends living with HIV only to discover that those drugs worsened their conditions.

Then, there was the time she went to the AIDS ward in a hospital and hugged every patient.“I came home smelling like shit and vomit and death and defiance,” she recalls. “I came home smelling like gratitude.” The paparazzi immediately began falsely reporting that she had AIDS.

She discussed her HIV advocacy in Malawi, aka “the Warm Heart of Africa.” “Fourteen years ago, I heard about an AIDS epidemic in Malawi, a country in sub-Saharan Africa that I had never heard of before—embarrassingly,” she said. “A country that had left over 1 million children orphaned by AIDS. I decided to go there and see what I could do, and it was like history repeating itself.”

Hospital wards there reminded her of the early days of the epidemic in the United States and inspired her documentary I Am Because We Are, which detailed her experience in Malawi and helped raise awareness about the country’s orphaned children. Madonna not only helped build schools, orphanages and a pediatric hospital in Malawi, but she also met and adopted four of her six children.

She said, “As soon as you really understand what it means to love, you understand what it takes to become a human being and that it is every human’s duty to fight, to advocate, to do whatever we

can and whatever it takes.”

For related coverage, read “Beyoncé Gets Emotional as She Honors a Gay Uncle Who Had HIV [VIDEO].”

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