My Meth Weekend

POZ blogger Daniel Pintauro received the 2016 New Generation Arts & Activism Award from the Desert AIDS Project in Palm Springs, California. Here is an edited excerpt of his acceptance speech.

April 4, 2016 By Daniel Pintauro

As you can imagine, the past five months have been a whirlwind, both wonderful and challenging in many ways. Though my initial decision to come out to Oprah Winfrey about having HIV and having contracted HIV while using crystal meth was terrifying, each day still carries a moment of terror as I wonder if I made the right decision.

Celebrities—even child celebrities—are used to having the spotlight on them, but that's often to talk about what they're wearing, not their viral load or safer-sex practices. Being so forthcoming on a global scale has forced me to spend time evaluating my life, who I am, where I've come from and where I'm going more than ever.

Palm Springs holds a spot in the "where I've come from" category, both as a place I love and a place where I've made some bad decisions. One day many years ago, I was in the middle of a meth-fueled weekend, sitting in front of my computer trying to find more meth and more sex.

After looking online for hours, I found someone in Palm Springs who had a friend. So I decided to meet them. I decided, after having done meth earlier in the day, to drive from Los Angeles to Palm Springs to hang out with these two guys. And, after having done a lot more meth and other drugs, I drove back to Los Angeles. It's a miracle that I wasn't pulled over or got into an accident or worse.

I've been thinking a lot about those two guys since the day I was contacted by Desert AIDS Project. What happened to them? Did they get on the path to recovery, or are they out there now having another meth weekend? My hope is that they came to the Desert AIDS Project and are in a healthier and happier place in their lives.

Shortly after that drive, I decided to get clean, stay clean, get my act together and move forward (not sideways), laying the first bricks on a long road. But I'm proud to say tonight that this award, in so many ways, completes a huge life circle and reinforces that I have made the right decisions.

There were many moments when I could have veered off the road, both because of meth and HIV, but somehow I managed to stay on track. That road is no different for anyone who comes to the

Desert AIDS Project looking for help. It takes bravery just to get tested; it takes bravery to step into the clinic to seek help and care.

I've been through a lot over the years, and sometimes when you're "in it" you can't see the bigger picture, you can't see that other people might be going through the exact same things as you. But I've been speaking to a lot of people and I'm learning that my story is not unique.

I'm not alone in finding that my depression and self-doubt are partly fueled by my latent struggles with being gay, and they are certainly fueled by the immense stigma I felt about being HIV positive. And I'm not alone in turning to a drug that removes all of that self-doubt, depression and internalized stigma and replaces it, albeit for a short time, with feelings of invincibility, strength and confidence.

I'm proud to receive this honor, but I'm more proud to stand with Desert AIDS Project, whose programs and services are at the forefront of compassionate care for the Coachella Valley. And I'm proud to be a part of this loving, caring community.

Go to poz.com/blogger/daniel-pintauro to read the full text of his speech.

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