A DJ Saved My Life

Our hemo hero embraces the music

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Being a longstanding positoid does something funny to you. Over the years you hear about so many positoid brothers and sisters who died, and it makes you think about a lot of things. Like, why am I still alive? What's different about my body or my virus that allows me to continue by bumbling journey on our fair Earth?

There's no simple answer to such questions. But this much is sure: A healthy head helps. What produces this rewarding state of mind? What keeps you focused on the true essence of life? Doing the things that make you happy and not giving a Newt about what other people have to say about it. One of the things that makes me happiest is music.

I got heavily into music after my diagnosis in '87, when I was entering seventh grade and didn't have a clue how to make the transition from cubby hole to locker room. There were other things on my mind: For one, my own mortality, which had been chasing me ever since my little hemo body learned to crawl.

Music offered my existence some reason and me some sanity. It drowned out all the fears and tears. A good hook in a song made me forget about what my doctor was telling me or what other students were saying at the lockers about positoids.

For a year after finding my pet virus I was single. I couldn't work up the courage to enter the dating world. But there was no need to, for I had four girlfriends in tow. I was 13, and had a mild case of the Bangles. It turned out to be a whirlwind affair, but the Bangles taught me what music could do: Speak for me when I was in no position to speak for myself. Their most notable lyric (to me) was from the song "He's Got a Secret": "It's there when he walks, it's there when he smiles/kisses your cheek and disappears for a while./Nothing in the world's going to cramp his style,/if only he can keep it from you." You can understand how this made me feel safer in my alienated and awkward state. It was like a warm cuddle with a friend.

Then I discovered some thing new: Electronic music via Depeche Mode! "You know how hard it is for me to shake the disease,/that takes a hold of my tongue in situations like these." I was transfixed. This called for a different level of appreciation altogether, and sparked my own desire to create music. So at age 14, I got my first keyboard (a Roland D-20, which I still have) and

launched my own musical legacy in the comfort and privacy of my own bedroom. Ever heard of the band Suffering Spleen? I masterminded its success.

I was even on the high school garage-band circuit for a while, but that was torture. Everyone wanted to be rock stars! It was awesome-we were halfwits who could barely play our instruments. Thinking back on those days reminds me of early flight attempts when men would foolishly stack on more sets of wings in the hopes of finally achieving flight. That's what our songs were like: If we added more distortion and another cymbal crash, we would have a certifiable hit on our hands and overnight fame and fortune. Realism set in eventually, and most of us realized and even reveled in the fact that as musicians, we sucked.

Soon as I began studying how to use synthesizers to negate the sonic need for others' participation. With a synth I had drums, bass, everything I needed to structure a song and to become a complete musical recluse. For me, making music has always been a form of meditation, and I found my feelings of inner tranquility severely tested by some idiot sitting beside me slapping a bass guitar with his hand as hard as humanly possible. When I'm alone, it's easier for me to focus, even if the music I'm making is mundane or directionless.

After I graduated from high school, I delved deeper into music than ever, trying to perfect my craft. Spending hours alone curled up over a keyboard was like heaven to me. I relished the fact that my music was beginning to take shape, finally.

And eventually I found I needed more. So I started my HIV educational ways. But I doubt I would have got there without taking my own personal magical mystery tour. No high school teacher taught me more than such songwriters as Kurt Cobain, Sting, Roy Orbison and Robert Smith. From them I learned I have something more to offer the world than an AIDS-realistic statistic. Smith is, of course, the lead singer of another one of my favorite bands...the Cure.

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