Spotlight Stories

June 22, 2015 By Nicole Icon

What’s up, y’all. My name is Nicole Icon and I am Legendary for Old Way Vogue and Realness. I’m a transsexual woman in the Ballroom scene. I’ve been in the scene since 1994. I was walking as a

Butch Queen, but then I changed to walking balls in drag. I started being in drag more every day until I started taking hormones to begin my transition to becoming a woman.

The Ballroom pretty much took over my life. I'd go home, get up, and go to the Village and then the balls. I'd go to the pier and be out there all night voguing with my friends. That was how life was back then. Those were hard times because there really weren't many places to go or get support.

In those days, it was easier to escort than it was to get a job. A lot of us got introduced to escorting as a way to survive. I never really wanted to escort, but I saw it was working for everyone else. I did it because I needed to eat and pay bills. The only way we could have some money was when we went and picked up dates on 14th Street. The money was nice, but I wasn't always proud about doing it. However, escorting helped me become Nicole. It costs a lot to become a woman like me.

Out on the streets, we knew that if we were going to have penetrative sex, we'd use condoms. But for oral sex, we never really used them. Guys would say they had $100 if you didn't use a condom, and being young and naïve I would think, well, it's only oral. So I didn't use a condom, and I got my $100. At that time, things like using a condom for oral sex was not discussed much, unlike the information we get today.

The moment that changed everything for me was one night when I was really hesitant to go out. Eventually, I did go out and I met this attractive client. He said, “I have $100 for a blow job but I don’t want you to use a condom.” I said to him, “Okay, I’ll do it but do not cum in my mouth or near my mouth. Don’t do that!” I made it very clear. When he was about to ejaculate he tried to hold my head, as I was pushing to get him off of me, he literally ejaculated on my face and on the side of my mouth. I couldn’t believe it. At that point, I realized I needed to change the game. I got tested for HIV and by the grace of God, everything was fine.

After that experience, I needed to get myself together. I started taking classes, and I even found a job that helped me during my transition and my survival. I was lucky to get out of escorting. I didn’t stay stuck in that lifestyle. I was able to come out on top. Many of my friends didn’t. These days, when I have sex with anyone I would use non-lubricated condoms for oral sex and lubricated condoms for intercourse. I don’t play games when it comes to sex.

GMHC recently produced a series of “Spotlight Stories” cards featuring gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth of color talking about their experiences negotiating safer sex. This Spotlight Story has been reformatted to fit this publication.

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