Art Saved My Life

December 12, 2016 By Guy Anthony

“Whenever I sit down long enough to think,

Within a blink or bat of eye,

I die

A thousand deaths inside,

Because Doctors say these pills

Won’t kill

But keep me alive.

They lied--

And I

Little Guy

Am stuck somewhere

Between closure

And disclosure

Still so far away

And not much closer

To who I used to be

Pre-HIV”

I wrote Anti-Retroviral as I sat waiting to hear “next steps” from a testing counselor, who truly didn’t care if I lived or died. I was simply a part of his organization’s “protocol”. I was merely another number in his monthly deliverable. It wasn’t the support of family that kept me strong, nor was the clinic where I tested positive knocking down my door to ensure I, at 21 years old, was fully equipped with everything I might need to sustain myself. It was Art that saved my life. It was through my ability to cope through self-expression that I actually began the healing process of living with HIV.

Every year since December 1, 1988, World AIDS Day has been a day where we are able to commemorate the lives of those who have succumb to complications from HIV, and to wrap our

arms-virtually and physically- around those who are still living with the disease by raising awareness around HIV/AIDS. Surprisingly, there are still people in the world who believe you can contract HIV through sweat--yes, I was asked if this was possible just a few days ago. This means that we, collectively, are not doing all that we can do to ensure communities affected by HIV have the tools they need when attempting to protect themselves and others.

The way in which I choose to advocate for those infected & affected by HIV is to create new and innovative ways to disseminate information. I choose to create inclusive and affirming spaces where both HIV-positive and HIV-negative people are able to commune with each other in an effort to speak openly and honestly about HIV. With the help of AIDS Healthcare Foundation, my organization, Black, Gifted & Whole, was able to do just that for our 2nd Annual World AIDS Day Unification event.

Held at Busboys & Poets-Brookland on December 1st, we were able to host an Artist Showcase entitled #POZArt: A World AIDS Day Unification event to provide an affirming and healing space for both HIV-Positive and HIV-Negative artists. In staying aligned with our theme this year, we chose to screen my dear friend Thomas Davis' dance and multimedia project, **The Catharsis Project**. The Catharsis Project addresses some of the most pertinent issues that impacted communities in the early days of the epidemic. Through Dance and stock footage from the early 80's and 90's, he was able to tell a comprehensive story of how HIV/AIDS ravished communities--and how some communities (Black Gay men & Black Women) were still being left out of the narrative when reports were being conducted.

There were 7 HIV-Positive artists on the bill. We raffled off my book, Pos+tively Beautiful, #HIVLIVESMATTER hoodies by Linton Walker, homemade jewelry from Asunder by Raymond Thomas and a host of other goodies donated by AIDS Healthcare Foundation. This was the first event we ever hosted where it was standing room only available. There was an abundance of free food, free drinks, and free love circulating throughout the venue.

#POZArt was hugely successful because it was different. Because we provided a space for HIV-Positive people to feel safe when sharing their innermost feelings. We were able to support each other outside of a clinical setting. Our artists weren't there because they needed a transportation voucher or a Visa gift card. No, there were to be felt. To be recognized for thriving instead of just surviving with HIV. Edgar Degas was right, *"Art is not what you see, but what you make others see"*, and what we saw that night was truly transformative.



POZ Art Rocky Dash

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