Basement/Penthouse

July 12, 2013 By Aundaray Guess

If you were looking at your self image in a mirror and the way you saw yourself where would you reside?

Are you in the basement or in the penthouse of your life?

The basement is a cold dark place that allows little light to shines through. It's not welcoming and has dirty corners in which small critters find comfort. It's true you can renovate it and fix it up to look comfortable but it'll remain the basement no matter what you do. A penthouse on the other hand is the opposite. It's filled with light; usually well maintained and stands above everything else. It has a shine on it and it's lifted. It most often represents attainment.

So I ask the question again, where do you live?

If I asked myself that question in my twenties I would have told you the basement. Back then living with this virus I felt dirty. I had no light in my life as I was trying to keep my head up from swimming in a pool of misplaced values and a sense of belonging nowhere.

I didn't give myself the gift of nurturing. My basement was filled with clutter of boxes stored with past pain of child abuse and low identity of self. I had picture frames of a smiling child that masked confusion on what lied inside of me and why did they call it gay. My older photographs were similar in pose only now the confusion was unable to comprehend this thing they called HIV.

It was a basement that I first received my gift. A questioning boy walking into the adult arms of a person who showered me with words I only heard said out loud to puppies. Words like 'cute', 'adorable', 'precious' and 'love'. It was in the dark of the basement light these words were whispered to me; even the red light bulb hanging from the wall knew it was a lie. But when you grow up not being affirmed or having value placed on you, you take whatever water that will help you bloom even if it's the leftover sludge from the bottom of the bucket.

I believe we were all born with wings to fly us up to higher lofts, but in my circumstance I was a child with clipped wings. Wings that were once full bloom now tarred with insecurities, self doubt and shame. "if you ever grow up to be a faggot I'll kill you" were the lessons I learned, lessons from home, from peers and deeply rooted in my community.

My true self was hidden in mason jars sealed with duct tape, hidden among the spiders on dusty shelves in the basement.

My saving grace was the cracked mirror where I came face to face with my reality. It was hard to see my reflection especially with my eyes closed. But I found the strength to clear the dust of doubt and reveal in my true persona. In the musty air I whispered to my reflection.

I am beautiful

In those words I saw a stripping

The physical action of saying it lifted my eyes to the possibilities of the words that have escaped my lips. Saying I was beautiful gave me a key to unlock my own potential instead of waiting for someone else to open the door to affirmation. I was refreshed in new waters yet to be tainted as I repeated this mantra of beauty to myself. I initially half heartily bought into the fantasy of the word beauty and my self mentioned in the same breath, yet I knew to find the way up out of my misery I had to believe, simply believe that despite my circumstances and disadvantages that I truly was

Beautiful

My reflection of self embraces it as I see the person I want to be.

Happy.

I start to see steps. Steps leading up. Ones I need to take to see the true light of my possibilities. They look daunting to climb but my will was stronger. Each step is victory as my bare feet moves forward, no longer dwelling in past mistakes.

I step forward out of low sense of self

I step forward out of stigma relating to my HIV status

I step forward out of harmful behaviors that uproot me from my growth

I rediscover me even in those moments of missteps that take me down a step and with the strong will of God finding direction to not have any set-back be a step back

But a step forward only wiser of past mistakes

My beauty takes me from my basement moments and moves me to an upgrade in my dwelling

To my true home, the penthouse

From here I can see all my possibilities

I can bear witness to my dreams looking out unlimited windows

And my true light shines, a gift from God.

Here I spread my wings
Regrown from my investment in self

This is where my life is supposed to be.

This is where I call home.

How about you?
Where do you live?
In the basement or the penthouse?

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