



Finding Myself

Not only do we need to take care of people living with HIV, but we also need to take care of ourselves.

March 29, 2023 By [Paul Kawata](#)

I'm not going to lie. The pressure of work, especially what's happening in Tennessee and Texas, has taken its toll. Communities highly impacted by HIV are weaponized as part of the fight for the soul of America! The extreme right is passing laws, turning back funding, and working the courts to codify religion's right to discriminate and they're winning. "It's against my religion" is now legal justification to bully, discriminate, and deny access to services like HIV PrEP.

During COVID I got addicted to vacation porn, specifically travel to Japan. This month I got to run away to remember who I am and why I still need to fight. In Japan I am tall. In Japan I am butch. You might laugh, but America stigmatizes me as short and effeminate. So many of the communities highly impacted by HIV are minimized because of the color of our skin, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation. Our lives are under attack. We are being used to scare people to the polls.

Civil rights, voting rights, women's rights, abortion rights, gun control, same sex weddings — we've changed the world and that's why they're fearful. This is not the America of their youth. How far are they willing to go to stop change? For me there is no choice. I can't go back into the closet. I will not go quietly into the night. I will rage against the dying of the light.

America is in for difficult times with lots of trauma. Their "look over there" strategy makes us the totem that gets their base to vote and give money. It is very expensive to run for President and there are some very deep pockets who want to take America back. Their "hit" list includes abortion, affirmative action, critical race theory, immigrants, guns, HIV PrEP, transgender youth, drag queens, and core HIV prevention funds. 2023 is just the opening salvo of message testing for the next presidential election. Imagine how these actions will traumatize clients, co-workers, and friends.

Normally I don't talk about my breaks, but it felt important to share my process for healing as our movement gets ready for the fight of our lives. After 34 years as the Executive Director of NMAC, I've come to understand that HIV is a marathon and not a sprint. Like so many, I prioritize others and wonder why I am exhausted and tired.

Paul Kawata in Japan, 2023

Courtesy of Paul Kawata

This picture was taken in Tokyo at the [teamLab*Planets](#) exhibit. It's a total immersive experience

that lets you see the world in new and different ways. Sometimes it's important to get out of the day-to-day grind and gift your mind and body with rest and the joy of travel.

I look forward to seeing everyone at the [2023 Biomedical HIV Prevention Summit](#). Approximately 1,300 attendees will come together to discuss the future of HIV prevention in America. Not only will the Summit update the core HIV prevention tools, but it will do a deeper dive into the political realities facing our work. It's not enough to end the HIV epidemic by 2030. Now we must do it in a world that hates the communities we serve, a world that hates us. Thanks to the NMAC board and staff for allowing me time off. By sharing my trip, hopefully I'm practicing what I preach. Not only do we need to take care of people living with HIV, but we also need to take care of ourselves. Leaders are no good to our movement if we work to the point of exhaustion and burn-out. I return ready for the next fight!

Paul Kawata in Japan, 2023

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Yours in the Struggle,

