The Memory That Gets Me Through These Dark Challenging Times

On Sunday, June 18, 2017, I walked into Hammerstein Ballroom for “Broadway Bares“ and joy surged through my body.

August 19, 2020 By JMV

When I last blogged here, I was telling about an uplifting time in my life. But I haven’t written anything in a while. There has been so much angst in the world, with COVID-19 still raging across the United States and the Black Lives Matter movement following the unjust murder of George Floyd. What would I write? I couldn’t. I focused my energy on protesting police brutality and racism, but recently I’ve felt the need to get my thoughts down and out. It’s time to continue telling my story to feel inspired, to be able to move forward.

Warm tints of light from the lamps on my nightstand cast interesting-shaped shadows from my plants on the walls. I’m listening to chill acoustic music, romanticizing this moment to get out every emotion as they come. I want to return to my story and make you feel the hope that I felt back on Sunday, June 18, 2017.

This is the moment I had been waiting for. I woke up excited and ready to get my day going to get down to Hammerstein Ballroom on 34th Street in Manhattan. I felt joy surge through my body as I hopped on the subway for Broadway Bares: Strip U., a high-energy, skin-baring fundraising extravaganza.

pictured w/ Steven Taylor, #1 fundraiser 2017

So much had built up to this moment. I had jumped at every opportunity to raise money for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS (BC/EFA), fundraisers night after night, promoting online donation pages, walking around bars with red buckets asking for support. I felt like I was finally a part of the thing I thought I had lost forever—a few years earlier, my drinking got in my way and I missed a tech rehearsal and what I assumed was my only chance to dance in the legendary show. But here I was, walking into the ballroom and looking at the lighting crew set up for the upcoming marathon of a day.

When performers arrive at the Bares venue on Sunday—it's a one-night only show, on a Sunday before Pride week—we are directed to a table where we take a marker and autograph rows of posters for donors and then we find where our designated dressing rooms are. Then we all meet to run through the finale and "punch-punch" dance that closes out the show. We then run through the show and all of the last-minute nitty-gritty work to perfect our routines. We run through the show multiple times through the day before it comes time to open the doors for the 9:30 p.m. show.

The entire day I had tears in my eyes. I couldn't believe I had the opportunity to be where I was doing what I was doing. I was back on stage in an epic number for Broadway Bares. My sobriety and hard work led me back to being of service to my community with a family that is our community. I saw the light in everyone's eyes shining so bright.

It seemed like a dream come true because it was. I felt like I redeemed myself after falling so hard. It was time to go on stage—and we nailed it. The first show was done, and we were ready to get repainted and touched up for the midnight show. I looked around in gratitude for the love that surrounded me. As we had our pep talk before the final show of the night, I cried a little.

I had many friends come to the midnight show, and I felt loved and supported. After the last number, all of the dancers sit down on stage as an emcee announces the top fundraiser awards and top fundraisers—it's a way to educate the crowd and say thank you. When they announced the top fundraisers, I was announced as 3rd place and I stood up in front of a room full of kindness and care. I had raised $13,151 for BC/EFA with the help of my generous donors, and for the first time in my life I felt seen. I felt the stigma of living with HIV wash away as my vulnerability gave me strength and my courage gave me a sense of purpose.

As I cry from gratitude now, I remember the tears of joy that night, the power of community around me. There was nothing I couldn't accomplish with the support of my community. I was basking in the magic around me, some of it from the glitter that would never go away and some of it from the sparks all of the smiling faces in the room created. It's important for me to recall such times now more than ever as we are in the summer of 2020 uncertain of anything our future will bring. These moments of hope are imperative for me to hold onto today. I know from experience that we can overcome challenges and dark times, one day at a time, and make a better future.

With all of the accomplishments and gratitude of Bares in my heart and soul that night, I went to bed with my bags packed and ready for my summer that was about to be spent in Provincetown, MA.

* to donate to BC/EFA & my 2020 personal STRIPATHON page, click here *

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/getting-back-stage-broadway-bares