Hurt/Hate/Heal

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Hurt

Damn, I'm gay, have HIV and black. It seemed the odds were not stacked in my favor. I was just entering my twenties but it felt like my life was already over. Asking myself, 'why me?' was an empty gesture but it didn't stop me from asking anyway. Of all the emotions I experienced, hurt was more pronounced. The stigma of HIV made it difficult to find someone to share my hurt and I defiantly had it to spare.

I should have been used to this feeling called hurt as it came early in my life when I was sexually abused as a child. Not once or twice, although I don't know if it would have been any better, but over a years' time.

The hurt came from my family who suspected I was gay at a young age and as if to scare it out of me, letting me know what they thought about 'faggots'. This was further compounded by a mother who pulled me aside to let me know, "if you ever turn out to be gay, I'll kill you." The hurt came from the person who gave me the virus as I gave my 'stuff' to him thinking he was going to be the one. And like an absentee father, left me alone with my 'gift' to bring into the world.

Sadly hurt became a tapestry of my life. A thread I couldn't remove no matter how I tried. The more I pulled the more it unraveled the broken child inside. My greatest hurt came from the feeling of rejection as I was made to feel like the 'other'. It seemed everyone was clean and I was 'dirty'. My hurt prevented me from reaching out for support as I didn't have the words to explain my situation. Even within my community, the 'gay' community, I was the 'other'. This was shown to me time and time again once my status was known by those I shared. I was never asked to be someone lovers but was often told, "We can still be friends". And after that announcement, it seemed the phone stopped ringing and I was blocked, not only from their address book but also from knowing their heart. So my secret became my secret. It wasn't to hurt or to deceive. It was to feel loved. It was to enjoy the pleasures of someone, even a stranger, to hold me close. The hurting pain of rejection caused me to live this double life.

My hurt with HIV was also physical as I struggled to swallow pills that stuck in my throat and refused to go down. Dry heaves overcame me as it felt like my insides were coming up to greet the sunlight. And my satisfaction was short when I was reminded I would go through the same experience the next day. The needles pushed into my arm to monitor my t-cell levels were always moments of fear. I grew up hating needles but as the years passed they no longer caused pain.

Just like my life with HIV I became used to pain.

My greatest hurt was my belief that I was being punished by God for being gay. I was always a religious person and had a strong faith but now that faith was being tested. Was I really that bad a person that I deserved this? Was I cursed? Even in my darkest moments when I felt no one had my back I knew I could always count on God. But it seemed like even he stopped shining his light on me. I felt I had no one. My back was against the wall. It was me against the world.

Hate

The hate in me came in like a storm. My wings of anger morphed the more I walked my path. The shadow that once walked behind me turned into my hatred which now walked in front of me. I hurt people because I was hurt. And I had no shame in letting people know how I felt.

My hateful actions meant turning off my inner voice and simply living life with no regards for people or their feelings. I simply didn't care. I was so hateful that if you told me you loved me, I told myself it was a lie. I saw it as a trick for me to lower my walls in order for that person to come in and do more damage. That simply wasn't going to happen to me anymore. I had been hurt enough. My hurt didn't allow me to be held or experience a hug. The thought of someone attempting to hug me out of affection made me jump. It was a knee jerk reaction of me pulling away. To touch me also brought forth in me those memories as a child when I didn't have the power to say no. I had to regain that control.

Lie, cheat and steal was my motto. I was living for the moment as a life with HIV meant I didn't have no future. It was the dawn of my destructive behaviors. I didn't do drugs or over indulge in alcohol. No my vice was sex. The one thing that was forced on me, the one thing that gave me this curse, was the one thing I turned to in order to heal my pain.

I swam in the lake of promiscuity with no life vest. I pushed myself into years of anonymous sex, standing in rooms of unknown naked men all with the goal of inserting their manhood into each other. My apartment door was replaced with one that revolved as one after the other, men of all races walked through to take pieces of me away. If by chance there was an attraction or a show of affection, I sabotage it right away as there was no way anyone could love me. I didn't love me. I created online profiles and in the HIV status field, I placed the word 'negative' because that was how I felt. I wanted to live my life as I didn't have a disease. I was in a place where I simple didn't care.

I hated myself. I felt I never would find love and dreaded holidays like Valentine Day as it was a reminder of what was out of reach. Looking back I actually was presented with people with loving ways but rejected them as they didn't fit my list of what I was looking for in a man. Yet ironically I didn't use that same list when it came to having sex as my standards were lowered when it came to someone entering my ass as opposed to my heart.

I simply hated. I hated my father who ran didn't raise me. I hated my friends and family who didn't

have to live with this disease day to day and asked me things like, “what’s wrong” and me unable to share that truth. I hated the gay community as it was not at a place where I could say I was gay- yet jealous they could live that life freely. I hated life and wished my disease could take me sooner than later. I hated people who were in love.

I was on a crash course with myself. Tears which fell only at night were now falling at all times of the day. They fell because I knew my actions were not me. I knew the young boy with the innocent smile was trying to come out and I didn’t know how to let him. The last time I let him he was hurt. Like an overbearing mother I built walls so no one could ever hurt him again. My tears fell because I spent most of my life living in shame, holding my head low instead of raising it to see my potential. My tears fell because I felt I let my mother down. I didn’t listen to her warning and was paying the price. I was crying because simply dealing with HIV was a luxury as my daily battle was more about me being black than the disease itself. I was trying to survive in a world built with systems not designed for me and as a gay black man the only time I was visible was when I saw myself on posters holding a condom.

I didn’t realize my tears were falling because it was cleansing me. Not knowing It was getting me ready for my final transformation…..healing.

Heal

I never set out to find a place of healing. I felt I was always going to a person walking with rage. I was scared that if I let go of my anger, I would be setting myself up to be hurt again. My anger was my shield of protection.

My healing came when I allowed myself to cry. When I stopped trying to hold back my tears. When I stopped punishing myself for tears which were due to me. I earned each drop for all that I suffered. The child abuse. The rejection from family. The announcement of my HIV. The times I was called a nigger, those tears were mine and I was denying myself each drop. I never knew that those moments I would cry I was actually healing. The water was nurturing the open wounds that existed on me. Cleansing my soul.

The biggest moment came when I stopped blaming myself for my circumstance. It wasn’t my fault that I was sexually abused as a child. It wasn’t my fault that I was gay, as I came to accept that I was born this way and it was something to be celebrated instead of hated. And although I placed myself in the situation to be exposed to HIV, I had to stop blaming myself for my life choices and find a way to move away from the bitterness that was overtaking my life.

Instead of living in a place of blaming I started to exist in a place of forgiveness. That included all of the negative actions of my life when I was so angry. In that forgiveness I started to see the person I was supposed to be. I let the child in me, out, to experience the world again. I was learning how to fly again and be free.

My healing allowed me to let God back into my life. It made me understand that although I was giving him the silent treatment, he never did the same to me. That he was always there for me,

through all the pain. And it was because of him I was able to bear.

The last act of healing was me coming to a place of acceptance. I think for so long I was in moments of denial and never fully embraced my circumstance. It seemed I was always living someone else's lie. I was living other people life. Constantly trying to be that someone that others wanted to see. I was the 'straight black man', I was the' passive bottom', I was the 'strong male', I was a 'cumdump', I was 'HIV negative', I was everything people wanted me to be. Always morphing my identity, auditioning in the hopes I would be liked. I never allowed myself to simply be me. I never took the time to make that discovery. I was now giving myself that permission.

I finally place myself on that journey to find not only who I was but who I was supposed to be. I had to rediscover my voice. And to truly move on I had to forgive the people who I felt place hurt on me. That included the person who took my childhood and most importantly the person who gave me HIV. I couldn't move on if I held on to the anger I felt toward them. And yes I had to forgive myself.

I had to let people go. Those who only wanted to take and not give. I had to recognize that family can be the greatest source of pain and sometimes you have to sever the ties of hurt. I had to understand that if someone didn't accept me as a gay black HIV positive man, then they couldn't appreciate and deserve the beauty I had to offer. I could no longer fragment myself for others. Giving people only the pieces they liked. They had to accept the wholeness of me. I had to stop giving my body away to strangers and those who only saw me for their sexual pleasure. Stop placing my body parts on social media as if I was standing on an auction block. Giving myself away to the lowest bidder. I had to stop asking for love until I knew what love was. I had to learn the difference between the acts of someone simply wanting to just having sex with you and the act of someone wanting to be in love with me.

Since the discovery of my truths I've never been freer. I'm no longer tied to people's opinion of me. I don't mean this as a disregard of people or to say they don't matter, I say this knowing my actions will be dictated by how I can best show I love myself. And that's the greatest gift you can give yourself, the ability to love the skin you're in.

The greatest thing is accepting that I'll have some doubts and may even have some setbacks on this healing journey. But to use those setback moments as reflections and restart my journey toward healing and love of self.

Now when someone asks me who I am I can say proudly I'm gay, black, HIV Positive, caring, crazy, Extrovert, outspoken, soft spoken, funny, impulsive, introvert, moody, sincere……the list goes on. But one thing I know is that they all add up to one thing…loving. That's me. Aundaray

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