If I Could Find a Cure

Lady Gaga and a full-frontal audition gave me a positive outlook on my future.

March 24, 2020 By Richard JMV

I'm sitting here in my kitchen in New York City thinking of what I can do to pass the time. I'm stuck here indefinitely as a result of these self-quarantine rules to slow the spread of COVID-19. What can I do for myself to not go completely insane? I sat down and turned on the Slow Jazz Radio on Pandora and figured writing could help me, but who knows? Maybe it could help someone else for me to continue telling my story as a young man living with HIV.

Now I last left you in late winter 2017 after a boylesque performance. In that blog post, "Dancing Through the Pain," I left the audience with a feel of who I was post drug addiction while finding my solution. Looking back at how I held the stage on my own and how people fixated on me, I can see now that it's no wonder I was asked to audition for a show in Provincetown that summer.

Now I had a lot happen to me between the show and the audition. I was still working at Equinox, and I was still trying to build myself up and grow as a performer and as human being. The longer I stayed sober, the more I discovered about myself. I was high-energy, and my vibe was infectious—but not the bad kind of infectious like what we are going through now with the new coronavirus. I was still young and had the world at my fingertips.

I was doing freelance, paid gigs at bars on weekends wearing skimpy clothes and selling shots along with another side hustle doing production assistant work on photo sets. I would spend extra time working out and fine-tuning my choreography; most mid-afternoons and late nights you would probably catch me at the gym or in the studios. Sometimes I'd have friends come join me and all of a sudden, it felt like I was teaching a class.

Then Lady Gaga released "The Cure" in April, and I couldn't help but relate it to HIV and finding a cure. I have mentioned before that I worked at Equinox Greenwich Avenue, a gym that is directly across the street from the New York AIDS Memorial which opened only a few months earlier, on December 1st for World AIDS Day 2016.

Inspiration struck me: I now had amazing choreography and knew butt loads of dancers, so why not film a music video about love and ending HIV stigma! I had the whole thing planned, but on the day of the shoot it rained. It made me so sad, and even to this day I think about the impact it could have made. But I decided to use the experience to propel me forward. I really wanted this to to happen, but instead of being down and out about it, I decided to put more effort into upcoming

projects.

When auditions for the show in Provincetown finally came along in mid spring, I was ready for the audition for Male Call Dance, an all-male, burlesque dance review. It was marketed as sexy and fun, and I wasn't sure I'd want to dance full frontal, but I wanted to try out for it regardless. It was the first time I would ever be on stage with my dick out. That sounds exciting, but it really tests your comfort. I had been told the producer was partial to rock music, so I planned to audition to "Enter Sandman" by Metallica. My routine was fierce, and I ready to show them what I was made of. I walked into the room—and sitting in front of me was "John," the very same guy who told the entire cast of The Nutcracker that I was HIV positive.

At first I was super nervous and I didn't want to be there, but then I realized it wasn't about him. It was about me. It was about my growth and my acting professionally and pursuing something more for myself. It was about the next stage in evolution for Richard (but I'll take Dick, if that's what you prefer to use).

It was about liberating myself and taking action and booking a show—which is exactly what I did before leaving that room. For the first time in a very long time, I felt that I was wanted and chosen for something that was earned by hard work and natural talent. I felt great.

But I couldn't rest. Another project was coming up: I had to get myself prepared for Broadway Bares, the iconic burlesque fundraiser for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS held each June. You can read about my first encounter with the famed show in "Baring It All for the First Time," which is a great memory for me. It's far better than the humiliating screw-up that later got me canned from the production (read about that catastrophe in "No Calm, Just a Storm"). Would this new opportunity make way for my come-back for Broadway Bares? I guess I'll have to take this necessary time of isolation to let you know.

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