

THE FULL THROTTLE COURSE

“When I returned from my trip to Augusta and found myself back in Los Angeles – and back in reality – it really hit me.

‘Holy shit! Now that I’ve opened this can of worms and gotten all of Gary’s contact information, now what?’

Throughout the years, I had entertained thoughts that it might serve me to confront Gary, but I could never figure out how to make that happen. Now I didn’t really have that excuse anymore. Considering the way everything had unfolded in Augusta, what was I going to do about it?

In ballet class one day, I was sharing about my trip with a lady I had started to date a little bit before I went to visit my Dad. She was a dancer. She was very talented, and she really stood out in class, and so naturally she was the kind of person I would be drawn to. We sort of had a little energy between us, and what was happening with her was happening during a year I had set aside to be celibate – a time that was all about me getting clear on my sexuality.

With getting clear on my sexuality as my goal, I was interested in platonically dating – and that meant either sex. And here was this sexy female, and I didn't know what it could be. I thought, 'Let's see what being with a woman does for me at this stage of my life. Does it ignite me? Repel me?' So we had a couple of dates, went to the movies. I was really into it. I always enjoy being the man to a woman in the times I have been with ladies.

At the same time, I was aware that I was in a quandary with myself, and I was apprehensive to let her know how much I was on the fence sexually.

After I got back from my trip, we talked about what had come up for me in Georgia. She told me she had gone through something similar to what I'd been through with Gary,

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and she had ended up getting involved with attorneys that helped her deal with her thing.

‘Attorneys? Are you serious?’

‘Yeah,’ she told me, ‘and if you need some information, I have someone here in Los Angeles I can connect you to.’ She was very supportive.

So I got the lawyer’s phone number from her and called the guy.

The first thing the attorney did was to check the registries to see if Gary was registered anywhere as a sex offender.

‘I can’t find him listed anywhere,’ the lawyer told me.

‘Really?’ That seemed to me like a big red flag.

Then the attorney asked me some very specific questions, and found out the entire period of molestation had happened in Florida.

‘In that case, Carlton, this will have to be handled by the Florida court system. I will get you the number for the Special Investigations Division there.’

He gets me the number. I get on the phone with them. I tell them my initial plan. ‘Listen, I’m a professional actor. And I was thinking...’

I tell them the whole scenario I have in my

mind. I would go back to Florida, show up at Gary's church, and do a badass acting job. I would get myself to one of his church services, find the perfect moment, and break down into some fantastic crying episode that would naturally require me to have to talk to the pastor.

'So then, once I have a private audience with Gary, and we are the only two people in the room,' I explain to the investigator, 'I dry my tears, snap off my actor face, and say, "Do you remember who I am?"'

As for me and my lady friend, since I'd been gone on my trip, there was that built-in distance between us, and I kept that distance in place. It's not like I came to some concrete decision one way or another about my sexual orientation. I didn't make a decision to not be with her, exactly. I just naturally seemed to need so much space for myself upon my return from Georgia, it just bled into me creating even more distance between us.

I never did reveal to her that I had been with guys.

It was kind of ironic. There I was, fantasizing about asking Gary, 'Do you remember who I am?' At the same time, I was trying to answer that question for myself. Who was I, really?"

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“Vogue. Let your body move to the music. Hey, hey, hey. Come on, vogue. Let your body go with the flow. You know you can do it...”

Those were the words streaming from the lips of The “Blond Ambition” gal herself – as the so-named world tour launched us into a live performance version of her hit song, for viewers exceeding some 80,000 plus. And those were the words that were being chanted, so that I might also claim more freedom for myself.

Long before I ever found myself on the “Blond Ambition” tour, I found myself dreaming Madonna dreams, somewhere in the mid-1980s in Printers Row on Dearborn Street in downtown Chicago. That is where I got initially cast into deliberate focus toward this music legend.

There I was, standing outside Orly’s restaurant, where I was working at the time as a waiter. And it was while resting outside, taking a cigarette break, that I saw Madonna’s face boldly covering a full page spread for that week’s Sunday paper release. The article was featuring her then-tour, *Who’s That Girl*, which had swept its way into Chicago.

I remember reading the article, thinking instantly about how a guy from Chicago had gone on to become Michael Jackson’s lead dancer, *and how I wished I could be that for a music celebrity one day*. I had the image of Madonna in my hands, as I was thinking those sweet thoughts – never realizing that later, many years later, *I would actually be the selected dancer literally holding Madonna*, over and over again, not only in my hands, but far over my head.

For me, some of the greatest moments with her happened as we were in the stadiums at around 4:00 in the afternoon, watching the early-arrival fans rush as fast as they could to the front of the stage. We'd always have the piped-in soulful sounds of Lisa Stansfield blaring through the speakers as we prepared to move from one song to the next, making sure all was in order for our soon-to-come late night explosion. Those proved to be true hallelujah revelation times for me.

Madonna's calm before the storm of celebration moved me much. As did knowing that we'd all come a long way, through the rehearsal/training days. This full throttle, excellence-to-the-effort process that M promoted, was a lesson that I knew I had to maintain for the rest of my life. *For every aspect of my living.* We were resting in shimmer-possessed confidence. No discount, dime store dedications from us – we were delivering hard core, rock-em-sock-em quality.

“Gene Kelly. Fred Astaire. Ginger Rogers. Dance on air...” Madonna continues singing.

We surely can't arrive on top of any cloud if our focus is not on that *excellence* course of action. And there surely would never have been a Jamie Foxx, Halle Berry, Mary J. Blige, Oprah Winfrey, Denzel Washington, Sidney Poitier, Magic Johnson, Condoleezza Rice, Barack Obama, or Martin Luther King Jr., to lead the atoms of our mind into jubilation had they not all been championing this very noteworthy cause – *the pursuit of excellence.*

But I've also grown to realize that *many times, while*

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striving for excellence, we will encounter much persecution. In the beginning, it was Madonna's life that was, for me, a prime example of this fact... the way she stood the test of time – against slander, and lawsuits, and downright ugly criticism... but now I realize I've come full circle, *and it is in my own life, on so many stages, that I now find this very same truth, played out, front and center.*

I understand now that all of the ridicule, intensity, confusion, and grandeur that surrounded my life were established to support me being ripened for a very large purpose. I understand now about strength of character, and how that speaks volumes. This was learning I had to acquire from experiential circumstances. And not from some lofty intellectual conceptualizing.

True leadership, as John C. Maxwell, in his book "Leadership 101" states, is largely contingent upon one's ability to be trustworthy. For me, his book punctuated the importance of making the distinction between whether someone is to be *trusted*, or merely *tolerated*. This has often times been a difficult beast for me to wrestle down. Trustworthiness dictates the level of intimacy possible with another person. I can tolerate almost anyone but that doesn't mean I'm going to let them in.

Since I was a kid, it has always been my desire to be a man who would have enough power to serve our society with more and more life-evolving knowledge. And I am absolutely clear now that there's no way I could ever expect someone to fully tune into my thoughts if they did not truly trust that what I was speaking about was some-

thing I had authentically lived through. People can smell our truth no matter how much we try to cover it with a floralized façade.

In addition to the issue of trustworthiness, Maxwell also professes that our ability to maintain a commitment to a leader, and the lasting effects the leader can have, are also impacted by their ability to show genuine interest in the people they are linked to. And as the buffet of slow-drip remembrances resurfaces in me, I reflect on my years with the Golden Beauty, how she offered many surprising moments of caring and sharing, and expressions of generosity – and how I am now finding and growing those same seeds in my own character.

Because of Madonna's acts of kindness, because of all of her domino-ing deliverings and sharings designed to mentor me – gifts that felt like Vegas casino jackpot wins – I absolutely reached a level of dedication to her that surprised even me. And even the harder-to-swallow lessons I learned in my years spent around her created no diminishment of my dedication to her.

And now, as I find inside myself that same kind of Empowerer with the potential for creating lasting impact in the world, *I am reaching that same level of dedication to my own character and my own blasted-wide-open path.*

Meeting my Empowerer on all the stages of my own life, finding him inside me at every turn, I know I am in the flow... “Let your body move to the music. Hey, hey, hey. Come on, vogue, let your body go with the flow. You know you can do it...”

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Released, delivered, healed, strengthened, empowered, and lifted up by Spirit, *I know I will do it*, as Spirit moves me from old shadows into the light at the heart of my own life. For it is there, from that place of Truth, that I can live, *truly front and center*.