

Communities for Immunity: Stories about COVID The Peale, Baltimore | 2022

Nefer (00:06): All right. Hello, people.

Audience (00:12): Hello.

Nefer (00:13): Just a fair warning, trigger warning, COVID, March 2020. Geez, I can't wrap my head around that was two years ago, but COVID was hard. Before COVID, I was dealing with depression and I just regretted living. And everywhere I went, it was just that burning feeling that "I'm not supposed to be here." I had been sexually assaulted multiple times, and my parents divorced. It was so much stuff that was just collecting. I didn't confront it. I didn't handle it or anything before COVID. So all of that just inside of me. COVID came around, no friends. I was always in my room. I was what I call a loner. I was alone with my thoughts and the built-up pressure and aggression. And all of these emotions just built up inside of me and now it's like, because I'm alone in my room, it's like all of those emotions, all of those negative feelings just came out. I was hurting a lot. Well, it raised the question, why am I here?

Nefer (02:44): And because of that question, I wanted to not be here. It was to the point where I was suffering every single day, and school wasn't any help because my school decided to give us so much work. And I had so much on my plate. It just added more and more and more and more. Again, no friends, no people to talk to, but another thing is, I did not want to tell anybody because I didn't want to burden them. So it was mostly my fault for being all in a bubble, but I was left with all of these feelings and emotions. Well, I used to self-harm and I would beat up a brick wall until my knuckles bled, because it was just like I was hurting and I didn't know how to handle it. So this one time, I was taking a bath. I thought that the bath would help me, would help cleanse or release all of that negative energy and those negative emotions, but what it really did was... It just gave me the opportunity to, I guess, let go.

Nefer (04:48): So, I decided to go underwater and be like, "Okay, this is it. This is how far you can possibly go, Nefer. You used to be an African dancer, African drummer. You used to move around and play and look at where you are right now." I was done. So I stayed underwater for quite a little bit, but the weirdest thing happened, all I heard, and it was loud, it was something telling me no. I don't know what it was, but I got up, I gasped for air, and I took a deep breath in. I was like, "What are you doing? It wasn't like you are a lost cause. You are just at a low, and you need to change." So I decided to get back in my bed, I closed my eyes, and I visualized myself in a better situation, a better mindset, a better way of thinking, a better way of acting, a better way of just being me. And just like that, something clicked. I was like, "Wait a minute, why are you letting all of these negative emotions and feelings get the best of you? You are better than that. You have way more potential than you think you have."

Nefer (07:01): So, to get myself started... because I wasn't really paying attention in school or doing schoolwork. My grades were absolutely horrible, like F and Ds. So I decided to, one, work, pick my grades up. Two, I decided, "Yeah, I'm going to eat," because I stopped eating. I ate, I exercised, I meditated, and I believed in myself. So one of my closest friends, he's like my brother, Zion, I was like, "What should I do?" He's a sophomore now at Baltimore School for the Arts here. And he was like, "Maybe you should audition here." So I was gathering all the courage and I was like, "Okay, okay, I got to do this. I got to do this," because no other school wanted me because my GPA was like really low. I was

like, "If you are going to better yourself, Nefer, if you're going to be the best person that you can possibly be, go audition."

Nefer (08:44): So I stayed up all night, practicing my monologue. I picked like three, but the one that stuck with me was... What was it? Oh my God. It was a part of the play, Fences, where the son was getting fed up with the father because the father cheated on his mother and he was just fed up. So you know what I did? I took all of those feelings and negative emotions and just put it into my performance. I took deep breaths, and I killed that monologue, okay? So just to give you a lesson, never stop believing in yourself. Even when you are at the lowest of lows and you are ready to give up, there is always another way. So believe in yourself. Thank you.