

Belo Cipriani featured in *dot429*

Losing Sight -- and Gaining Insight

dot429 member Greg Archer interviews Belo Cipriani, the gay author of "Blind: A Memoir"



There are some things in life you never see coming. For Belo Cipriani, becoming blind was one of them.

But, the gay memoirist reveals, it may have been the one catalyst that allowed him to, surprisingly, begin looking at his life—and loving and living—in a completely different way.

Such rich emotional discoveries are shared in Cipriani's powerful new book *Blind: A Memoir*. In it, the 31-year-old from San Francisco reveals, among other things, the hate crime that changed everything.

The incident occurred in the Castro in 2007 when Cipriani ran into some old friends he had lost contact with years earlier. Their standoff-ish behavior alerted his senses: something was not right. But there was no escape. He writes:

I began to shift my body and turn around and felt the first impact in the back of my head. A cyclone of punches then followed, and I was knocked to the ground. A series of kicking and kneeling came after, and I tried hard to block what I could until my body surrendered. I felt warm liquid roll down my head and face, and I looked up for a quick moment and saw Carlos kick his leg back as he charged his foot into my face. I yelled, "Carlos, nooo!" and before I completed pronouncing the o-o-o, I felt his boot crushing my right eye.

The aftermath ushered in a lengthy rehabilitation process, something the author credits his sisters and close friends with helping him get through.

"The assimilation process is a lengthy one and I am still going through it now," he says. "I've learned how to meet my basic needs—eat, cool, walk, work. There are other things I am still working on. But it's very interesting to feel your body change. I am more aware of my body than ever before. I think back, before I lost my sight—I was more unconscious of what I did."

When he had his sight, Cipriani was a successful human resources executive for the likes of Google and Apple. He rolled back into the workforce after rehabilitation but when the economy went south, it forced him to consider other options. Maybe there was something more rewarding he could do.

"When I lost my sight, I asked myself, 'What makes me happy?' And writing makes me happy," he says. "Then I realized that there were a lot of books out there from authors that were born blind, which is a big difference [than becoming blind as an adult]. I was only able to get a

handful of books that dealt with adult vision loss. If somebody is born blind and as a child, becomes a very competent blind person, it's not like being 27 and giving up your corporate job and six-figure income, and having to give up driving. It's a different journey," he says.

"I really felt that I had an opportunity to contribute something with the memoir."

And he does. With *Blind*, Cipriani weaves together a winning, heartfelt tale that plunges deep into the emotional resources of the soul, yet delivers a refreshing sense of levity, too -- about survival and moving on. A chapter about blind dates -- literally -- is a winner. Meanwhile, the author's overall journey is just downright compelling.

"My relationships have changed," Cipriani admits. "There's more quality. When I was sighted and connected with people, it wasn't always equal. Now, my relationships and friendships are more fruitful because the other person knows that my friendship will be different; that I do things differently."

Today, when the subject of the hate crime itself arises -- a civil lawsuit was filed, the results of which Cipriani says were "deeply depressing" to him -- he is filled with remarkable grace.

"My feelings toward them [the attackers] have shifted and they will continue to shift and change as I grow older, and learn more things about myself," he says. "There was a time when I was fixated on what they were doing and where are they are now. Obviously, now, they are not in jail; there was no incarceration and I've come to terms that it was a waste of my time and energy to fixate on that. Now, I focus on something more productive.

"Looking back at my assault, I don't think it was premeditated," he adds. "I don't think they woke up that day and said, 'We're going to get Belo.' I think that something happened ... and that instant gratification kicked in."

Cipriani is quick to note that one of the things he's discovered from all of this is that there's a built-in sense of instant gratification in society.

"People don't think about consequences," he says. "Even the smallest actions have consequence. People tend to overlook their decisions in life. The message that I want to give is that there is always something after nothing. Everyone has fear. There's a fear that something is ending, or that you'll lose your job, your home. But there is a solution. You do get back on track. The reality is ... I rehabilitated myself."

As for what he's discovered about himself lately, Cipriani is candid.

"I'm really understanding tolerance," he says. "I think that when I was sighted, it was really easy to avoid myself. If I had something that caused me stress, pain or sorrow, I would self-

medicat -- through activity, friends or keeping busy. I think through my disability, I am definitely more aware. Now, I am not just doing things for the hell of it.”

Learn more about Belo Cipriani and *Blind: A Memoir* [here](#).

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