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Paolo Glaude, Bellevue Hospital

New York, NY

By Kiara C. Jones

Paolo Glaude turned 30 and decided it was time to start “adulting.” He completed his degree in nursing, was eating vegan, working out, and seeing a therapist once a week. Paolo was hired in his first nursing position at a dialysis center in the Bronx. He relished the relationships he had with his patients, who saw him for treatment three times a week. They supported and encouraged him as a new nurse in the field. He provided care and helped motivate them to make better lifestyle choices to improve their health. An avid athlete himself, Paolo loved watching his patients do the work and get stronger. This was why, he says, he got into medicine -- to change lives. He felt gratified by even small wins for his patients and was excited to plunge deeper into nursing. Paolo took on a second position as Pre-Op RN at Bellevue Hospital. He was there to prep patients for surgery and witness their recovery. Three days a week at the dialysis center and four days a week in Pre-Op made for a pretty intense schedule. Paolo was learning and growing with each day. Then the pandemic hit.

The first thing he noticed was that his dialysis patients were missing appointments. “They weren’t coming back in for treatment. And then we were finding out the worst.” Paolo was devastated by the news. “My patients were there with me for my first steps, and then they were gone.” It was a depressing time. The great city of New York was crippled with fear and spreading illness. Each day the news of the virus worsened, and the infection rate was rising. The death rate was rising, and the options for treatment were nonexistent. Everything was shut down. The city was desolate, and there were few outlets for relief -- no gym, no movie theaters, no hangouts with friends. As a vegan, it was even hard for Paolo to find food.

Bellevue Hospital was bracing for impact. In previous outbreaks, like Ebola, Bellevue was the epicenter for care in the city, but even that was different with COVID-19. New York City had a deluge of coronavirus patients and quickly became ground zero for the pandemic in the United States. New Yorkers were dying at alarming rates from the coronavirus; hospitals were out of beds and the medical staff was overwhelmed. In compliance with Governor Andrew Cuomo’s order for more hospital beds, a 14-tent field hospital was set up in



Central Park to take overflow patients from Brooklyn and Queens. Paolo's hospital stepped up to support its nurses and staff emotionally. "They offered services if we wanted to speak to somebody and extra break time. But most of the people that I work with are very strong. We told ourselves that we still have to treat these patients. We have to do our jobs." He leaned heavily on calls with his family and friends for support. His best friend called one day and said, "Bruh, you're facing the greatest pandemic since the Spanish flu. You really are a superhero!" Paolo didn't like the title but embraced the encouragement. He wanted to do more.

On one of the few days he had off during the pandemic -- he was working six-day weeks with multiple double shifts -- Paolo decided to join his NBNA chapter to help plan a Black Lives Matter rally in memory of George Floyd. "Our NBNA chapter president, Dr. Julius Johnson, wanted to make sure we came together as health care workers to make a difference for our future." They decided they would march from Union Square in Manhattan to the Barclays Center in Brooklyn as a demonstration of unity and strength. Paolo marched in solidarity with his fellow nurses and frontline workers 4.5 miles over the Manhattan Bridge into Brooklyn. These nurses had seen the worst from this pandemic but still hoped for the best for their communities. "We stood to give voice to the things that weren't heard, and it was a big success."

That day, in the midst of the storm, something magical happened. Paolo connected with the woman who would become his partner. She is also a nurse and a member of his NBNA chapter. He had noticed her before, but only spoken to her in passing. When he saw her at the George Floyd rally, he decided to step up. "I approached her. I knew this was the time to shoot my shot." His aim was right on target. They marched side by side at the rally and have been together ever since.

This newfound togetherness posed additional challenges. Paolo was isolating for safety, taking advantage of the hotel that the hospital offered, and made sure that he stayed away from his family and friends. As much as Paolo and his new girlfriend wanted to spend time together, for the safety of themselves and their patients, they stayed apart. Paolo looked for simple comforts. "What I did, that really helped, is take longer showers. The longer I was in the shower and just cut my battery, just stayed there and didn't move, the more I relaxed." He allowed his body and mind to completely shut down under the water. Knowing that the heat and the soap would kill the coronavirus put Paolo at ease as he washed away the stresses of the day.



Paolo says he has no fear when he walks out the door. “I come from an athletic and a sports background.” Paolo loves baseball and looks forward to the day when he can join his teammates again on the diamond. “Whenever I played, I remained hopeful ... until the last play, until there was no more time left, until the last inning. I always have hope that something good can happen if we just stick to the plan. So, we just gotta stick to giving great care. We’re gonna get over this, get through the pandemic, and we’re gonna be rewarded.”

Paolo is already beginning to see the fruits of his labor. “I chose nursing as a way to provide for myself, but look at how I’m providing for the world. I see I’m actually making a big difference.”