Walking my Revolution

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Overcoming hiv and abuse through inner dialogue and music

Marleen te Vaanholt

Walking my revolution Publishers

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To my two dearest men,
Without you none of this would have been possible.

With much love,

Marleen te Vaanholt

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Preface

New Year's Eve 2002 will always be a very special evening for me. On that night, a very special journey began. That night Robbie Williams took me by the hand and started walking with me in the last part of my revolution. And by doing so I soon started to call him on first name basis. I started to call him Robert.

Robert took me by the hand, not in person, but through two of his shows, his music, a documentary, and some facts from several interviews. But mostly Robert did so through six songs in particular and a certain joke. The result of it all was so fantastic, that it left me in awe.

By taking me by the hand on my road of change, Robert helped me to find both physical and psychological healing. Step by step I questioned my life, several of my huge decisions and some life changing events.

By questioning I found some incredible understandings. Understandings which, one after the other, took away the shame I felt about so many things.

By questioning I took steps that helped me to grow. Steps which helped to get to know myself better and which therefore helped to reveal a new me. All the sudden I had far more self-esteem and self-confidence than ever before.

By walking the last part of my revolution, I became a changed and better person. Someone who was at ease with herself and the world around her. Someone who learned not to judge herself or others so quickly or harshly. To top it all off, I started to believe in God.

But I could only walk this part of my road of change, personal growth, and self-healing with the help of a man I had never met. That felt so unbelievingly weird. Someone who wasn't in my life in person helped me in such a way that I owe him big time. And this person was someone I even couldn't stand a few years ago. Then I felt that Robert was an arrogant bloke with all these tattoos and with a sense of humour that was lost on me.

Now, because of all the things that happened to me in that last part of my revolution, Robert has become one of the dearest persons in my life. That feels so incredibly strange. Especially, once more since I don't know Robert in flesh and blood.

But the strangest thing of all was that Robert was supposed to play this part in my revolution. Robert was meant to be the key figure in that last part. Could it be any stranger? But that was one of the things I learned during that final time.

As I finished walking the last part of the revolution, I felt so wonderfully fantastic. But as time progressed that special fantastic feeling started to slip away. I regretted that. I knew I had to hold on to that feeling. I knew I had to keep remembering all I had learned in that period of my life.

I also felt the need to share my story with Robert. Surely, that story is one of the best compliments Robert can get. Just by being himself, by making the music he made and by writing the songs he co-wrote, he got to help another human being so much.

Now, how many artists can claim an effect this tremendous? Not many, I think. Yet, I was at a loss as how to get in touch with him.

But then, you never know, do you?

So, I started to think of what I would say to Robert, apart from a very, very sincere, heartfelt, and often repeated thank you.

By imagining what I would tell, I found out I wanted to tell so much that I could go on for hours and hours. The need of telling my story was apparently so tremendous that I couldn't keep it short. This baffled me much, since I used to be straight to the point.

I also felt that I kept forgetting to tell Robert things that would matter too. It was simply too much. There was no way that I would be able to get across all I wanted to say in a limited amount of time. It was despairing.

Then from time to time, the feeling kept creeping up to write down my story. At first that felt ridiculous, just as trying to tell Robert. But I was losing that fantastic feeling I had felt in the spring and I really wanted to get it back.

This urge to write down my story kept nagging at me. So, at the end of August I finally started writing. I started writing so I wouldn't forget all what had happened. I started writing hoping to

be able to cling on to all those special feelings and the lessons learned. I started writing so that this story might help me in the future as well.

I also held on to the idea of sharing this story with Robert one day. That was why I started writing this in English instead of Dutch.

Besides, English was the language most used in that final part of my revolution. The songs, the shows and the joke that got my attention were all in English. And for me it is only natural then to continue the several thinking processes, internal dialogs, and imaginary conversations in that same language.

While writing, I soon learned that it was no wonder why I couldn't tell my story in short. Even writing it down took far longer than I had imagined. This was not only due to the fact that describing that last part really took much time. But also, due to the fact that, before I could tell about the last part of my revolution, I first had to tell about the other parts and the events that led up to them.

Writing down my story felt good, very good. But writing this down also made it awfully clear that I had been very honest with myself. It showed once more the way I felt about certain things that had happened. Some parts almost made me cry or sad or angry again. Other issues made me laugh or filled me with wonder once more.

Once again, I became aware that some issues were very private and intimate. To such a point that at first, I wasn't so sure whether I would let other people read this story. When I did decide to let them read it, I rewrote some parts until I felt comfortable enough to share my story indeed.

Still, the things I did leave out at first, you could have read between the lines. That was, if you had paid attention.

However, by the time I could finally look upon my story with some distance I managed to be more open again. I could use names again instead of vague descriptions. I also noticed missing details now. Some were so very obvious for me that I hadn't thought of writing them down for you. Other details had simply slipped my mind at the time. I had indeed so much to tell that I even forgot to tell some essential details on paper as well.

As time passed by, the feeling of telling my story stayed. Only the emphasis changed. After a while I realised that my story wasn't just meant for me and those around me. My story could also be of help to others. It could be of help to some of you or to someone around you. Just as Robert's songs, shows, jokes and facts of his life had been of help to me and several others.

Maybe by reading my story, you will find the courage to take your own first hesitant steps in your own revolution. Or maybe my story will make you think about your own life, your own decisions. Maybe you will make your own discoveries. See your own troubles in a new light. Discover your own times, your own key figures, or your own rewards.

Some of you may recognize the feeling of coming a long way or the effect music can have on you. You might feel the need to shake my hand then and say: 'Welcome on board, girl.'

And if none of this happens to you while reading my story, then my story will certainly be an enjoyable way to pass your time. A time in which you will get to know me very well indeed. And while you get to know me this well, you will also discover how Robert just happens to be the one who sang and co-wrote the songs which meant more to me than any other songs had ever before.

And that leads us once more to the story that lies here before you. My story. The story of how I walked my revolution. So, let's start.

Part one -Time of acknowledgement

Chapter 1. Falling ill

The part of the revolution in which Robbie Williams had such a prominent place started in the last week of the year 2002. The end of a year is for me always a time to look back. I reflect then on what that year has brought me. You know, like making up a balance.

The balance for the year 2002 was a very unusual one. That year my entire world had been turned upside-down. At the start of the year, I was ill, I lived in the west side of the country in a block of flats, I was married, I felt trapped in an abusive relationship and I had a wonderful job. However, at the end of that year I was less ill, I lived in the east side of the country in an upstairs apartment, I was separated and therefore no longer trapped in that abusive relationship and I had lost my wonderful job due to my changed circumstances.

Naturally all these changes didn't come easy. Between the start and the finish of 2002, I went through a very difficult time. But now at the end of that very same year I came to realise I had made some gigantic steps. Maybe to others they didn't seem that way but to me they did. I had come a very long way. I had made some very important decisions that year and I had learned a lot.

I felt that the way I had come through this year was something to be proud of. I wasn't there yet, but boy, had I come far already.

I even came to feel that it had all been worth it. This despite the challenging time I had been through.

Maybe if I had known all this up front, I might have faced up to reality sooner. Now I first had to fall ill before I started to face up to my problems, before I started walking my revolution.

I can't put an exact date to the start of my revolution. I only know that it started after I became too ill to work. That was at the end of August 2001. The many symptoms which came with my illness were so divers that the doctors had trouble diagnosing me. So far, they had only been able to determine what it was not, but not what it might be. Since it was so much easier to do give it a

name, I decided for myself that I've had at least a serious burn out. However, when I started to fall ill that was the last thing I would agree to.

The first symptoms appeared after my pregnancy leave. My daughter went to a day care centre while I was at work. She started there in January. Obviously, that was a perfect time to collect all sorts of colds or flues. Especially the kinds that come with diarrhoea. Naturally, my daughter transmitted these collections to the rest of the family, so we were all frequently ill in the first few months of 2001.

On one of these occasions, I suddenly suffered from a strange phenomenon. My legs started to behave strange. No matter how I tried, I couldn't control my movements. At each step, I lifted my legs up real high and the higher that movement was, the slower I could walk. I could only take things easy and after a couple of hours everything went back to normal again.

This strange walking disorder reappeared briefly each time when I was once more ill till it became June. Then the walking disorder became even worse and the walking even slower. The higher my legs lifted the more energy the movement took.

This time it took two whole days before I could walk normally again. This was too strange for words, so I went to see my family doctor. He was stunned. He had heard of walking disorders before. But only permanent ones and not those that come and go as they please. So, my family doctor arranged to go see a neurologist.

Meanwhile the walking disorder reappeared on several occasions. I started to be more and more tired as well. I also had dizzy spells, I suffered from a loss of taste and I ate a third less than usual.

All in all, my body was telling me in more ways than one that something was the matter. Only I had no idea what my body was trying to tell me and neither did my neurologist. He suggested some tests. But those tests had waiting lists so it would still take weeks and weeks before the results were known.

Despite my rambling health I did go on a holiday in the south of the Netherlands. Just me, my daughter, one of my sisters and her youngest daughter.

One day we went to visit a nearby town with many paths with

high staircases. As we tried to climb some of those stairs my legs gave up on me completely. I trembled all over and I had much difficulty to lift my legs. I couldn't climb any higher, but I also didn't dare to climb down anymore either. Not without help anyway.

I was at my wits end. The only thing I could do was to sit down and have a cry out of despair because my legs didn't seem to have the strength anymore to get me further.

Meanwhile my poor sister decided to bring the children down first and then to come back and help me down the stairs. That went very slowly. Literally step by step and with a lot of breaks. Once descended I discovered that even walking as such was now more difficult too.

There was no mistake about it. I had reached my limits. So, we returned straight home.

That evening I went to bed early. The next morning, I was incredibly dizzy, so the only thing I could do was stay in bed.

After two whole days, I finally felt better. Just as well. Our holiday was over. It was time to drive back home.

At the end of August my health got so bad that I had no choice but to finally announce myself too ill to work. This time I didn't just have a serious dizzy spell, I also was extremely tired. Besides the walking disorder became worse and worse. I couldn't walk more than three meters without support. And everything seemed to cost more and more energy and took more and more time. At my lowest point even sitting up cost me so much energy that all I could do was lying down.

Sitting or walking felt like doing a cross country run. My heart was running faster than it should have when not active and my breathing was shallower and faster as well. All this was correspondent with someone who was running a long distance, but I was only walking from the bedroom to the living room, or I was just sitting on the couch.

This was just too much. This went far beyond a silly movement of the legs and it worried me, worried me much.

After checking all the options, I decided to call my specialist for internal diseases. I explained my current state to her, and she didn't like the sound of it either. She arranged a visit at the first