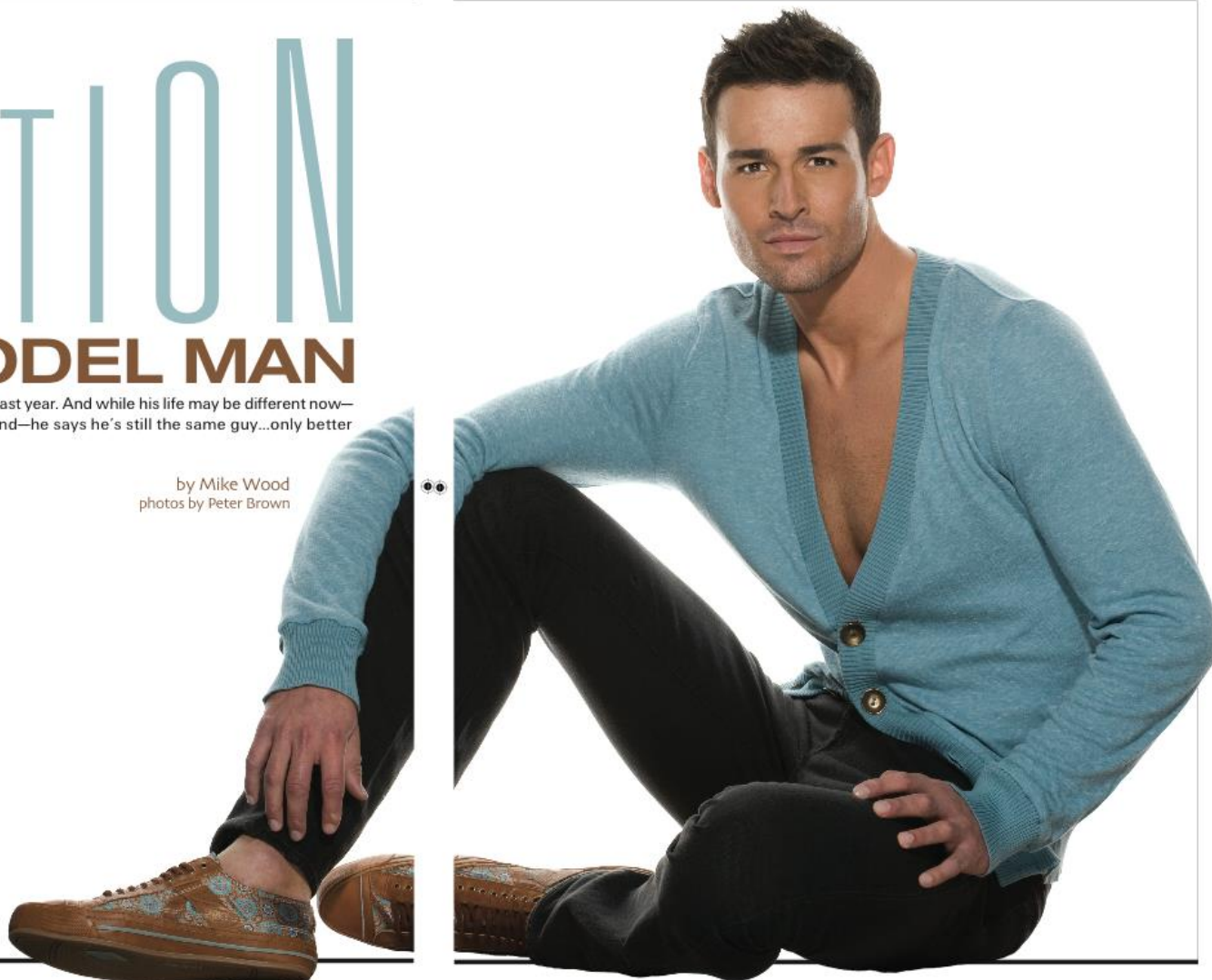


# EVOLUTION OF A MODEL MAN

J.P. CALDERON came out in a big way last year. And while his life may be different now—from his weight loss to his new boyfriend—he says he’s still the same guy...only better

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He was laying it all on the line for everyone to hear. "I did it for myself to begin with, but once I [came out], I started getting all these letters and e-mails and MySpace messages and...it's just been so wonderful and humbling for me," J.P. explains.

**T**he more things change, the more they stay the same.

This old adage came to mind pretty quickly when I sat down with J.P. Calderon for this month's cover story interview. When we met one year ago at this very same restaurant J.P. was, as he is today, confident and handsome, but back then he was also a tad more nervous, a little bit pensive, more than a few pounds heavier and...oh yeah, about to come out to the world with the help of this magazine and one Ms. Janice Dickinson.

Now J.P.'s out and open about who he is, where he came from and how's he gotten to where he is today. This makes our conversation easier. He's more relaxed, less careful about how he words things. We know each other better now, and more importantly J.P. knows himself much better, too.

"I'm changed," he says with a smile. "My perception has changed. I didn't give people credit—those closest to me and beyond. But I'm still the same guy. At least, I like to think I am." On the flip side, he laughs and says, "But, yeah, I'm different, too. Last time we were here, I barely touched my food! Now, here I am scarfing down my pasta!"

The subject of one's sexuality is never an easy one to broach, but it was particularly difficult for J.P. when we met one year ago because he wasn't confiding in a brother, a parent or a close friend.

I ask him if he feels like a spokesperson for the gay community now.

"Yes, I do," he says. "And the reason I do, is because I did it the way I did it. I feel like I'm on a mission now."

With the outpouring from the community and the letters I've read myself here in the *Instinct* office, it's clear J.P.'s story struck a chord with many across all boundaries: gay, straight, male, female, moms and dads from around the country who wrote to tell us how proud they were of J.P. for telling his story and how J.P.'s openness had helped their relationships. That's called impact. Knowing this, I throw out the words "role model" for J.P. to chew on in between his bites of pasta.

"I'm a role model, I guess. But I don't want to be a perfect role model," J.P. says. "I love to go out and have a good time. I do drink. Sometimes I do get drunk, and sometimes I do crazy or wild things. And sometimes I do the wrong things and make bad decisions. But we all do, and I think we have to be okay with that."

We're interrupted now by a once-shy female fan I've noticed has been conspicuously watching us (or rather J.P.) from across the room. She's tentative at first, afraid to interrupt our dinner, but J.P. encourages her to say "hello" with a friendly, come-hither wave of his hand.

Soon this straight, female fan is joined by an

entourage of men. "Thank you," they sing over each other. "Love your story. Love you!" The accolades spill from their mouths as I oblige to take a couple of group photos for these out-of-town visitors.

As much as J.P. seems like the same regular, nice guy I met a year ago, things have clearly changed. I'm dealing with a celebrity on some level today.

#### WAITING FOR THE OTHER SHOE TO DROP

There was a earnest two-month waiting period between the filming for *The Janice Dickinson Modeling Agency*, our initial interview and *Instinct* cover shoot, and the episode's airdates and the street date of the magazine. Everything had to be kept strictly confidential and under wraps for two "oooh, painful months" as J.P. recalls them.

"It was two months of my life where I can't remember sleeping. One night I'd be so happy and proud of myself, and think, 'I'm finally going to be so free. This is a good thing,'" J.P. remembers. "And then the next night I'd be up pacing or crying and sweating and thinking, 'Why didn't I just keep my fucking mouth shut!'"

And then he had to tell Grandma. "My grandma is my saint. She is my angel," J.P. says proudly. "So, of course, I waited until the last minute, because I was so nervous! But they dangled the carrot of my sexuality earlier than I thought they would [on the show]."

He points at me several times, saying, "You came on and they show you for like two weeks before our actual episode was going to air. Yeah, thanks, a lot, Mike," he laughs, "you made me have to tell my grandma before I was ready!" So J.P. called her.



"She was going on and on about family and different things. And finally I thought, *Focus, grandma, focus!* So I say, 'Grandma, I called you for a reason. I have something to tell you. You know I've been doing that new show...' and she calls it the Angie Dickinson show. She doesn't even know who Janice is...and I say, 'I did something on the show...'"

He told her there was something that had been plaguing him his whole life. "And then I just said it, 'I'm gay, grandma.'"

He recalls a lengthy pause where his heart and mind raced, then she muttered, "Oh."

Then came, "Well, I still love you. Are you happy?" J.P. told her he was. She said that's what mattered and then she moved onto other subjects. J.P.'s bombshell admission wasn't such an explosion after all, but rather just another item to talk about on grandma's familial laundry list with the likes of a cousin's soccer game and an uncle's new job.

J.P. did have one family member call him and ask if he wanted to pray with her. "I thought, *You know what? That's Janice!*" My family was not very approving in the beginning."

By family, he means extended family—uncles, cousins—since his older brother has always been J.P.'s biggest supporter. "He is my rep," J.P. laughs. "That's what I call him." He assured J.P. that extended family members would come around.

J.P. never had such dilemmas with his straight friends. "My straight friends love me, but in the straight world or in the athletic world they'll never say, 'Hey, we love you' just because it's not their style." He goes on to offer an example of a typical ribbing they would offer by referencing a recent game night: "If we play poker with all the guys, they'll say, 'I bet you want to play strip poker, don't you?' And sometimes I just think, *Yeah, ha, ha. Real funny, guys.* But sometimes I'll



egg 'em on and say, 'Yeah. I totally want to play strip poker! I can't wait to see you guys naked!' And that usually shuts them up for a little while. It just all in good fun."

#### FASHION FORWARD THINKING

Fun is just one word that could be used to describe this month's cover shoot as well. Calm also comes to mind. There was no camera crew following us around this time. No Ms. Janice, no swimming pools to float in. Just a photo studio, J.P., me and the rest of the *Instinct* crew—a much more relaxed scene than last year to say the least. After the shoot was complete, I pointed something out to J.P. that struck me as curious during the shoot. Our stylist wanted J.P. to try on an outfit that was similar to something he didn't want to wear a year ago during our photo shoot. This time, this year, however, J.P. was enthusiastic about the ensemble (get a glimpse of it on pg. 4). I ask him about this, and I learn what a difference a year and some perspective can make.

"I wasn't a model then," he explains. "I was becoming a model. Now I'm comfortable with who I am. I'm gay. So what? I'm a model and with this issue [of *Instinct*], I think people will see a big difference. The fact that I was coming out in a gay magazine [last year] and wearing clothes that looked—at least to me—stereotypically gay. It was just so much...gayness all at once, and I didn't want any respect taken away from me. And that's a stereotype. That was wrong. But that's where I was at last year. Today it's different."

As well as his work with Janice, J.P. recently signed with Ford Models and has been consistently working. He's shot with 2Xist, done Fashion Week L.A., Fashion Week in New York and campaigns for French and Italian

fashion magazines. He's also booked speaking engagements, and appearances at Pride events across the country.

"It's getting tremendously easier for me, but I'm still getting used to it. I have to break through stereotypes and I still sometimes get nervous that I'll hear someone shout 'faggot' at me when I walk down the street," J.P. says. "It's the same for anyone coming out, I think, or being out. I think we always have some of these thoughts or reservations in the back of our minds somewhere."

But he's been working hard on changing his perspective and he says it's working.

"I can open my eyes wide. I was living in tunnel vision for so long," J.P. says. "Now I can see the bigger picture. I've only seen me, myself, my heartache and what I was about instead of seeing what I could do and what I should have done."

This opened him up first—brace yourself, boys—love.

#### THE MAN IN HIS LIFE

J.P. met him early last summer at an *Instinct*-sponsored party for Gay Days where J.P. was signing autographs and socializing with the crowd. J.P. and the X Games athlete shared mutual friends and an affinity for sports, and their chemistry struck like lightning. "I just immediately noticed him," J.P. recalls. ➔

"It's not anything I expected. Physically, he's not my type at all. But he was looking at me, too. And suddenly I became really shy...but he had the cutest smile."

The pair started talking and really hit it off. They spent the rest of the Gay Days trip together and had a blast. "It was like I had known him for 20 years. I was so comfortable," J.P. says.

But after the weekend was over, J.P. went back to L.A., and his new friend stayed in Florida. "I just thought, Well, he was great, it was great, but it'll never happen." The two stayed in touch by talking on the phone almost nightly for about two months, but too many miles lay between them.

Soon J.P. booked another appearance on the east coast—in Atlanta to be exact—and it would be this gig that would bring them together once more. His new friend flew up from Florida to meet him. "I thought, Wow, I really don't know him. I like him. I've talked to him, but we only spent that one weekend together. What if we hate each

other now? What if that was just a honeymoon phase?" J.P. remembers.

But as fate would have it, both men fell heads over heels for the other. "I was very selfish my whole life, so this is something I never did," says J.P. "Not for a girl. Not for a guy. But this guy... this guy had me!" he admits with a laugh.

The pair now live together in Marina Del Rey, California.

"Every single one of my friends was like, 'Wow, dude, what are you doing? You just met this guy.' And I'm like, 'You know what? I don't know what I'm doing, but I'm just doing it. I like this guy. He's amazing. I'm tired of being selfish and thinking only about myself...I'm just doing it.'"

The first months of cohabitating was great according to J.P. but by the second month things got "really real" he says with a laugh. They got to know each other—warts and all. "But you get through it," J.P. says, "because it's worth it. It's really worth it."

I ask J.P. if he's in love and there's an immediate smile and his cheeks get flushed. Whether he's going to admit it or not, is not at issue. The answer is all over his face.

He chastises me playfully for going there and turns the question on me, then he gets serious: "It's just not in my character to say it...growing up with the way I did and losing my mom, and being in this bunch Latino culture, you're just not supposed to say it, I thought... especially not to another guy. But I love him so much. I know it's a cliché, but he's such a beautiful person inside and out...no, he's not beautiful on the outside. He's hot on the outside!" he says with another big smile. "Hot."

#### REVISITING HIS FAMILY

J.P. is spending more time with family these days. The pressure of hiding his true self no longer stymies a healthy connection there. He and his older brother hang out regularly, drink beer and shoot the breeze. J.P.'s brother has always been supportive—been like a father to him—but ever since J.P. came out, that bond seems even further strengthened.

His brother's kids (a 7-year-old niece and 5-year-old nephew) are now a staple of J.P.'s hectic life and will often ride their bikes over to his place for impromptu visits. "My niece is a little Janice Dickinson already! She has no reservations at all!"

*Do they know their uncle J.P. is on TV?*

"Oh yeah! They'll make fun of me," J.P. says, now initiating that sing-song taunting voice kids love so much, "You're in your underwear, uncle Johnny! And they laugh. They don't think it's cool. They think it's funny!"

*Do they know that you're gay?*

"You know what? I don't know to tell you the truth. But I'll tell ya, one of the reasons I really love my brother...I have a story for you..." J.P. trails off to collect his thoughts.

He goes on to tell me about last year's Christmas brunch where J.P. and his boyfriend were sitting at the table with his brother, his sister-in-law and the two kids. "The kids have been over to my place a million times now and they've seen that there's only one bedroom. They know that my boyfriend and I live together. They know that he's my buddy, but I don't know if they know he's my boyfriend. So, of course, my niece, the little Janice Dickinson, asks, 'Where do you guys sleep?' I think she asked [my boyfriend], and we're sitting there thinking, *Oh my god, what do we say?* I was ready to blurt out, 'he sleeps on the couch,' or 'we have a big bed that comes up from under the ground only at night,' or make up some other magical story," J.P. laughs.

But before any of those thoughts were spoken, J.P.'s older brother chirped in very matter-of-factly, "He sleeps with Uncle Johnny. They share the same room."

"Oh," shrugged his niece before diving back into her breakfast. And that was that.

"I was speechless," says J.P. "I thought that was so cool that my brother did that. He has so much pride in me, he's like leading the brigade, ya know?"

With help from his older brother, J.P.'s boyfriend has also been integrated into the extended family as well. "I was so nervous about introducing him to people. And it's been amazing. I ask my brother, 'What should I do? Should I bring him? And my brother has to keep me in check and say, 'Why the hell wouldn't you bring him? He's a great guy.'"

"My aunts are hugging him and welcoming him, my uncles are talking shop with him, my grandma's talking to him about how to cook certain foods—it's her way of bonding—and it's just left me floored. It's really blown me away," says J.P. with a proud grin. ➔

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Speaking of the holidays and food brings me to a topic I can't help but address: J.P.'s very apparent weight loss.

## BODY IMAGES

My own mom has called me on several different occasions to voice her concern over J.P.'s weight loss: "Talk to him. Is he eating? Tell him he needs to be eating." I use my mother as the scapegoat to lead into a question that has been on many more minds than just my mom's. J.P. smiles obligingly, touched by the concern, but he assures me (and my mom)—as he has had to assure many family and friends—that he is fine, and fit and healthy.

When J.P. was on *Survivor* he says he was 205 lbs., about the same weight he remembers being for most of his adult life. When I met him for last year's *Instinct* story, he says he weighed in at 195 lbs. But with his increasing opportunities in the modeling world J.P. knew he had to change his body.

"Everyone would say they loved my look, but..." J.P. trails off. It turns out that "but" equaled about 30 lbs. "I wanted to make myself more versatile. So I took it upon myself to lose the weight."

Today J.P. weighs in at 175 lbs. And despite any Internet reports to the contrary, he's not doing drugs or starving himself. "I did everything right. Not wrong," he points out. "Legally. Not illegally." He doubled his time doing cardio and cut back lifting weights. He was very cautious of what he ate, and then he went on a detox where he cut out all meat, refined sugar, caffeine, alcohol, wheat gluten and dairy.

He lost seven pounds in his first week, and then the weight loss was more gradual in subsequent weeks. But he admits it's a constant battle to keep the weight in check. "As an athlete, I've spent almost all my life telling myself to get big, be strong. Now I was telling my body to actually get smaller... it's been a challenge."

He is constantly thinking about the calories he's consuming and what his body can burn more readily. "In Latino culture it's all about eat, eat, eat and I've just completely gone the opposite route," J.P. says.

I wonder how he feels in his new body.

"Weird," he offers before a brief pause. "I like my new body. But it's weird. I mean I have a waist size that I had in high school. Clothes just fit me differently now. My friends and family worry a little bit about me, but I'm okay. I want to go for modeling and this is what I've got to do."

But don't get him wrong, he says with a laugh: "I want to eat! I want to eat a lot! I love eating."



## DIFFERENT LIFE, SAME MAN

The red carpet events, the public eye, the complimentary letters, the congratulatory e-mails—these are all things that could have inflated J.P.'s ego or made him lose sight of who he was or why he came out in the first place. But all of these things have served him well to remind him how important it is to stay grounded.

J.P. still coaches girls' volleyball and enjoys it. He says his players are respectful of him and his sexuality. He knows this not because he has ever spoken about it with his players, but because their parents came up to him at a tournament, pulled him aside and told him quite fondly that

both they and their kids were proud of J.P. for coming out in the magazine and on TV.

"They never gave me a glimpse that they even knew and I thought that was so neat," J.P. says. "The whole time they knew, but respected me enough as their coach. And here I thought they might be giggling or pointing at me and whispering. To hear that my kids are of proud of me, too, is really cool."

I've learned that taking risks is okay. And going after what you want is okay as long as you're true to yourself and you have a good heart and you don't hurt anyone in the process," he says.

*What's been toughest?*

"I think the part I'm still having a problem with is having people think that because I'm gay, I'm not a man," J.P. explains. "When they know who I am as a person, they seem to like me and I don't want that to change when I tell them I'm gay or reference a story and say, 'Oh yeah, me and my boyfriend...' I don't want to ruin it. It's my insecurity. I'm at fault. And I completely admit it. I don't want to hide it. I want to change those perceptions and those thoughts. Even though I've come out, I think I still have a lot to come to terms with. And that's just a part of the journey."

It's a journey J.P. is glad he's finally able to embrace. "I am happy. I'm very happy. Now I get to experience life—my life—in the open with the people I love. I can be in a relationship with somebody and I don't have to hide him, or call him my buddy or my friend. I can say, 'Yeah, this is my guy.'"

As for his future, J.P. will continue to coach volleyball and model through Ford, and he intends to keep his mind and his options open. "I have a loyalty and devotion to the kids that I coach. I never wanted to be that guy who abandoned where he came from. It's an event one night, then waking up early to sweat it out with these kids in the gym, then an afternoon modeling gig or whatever. I'm crazy busy all the time, but it keeps me grounded. It keeps me real."

And something tells me J.P. wouldn't want it any other way. **instinct**

Look for more exclusive pics of J.P. at [instinctmagazine.com](http://instinctmagazine.com) in the Cutting Room Floor beginning March 1.