

Relationships

How Birchgrove can change your sex life.

Stuck in a rut? Not getting the right things from your relationship? Not having a relationship? Want to start a new one? Well as my experience over the last year has suggested what you need to do is join the Birchgrove committee. Never mind going to Relate we have it all. Having been born at the marriage guidance bureau (a long story) and also being chair of the group it seems only right that I should comment on this, our work. Birchgrove, as well as having people in all stages of relationships, just starting, just ending, just living and even a few in happy fulfilled ones, is predicting my future love life.

Relationships are difficult when you are human and so for a human like me with bits missing, bits that don't work and bits that just bloody hurt they seem impossible. Now it could be that I am just crap at them and I can think of more than a few women who agree with that, or maybe I am just too good at ending them. I do not mean that I know how to end a relationship in a good way; despite years of practice I still seem to find new and even more excruciating ways to do it. I just mean that I do it often, in fact every time I go out with someone. My problem is that I am not nearly so good at starting them.

I wrote in the magazine before about the time I put a small ad in 'Soul mates'. (Honest, unemployed cripple with poisonous sperm and defective genes seeks rich, beautiful woman to wash sperm with... or something like that) It worked well and I got a friend and a few shags out of it. But nothing I could really call a long-term relationship; they were all shorter than a Royal marriage.

Then last year most of my friends' relationships seemed to hit the rocks and not just the Birchgrove lot but real people too. The ending of relationships seems to be pretty common amongst the positive haemophiliacs I know. We even had one Birchgrove meeting where everyone who came was fed up with, breaking up with, or had already split up with their partner except me. Inevitably mine had disintegrated by the next meeting while everyone else had started new ones, made up, moved on or at least pulled. It all made me think that while discussing registration with the charity commission we should put relationship counselling in amongst our aims.

I then realised something startling. I am following the general trend of the other committee members but 6 months to a year behind. So I would like to ask for people with happy lives and lots of money, sex and holidays to get involved. That way the general trend will be such that in six months time I shall be loaded tanned and shagged out. Please get in touch my hormones need you!!

Robert
The (single) Chair

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WHEN

Hi, I am a 29-year-old gay severe haemophiliac with co-infection and really bad roots at the moment.

For many years I found it difficult to tell people about my sexuality as I always thought I was the only gay haemophiliac in the country but I'm not. People always think it's easier to tell others about your status especially if you are gay but it isn't.

The first lad I went out with didn't know my status and to this day doesn't. He always knew I was a haemophiliac but I never did anything that would put him or me in any danger.

The last man I went out with over three years ago, I made the mistake of not telling him right away when I was getting into him, and it got harder and harder to find a way to tell him which I never did until it was too late. A condom burst and he went for a test and it came back HIV+, which shattered him and destroyed me.

We still carried on seeing each other for two years before we split up and those two years almost destroyed me inside and out. He treated me like crap slept with bloke after bloke and I felt he needed to do that as well as other things for what I had done to him. It wasn't until later that I found out that he'd had unprotected sex a couple of times before (we always practiced safe sex), and that his last partner had bled inside him then was never seen again.

So I'll never know if it was the time of the condom breaking or whether he was HIV+ before we met and just blamed me. It taught me a lesson the hard way. We still talk on the phone a couple of times a month and visit each other.

The whole episode has made me a stronger person as I'm not afraid or ashamed of telling people about my status like I used to be and will tell people when the time arrives.

So at the moment I am single, and happy being that way as my life is full with the voluntary work I do as well as trustee and vice chair for different organisations which keep me very busy, as well as my dog who I love to bits.

to tell?

I WANT SEX!

I want to have sex. Not just any old sex, but passionate, uninhibited, adventurous, swinging from the chandeliers type sex. I'm desperate, obsessed, gagging for it!

Sex, or more accurately not having it, has only become a problem for me over the last few years. My husband Dave and I always had an active sex life. In fact we were at it like rabbits. OK, so occasionally a bad bleed would interfere with our enjoyment but we soon made up for it.

When Dave found out about having HIV like other haemophiliacs we met he didn't tell me for ages. When he did I went for a test and found out I'd got it too. The haemophilia sister had talked to Dave about using condoms but once we found out about me there was no point so we carried on as normal.

Over the years we went through some tough times but being able to have a normal sex life was a big help. In the end though it wasn't enough and after being together for 15 years (married for 10) we split up. Dave and I are good friends and we haven't divorced yet but two years on I am trying to get used to being a single woman again. I was very young when I met Dave and not very experienced at dating. Now I am 37 and starting all over again but this time with HIV too.

So when do you tell someone you've got it? On a first date? When you're in bed about to do it? Or afterwards? And then there's the whole condom thing! To be honest I don't want to have sex with condoms. I want sloppy, noisy, liquid, fluid, messy, unprotected sex. I'm sure other people must feel the same but nobody wants to talk about it. I went to visit a positive women's group in London recently and there were a lot of women there who were pregnant or had children. Every single one of them told me it was an accident with a split condom.

The doctor or nurses haven't spoken to me about sex since I split up with Dave. Perhaps this is because they think it's not an issue now. I've not seen much written about sex by women or straight men either.

Susan

Review

SEX and RELATIONSHIPS for Straight Men WITH HIV

A guide to keeping sex and relationships as part of your life

by Terrence Higgins Trust

At last, at last, 10 years of asking, a leaflet for HIV+ straight men. THT have recently produced a series of leaflets for people with HIV. Initially there was one for gay men with HIV, then one for women and now one specifically for straight men with HIV about sex. There has been hardly anything about sex and relationships for HIV+ straight men and so it is great that finally something has appeared. Having said that the sex part is mainly about not giving what you've got to your partner. (In the THT universe straight men don't sleep with women they have sex with a partner.) And the relationship part is mainly about starting one rather than maintaining or ending one.

Now both of these issues are very important and it is vital that people with HIV know that they can have relationships and sex as much as anyone else. But apart from the usual counsellor-speak of taking care of yourself, doing what you want to do not what you feel obliged, to do there is nothing specific about moving on from a bad relationship. Nor about what to do when the good bit is over. No advice about the emotional equivalent of taking the soggy condom off your sagging knob. Perhaps some ideas for the next one.

There is also one laugh in it when it reminds us all that "Having sexual feelings is normal, for anyone, including you." So I can happily recommend this leaflet for anyone with sexual feelings out there.

Cady Khudabux died in November this year. Born in Africa with parents from India and living most of his life in Europe it was inevitable his life would be extraordinary. I met him first at Christmas in 1989 when he was trying to run a support group of HIV+ haemophiliacs in and around London. His group was small and usually only 2 or 3 came to it. He met the Birchgrove group that had come from South Wales and was amazed at how many people there were, over 30. He continued to try and run a group despite fervent opposition from his hospital social worker and was part of the first ever functioning national Birchgrove committee. He fell in love with Deborah, a European born in Africa and living in London. They moved to Brighton to enjoy life by the sea but she became ill. She was diagnosed with cancer and with the two of them getting very ill he chose to take treatment in order to be healthy enough to care for her. She died at home as she wished to. An article he wrote in the Birchgrove magazine about the death of Deborah is one of the saddest and most moving I have ever read.

Professionally he had worked in virology laboratories and had the distinction of working on HIV, or HTLV-III as it was then and HCV. He decided to quit when work on CJD looked likely; he felt it was tempting fate once too often. Out about his HIV status from the 1980s he was involved in the campaign for recompense appearing on TV and in the newspapers. This he continued to do right up to this year appearing in a local documentary about hepatitis C and blood products and an interview with Positive Nation about haemophilia and his cats.

He did his best to try and make agencies more suitable to the needs of haemophiliacs, spending years trying to get the Haemophilia Society to employ a specific worker for those with HIV and their families and succeeded. He spent years trying to get the MacFarlane Trust to take its registrants views on board, arguing for hours at hundreds of tedious and dull meetings with Alan Tanner. He was one of the gentlest people I have ever met and he cared about people; those with haemophilia, and those without. He was thoughtful, loving and perceptive but he could be stubborn as anything sometimes. He leaves behind a sister, a nephew and niece and a lot of people who will miss him but knowing he died in the way he wanted to. At home, looking peaceful and having planned who would take care of the cats. He even had the presence of mind to take his glasses off beforehand.

Robert

Cady Khudabux, Birchgroves Little Buddha 9th September 1951-9th November 2001

Cady was a quiet, gentle, but very powerful man, who's talents crossed many waters. Anyone who met him would be mesmerised by his gentle approach to life and his ability to listen, a skill that sadly few possess. One of my lasting memories of this great man will be his hands; so soft and tactile for me they were healing! Whenever we hugged or even shuck hands there seemed to be a flow of kindness and an inner power that he transferred, to whoever he touched, whether in a physical or spiritual way.

Cady had an inner power in which he would put people at ease within seconds of meeting them. We

came from backgrounds worlds apart, but we became friends, soul mates, colleges and collaborators in the battle to change the perception of Haemophilia/HIV. Cady taught me to Love, he introduced me to an understanding of black conscience, he introduced me to Steve Biko a black south African activist, someone who I've studied since that day. Meeting Cady many years ago enriched my life and he will remain with me until the day I die. My memories of him are special, the time we spent talking and listening were unique. His inner understanding of people was special.

He once told me a story that has stuck with me always. A man goes on a journey because he's sad and alone. He spends many years wondering around the wilderness until he comes across a village that looks warm and friendly. As he enters the village he meets a wise old man sat on a stone. He asks this man "what is this village like" The old man looks up and says "What was your last village like?" The man enters and becomes a new person with an understanding of giving and respecting those around you in which you receive the love and respect of others. He spent many happy years in his new home.

Cady was part of the famous gang of four who for many years carried the fight in the name of Birchgrove. This group of four was very strange and without HIV I doubt we would have ever met. There was me, a lad from the streets (some might say the gutter) a gay queen, a middle class private school henry and Cady a black indian. We became a powerful foursome who challenged everyone, with success. We had a plan we would send in Paul Jenks and Cady as the sensible first line of attack, and if this didn't work, then the rearguard would advance, and in for the kill Gareth and PK would go.

This reminds of a situation in London. Cady and Paul J had over many months been meeting with NAT discussing funding for National Birchgrove, without success, so we arranged to, in Cady's words send in the rotweiler, yes me well it worked. After forty minutes of anger and frustration we came away with £10,000. The start of National Birchgrove. This money enabled us to hold the first National conference in London. The rest is History.

Its hard to remember Cady without thinking of his lovely wife Deborah, again a very special person in my life, with whom Cady had a soul mate, a friend and a lover, someone who cared and loved for all those around her. Deborah was instrumental in producing the first ever Birchgrove discussion document living with Haemophilia and HIV which is still relevant today even though many years old. I constantly refer to this document for inspiration and guidance in my work for Birchgrove.

Cady always knew in his passing he would meet with Deborah and he/they would be one forever, His love for Deborah was so special we spent many hours discussing the qualities of this special women.

I know they will be together in a place that's calm and restful and Cady will be at peace!

Gareth

REGINA KILLICK

