

## 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.

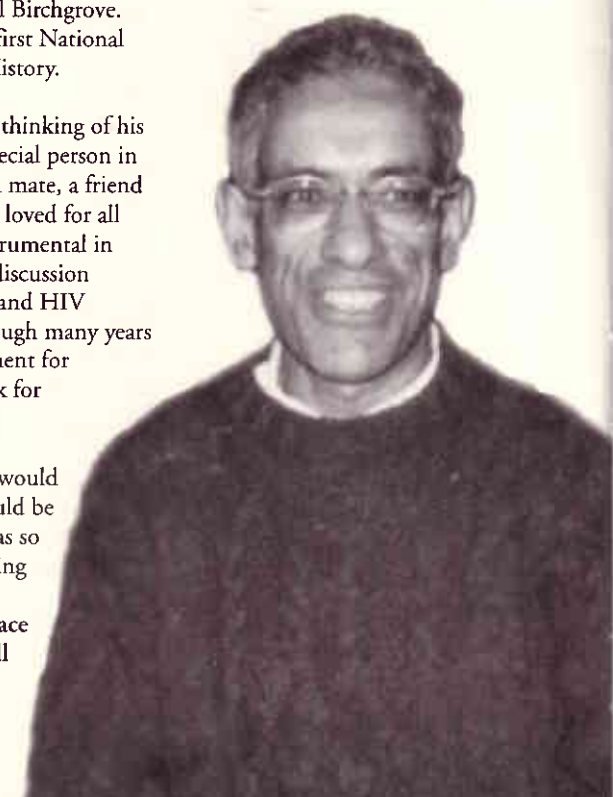
Its hard to remember Cady without thinking of his lovely wife Deborah, again a very special person in my life, with whom Cady had a soul mate, a friend and a lover, someone who cared and loved for all those around her. Deborah was instrumental in producing the first ever Birchgrove discussion document 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

BIRCHGROVES LITTLE BUDDHA



# Want to have a say in the future of CJD?

The CJD Incidents Panel has recently released a consultation paper on the management of possible exposure to CJD through medical procedures. It is a working document and is being made available to the medical and allied professions and to anyone else with an interest. It is set up by the Department of Health to advise Health Authorities and Trusts on how to manage incidents involving possible exposure to CJD.

The guidance particularly draws on two reports "Risk Assessment for Transmission of variant CJD via Surgical Instruments" and "Assessment of the risk of exposure to variant CJD infectivity in blood and blood products". Snappy titles I hear you say.

The DOH are basically giving an opportunity for you to have a say in this document, if you can understand it. It is pretty heavy reading, and depressing, but also pretty intriguing. The main elements of the questions are based on your views of the document and whether you agree or disagree with their proposals set out in the document. You have to work out what their proposals are first before you agree or disagree, but you will know what I mean if you give it a read.

Questions vary from surgical instruments, A CJD national database; consent issues, plasma and management of people who have received plasma products from donated blood by people who later developed CJD. As we mainly have our conditions monitored and managed by our haematologists, see if you can spot any in the membership of the CJD Incidents Panel.

The consultation document and the response form are available on the Department of Health website at <http://www.doh.gov.uk/cjd/consultation>. It is also available by post from Department of Health Publications PO Box 777 London SE1 6XH. Please quote the reference 25478 A/F 2001/20. They are also contactable by Fax 01623 724524 and their email is [doh@prolog.uk.com](mailto:doh@prolog.uk.com)

The document is also available in braille, on audiocassette tape, by email, on disk, in large print and in other languages, so there's almost no excuse for not having the opportunity to respond. Oh yes and its also printed on chlorine free paper for a further incentive.

The closing date for this consultation is 15<sup>th</sup> January 2002 so get moo-ving.

## STRAIGHT Talking

In keeping with the theme of this issue of the newsletter, namely relationships and the difficulty we're sometimes faced with regarding them, I'd like to tell you all about a project I've been involved with recently.

It was a telephone call from a friend that got me thinking... up until that point I'd been in a reasonably stable relationship for around 18 months with someone who was HIV negative, and it was going ok. I mean I'd found someone who it seemed accepted me for who I was, without making issue over my being HIV+, and I guess we got on with things. I have to say it was good for me, at least initially... after a relationship gap of around 7 years (and only schoolyard relationships before that!) it really was just what I needed. For a while...

Then the phone call, which basically outlined plans for a UK group for HIV+ heterosexuals – inspired not only because of the fact that the vast majority of the services and support groups in this country are, perhaps by necessity, designed around the HIV+ gay community – but also for the purpose of meeting people of the opposite sex who really do understand the HIV issue, and therefore perhaps whilst not forgetting it's there, could live with it in a relationship more easily.

A little research turned up some interesting facts... it seems the US has been doing this for a long time. Websites such as "hivstraight" and "heterochat" have been up and running for years, providing services such as chat-rooms, dating services, personal ads and links to 'guys and girls' support groups around the country. In contrast, and please correct me if I'm wrong here, but I could only find one site within the UK dedicated to people who are HIV+ and heterosexual.

I have to say that working on the project has opened my eyes. The concept of looking for a relationship within the positive community had never occurred to me before, and as I spoke to people online in the US it struck me that far from HIV being a hindrance to getting to know people, it can be common ground upon which friendships and even relationships can be built. Several stories of long-term relationships being formed from one US online chat-room inspired me not only to do work with my friend towards something similar in this country, but even perhaps forced me to look at my own relationship, and to re-evaluate what I wanted in my own life. Was I maybe settling for something that was less than perfect on the basis that my girlfriend happened to be the one person that accepted me being HIV+...?

So... computing and web-design being my trade, my friend and I set about doubling the total number of sites available in this country, and one morning "Straight Talking" was born. Still in its very basic form, you can find the site using the URL below. Currently it includes facilities for chat through an MSN community and personal ads... but there is room for improvement and any suggestions would be gratefully received. You can contact us through the site at any time.

Straight Talking:  
<http://www.straight-talking.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/>

# SELF

Paul Bateman talks to **Dave Allen** about his involvement in courses specifically designed to help people with long-term medical conditions and HIV get the most out of life.

## **Would you like to tell me something about yourself?**

I'm a 29-year-old severe haemophiliac with HIV/HCV co-infection and I'm also gay. At the moment I do a lot of voluntary work over in Liverpool for a HIV organization and have done talks on Haemophilia HIV/HCV and homosexuality. I have done loads more other stuff as well but don't want to bore you so soon.

## **Could you tell me what the LILL project and the AIDS Mastery course involve?**

The Lill project, of which I am a tutor, and the youngest for the Haemophilia Society, is still new to me and I'm learning all the time. Basically it's for people with long-term medical conditions that would like to get more out of life without their conditions running their day-to-day life.

AIDS mastery. This is always a tricky one to try and tell people what it is about. It's for people who are infected or affected with HIV based around a whole weekend. It's a safe place where you can express all those emotions which we bottle up inside, a place where you can get rid of old baggage and be ready for any new stuff. To be honest I would have never become a tutor for the LILL project if I hadn't gone on an AIDS Mastery course two years ago. I feel so strongly about the mastery that I became a trustee for them this year.

## **How are the courses run and what is the format like?**

The LILL Self Management course is over six weeks for 2 and a half hours per week.

It's very easy to understand and follow which it needs to be for me as I'm not the brightest

button and the whole thing is very laid back, no red crosses for being late etc.

The AIDS Mastery is over a weekend, Friday night to Sunday day, and is held all around the country a (Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, and London,) several times a year. It is held by two or three tutors who have been doing them for years. It originated in America many years ago and once you've done one you can do any other one around the world.

## **What sort of people come on the courses?**

The LILL (self management course) is for people who have long-term chronic conditions. When I was learning to be a tutor there were people who had ms (Multiple Sclerosis), me (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis), asthma, Haemophilia (me) and the list could carry on. So on the courses there might be people with other conditions with the same effects that your own condition has had on you and you can share those experiences.

AIDS Mastery is for people who have any connection to HIV either by being positive or living with somebody who is, or a friend, relative etc, or for people who work within the field of HIV.

**“it's for people with long-term medical conditions that would like to get more out of life without their conditions running their day-to-day life”.**

# MANNA

**“The LILL has given me confidence about myself and my conditions and an understanding that just because we have different conditions we do get the same effects and this made me more positive about myself”.**

### **How did you first get interested in the courses?**

I was in Sheffield when I told Babs Evans the HIV/HCV worker at the Haemophilia Society that I would like to get more involved in doing stuff. I was thinking about doing talks and she told me about the LILL and that was how that started.

The AIDS Mastery was two years ago when a friend of mine said she wanted to go on this course and would I go with her for moral support which I agreed to and the whole thing rattled my brain into action and I've not looked back since

### **What were the main benefits that you derived from the courses personally?**

The LILL has given me confidence about myself and my conditions and an understanding that just because we have different conditions we do get the same effects and this made me more positive about myself.

Well the AIDS Mastery gave me a safe place where I could get rid of 17 years of anger, and focus on who I was and it gave me loads of confidence about what I had to give.

### **What would a person with Haemophilia and HIV expect to get out of one of these courses?**

Hard one to answer as everyone is different but like most things the more you put into these courses the more you get out of them. Why not give them a try? What's one weekend or 2 and a half hours if they make a difference to your life?

### **How do you find people's experiences after disclosing their HIV status to a mixed group?**

Well if you don't know anybody in the room it's always hard but somebody has to be first. Once people have disclosed their status it's always much easier, that's what I feel anyway and that's why I always tell people about my status and

sexuality because I've spent many years hiding them both and I think it's about time they got an airing (I must admit I always make sure that everyone in the room agrees on confidentiality). Also the person sat next to you might be in the same boat as you about disclosing their status.

### **How can anybody find out more about these courses and how to access them?**

If you want to know more which I'm sure you do, you can get in touch with Babs at the society or you can contact myself and I'll email you details of LILL courses and details and dates and venues for the AIDS Mastery this year and in the future.

Hope to see you on a course soon.

dids808@hotmail.com  
dids808@aol.com

Further information about LILL and AIDS Mastery courses can be obtained from Babs Evans at the Haemophilia Society or alternatively;

**Ian Hayes**  
Tel: 01934-842479  
Email murrayhayes@cwcom.net

**Jane Cooper**  
LILL Project Manager  
The Long Term Medical Conditions Alliance.  
Tel: 020 7813 3637  
Email: alliance@lmca.demon.co.uk  
website: www.lmca.demon.co.uk

AIDS Mastery is run by The Northern Lights Trust  
BM NLT London WC1 3XX.  
Tel: 020-7306 3303

NLT PO Box 11, Liverpool L69 1SN  
Tel: 0151-708 9080  
web site: info@aidsmastery.org.uk  
Email nltrust@hotmail.com

# AGEMENT

# Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir

In response to the article in the latest copy of the magazine concerning OAC, I was somewhat confused to what they could offer me and other partners who are new to this situation. I am relatively new to all of this only being with my partner for two years and at the moment the issues raised do not seem relevant to me. It was difficult when we first got together. Although I had some insight in to haemophilia and the fact that a large number of haemophiliacs had contracted HIV, I was still quite ignorant of many facts and made some assumptions that were way off target. I did some research via the Internet etc when I realised I was serious about making a commitment to my partner. The worst aspect was knowing that we would not grow old together, and having a family together, although not out of the question, was probably going to be difficult not only emotionally and physically but financially too.

Perhaps I am fortunate in the fact that my partner was totally honest with me and told me all the fact early enough in the relationship for me to back out gracefully if I couldn't cope with his illness. I was amazed after hearing other partner's views and looking at the various websites for partners that there are so many who find it hard to get past the illness. Of course you can never forget about it and there are days when the worry and the stress about his health and being totally honest my own too does seem too much but fortunately these are few and far between. I think we need to put it into perspective. Yes the I love is ill, and tragically he will probably die before most men his age, but he is here at the moment and is in relatively good health and I have no need to complain about it or have the need for a support system.

What I think is needed is practical advice. After all forewarned is forearmed. Babs the HIV worker at the Haemophilia Society is great at this. Also the team at the hospital have been great in answering questions and giving advice. Birchgrove are doing a tremendous job in fighting for compensation (although I hate to be submissive and putting my feminist feeling to one side for a moment) I feel we, as partners need to fight alongside them rather than as an independent group.

my words and agree that a support group for partners is the best thing since sliced bread but at the moment I am not overly concerned with the need to share my problems with others. Yes we have problems like every other couple but I think its all too easy to blame it all on the fact they are ill. If my partner is grumpy then ok it may be because he is not feeling 100% but more often than not its either because he has drunk too much the day before or (God forbid) Man Utd have had a bad game!!!! Yes I nag him and yes I whinge to my mates that he is a miserable sod and that he is getting on my nerves but isn't that normal? My mate's whinge just as much about their partners!

“What I think is needed is practical advice”.

I apologise to the girls who have set up the group; this isn't intended to offend or to undermine the help and support they offer. As I said I am new to this and haven't had to face the dilemmas that long-standing partners have. I am probably in the minority in saying I cannot understand the need for this kind of support group but I wonder if perhaps its that we have lost sight of our partners being people and just see illness. Perhaps if we changed our perspective and focused on the whole picture it would make life easier not just for them but for us too.

No doubt I am over simplifying things and perhaps in 10 or 15 years I will be forced to eat



# “Suck it and See...”

## “Suck it and See...”

### (not a piece about Oral Sex)

“I didn't choose this life it chose me”. I have repeated this sentiment to myself many times over the past 13 years since I met Mick. Because, lets be honest no one who is in their right mind would choose to love someone with all these problems. I remember how naive I was when we first got married. Yes, he was a severe haemophiliac and he also had HIV but it couldn't get any worse – WRONG. Then he got Hepatitis C and at the beginning of this year, (on my birthday actually), the hospital informed him that he had been exposed to vCJD but not to worry because the risk was only “theoretical” (yeah right, OK!!!!!!).

I thought I was coping really well, it did not affect me that much and our life went on as usual. I spent little time thinking about Mick's illness and carried on as normal-WRONG AGAIN. At the end of last year things started to go wrong. I felt like I was grinding to a halt. I couldn't sleep, eat or communicate with people. I would cry all the time (in secret) and resented other people with their “normal” lives and lack of problems. I have a really strong support network, however I felt that there was no one I could turn to because no one knew exactly what I was going through. I did not want someone to empathise with me. I wanted someone who could truly understand. Even though I wanted this I still did not want to attend the partners weekend in Nottingham. If I am honest I would not have gone if another partner had not telephoned me and asked me to go.

However, I am so pleased that I did go and that I have been involved with the development of Organic Action for Change. I have found that OAC is not about focusing on my partners' illness and needs it's about me. It's about me not feeling guilty when I am ill, not feeling guilty about putting my needs first and it is also about having a really good time and socialising with a great group of people. Being involved with OAC has helped to increase my confidence and given me a real feeling of not being isolated. There are times when I am so busy that OAC is a real pain in the neck and I don't have time to be involved in it as much as I would like. There are also times when I think that I don't want to be involved in OAC because it can be an

emotional roller coaster (but that's just life isn't it?). However, the sense of support and understanding that I feel every time I attend an OAC Workshop or Group keeps drawing me back.

When I read the letter published in this issue of the newsletter questioning the need for a partners group I could totally identify with this person. It took me nearly 13 years to realise that I needed support, and I do appreciate that everybody is entitled to their opinion, but what I would say to the author is “don't knock it until you've tried it”. The author's point that we should fight alongside our partners and not as an independent group would be very valid if that was the aim of OAC. However, OAC is not about fighting for compensation or changing institutions, as from past experience this can prove to be soul destroying and negative; it can wear you out and leave you feeling empty.

The concept of OAC is to facilitate change from within oneself, to identify what we need to enable us to carry on living this life that has chosen us and about making ourselves happy, it's true that we all have the option to walk away at any time and everyday we make a choice to stay with our partners. But in a way OAC is about acceptance and enabling us to feel OK about our life and our choices. Maybe this sounds selfish but I have had a taste of this and I want more. The knock on effect should be that my relationship with Mick is improved and that we ultimately stand a better chance of staying together and being happy. It is hard enough sustaining a relationship without the added pressures that we live with.

Ultimately, my response to anyone who is sceptical about the need for a group that offers peer support and brings partners together to improve their quality of life is why not “suck it and see”, it may not be for you, but I truly believe that everyone who has attended an OAC session this year has got something out of it.

*Anyone who is interested in further information regarding OAC can email us on [oac3@hotmail.com](mailto:oac3@hotmail.com) or contact Babs Evans at The Haemophilia Society on 0800 018 6068.*

C J Mason

