

SPECTRUM

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IN THE PINK

"What to do When a Friend Has AIDS"

by James Gill

Although gay men and lesbians are now taking responsibility for their health and protecting themselves from AIDS, that is not the end of the problem for us. The majority of People with AIDS continue to be gay men, and there are still thousands of us who are infected who have not developed symptoms yet.

While most of us will never have AIDS, many of us will become what is called the Worried Well. We are the friends, lovers and family of People with AIDS who are faced with trying to maintain their relationship with the person with AIDS.

You may become a member of the Worried Well when you are completely unprepared. You may feel helpless or inadequate. There are many things that you can do to help someone who is ill, though.

The most important thing to remember is not to avoid the

person. Be the friend or loved one that you have always been. Your friendship means a lot, especially during such a difficult time. Do not be afraid to touch--you cannot contract AIDS by holding hands or hugging. Cry with your friend, and laugh with them as well. Talk about the future--hope is important. Whenever you promise to do anything for your friend, keep your promise.

Try and be considerate of your friend's need to deal with AIDS on his or her own terms. Call before you visit--your friend may not want a visitor that day, but if not, do not be afraid to call back another time, your friend might be lonely or frightened and need you. Do not be reluctant to talk about the disease--your friend may need to talk--just ask, "Do you feel like talking about it?" Remember that it is O.K. just to sit and say nothing.

Involve your friend in decision making. AIDS takes away a lot of control in people's lives, you can give some back no matter how small or silly the decision seems. Be prepared for your friend

to get angry for no apparent reason and do not take it personally. Don't get angry if your friend is handling the illness in a way you think is inappropriate, after all, it is their life, and they may not be at a stage where you think that they should be.

Be creative by bringing books, periodicals, music, or even homemade cookies. You can bring an old friend who has not been to visit yet. Help your friend celebrate the holidays.

Help your friend's lover, care-partner or roommate--they suffer as well and need a break, or just someone to talk to. Let them know about the support groups for them. Take your friend for a walk or an outing, but ask about and be aware of their limitations. You can offer to drive your friend somewhere--the clinic, the store, the bank or to a movie. Offer to bring over a favourite dish, and bring it in disposable dishes so there is no worry about having to wash dishes afterwards. You can also offer to help with any correspondence your friend may be having difficulty with, or call and ask for a shopping list, and make a special delivery. Ask before you do anything, though, there are still lots of things your friend can do, let them do those things.

Help your friend feel good about their looks. If your friend's appearance changes, do not ignore it--be realistic, be gentle, and above all, do not lie.

Do not let your friend blame himself or herself for their illness. Do not confuse acceptance of illness with defeat. Your friend's acceptance may give them a whole new feeling of power.

Remember that friends and lovers are family--demonstrate this by being a loving family member.

Bring in a positive attitude--it's contagious.

These ideas come from a brochure which is available from the Gay Men's Health Crisis, 254 W 18th Street, P.O. Box 274, New York, NY 10011

Next GALA Meeting: Tuesday, January 30, at 8:00 pm in Room 203 of the SUB. We will be watching Torch Song Trilogy (starring Matthew Broderick!)

THE WOMAN'S ROOM

OUR CHOICE

by Alexandra Fremont

Sitting in the rocking chair with my two month old niece nestled in my arms, my sister spoke six words to me that I will never forget: "The test was positive, you're pregnant". A few hours earlier I had asked her to have a urine sample tested at Birthright where she was a part-time volunteer.

My first reaction was a feeling of numbness, except for my arms which tightened their grip on my niece bringing her closer to my face so that I might kiss atop her head. A myriad of emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, loneliness, and despair seized my body. I felt all these emotions separately, but simultaneously I felt tremendous happiness. I don't recall ever having experienced such utter confusion before that moment.

It was mid-April, I was two weeks pregnant - and nine months seemed very faraway. Yet I had a decision to make in the next few weeks which would not only alter my life nine months from now, but forever.

I did not perceive my situation at that time as being entirely favourable for bringing a new life into the world. I had just returned to university the September past after a seven year hiatus, and was enjoying it tremendously. I had no financial means of supporting a child. I was only twenty--six years old, and living a thousand miles from my family. I was single. There was no way I could have this baby!

The next three months were sheer agony. I spoke with anyone who would listen, and telephoned my mother at least once a week. One day I was delighted at the prospect of becoming a mother, the next day I would cry all day at the very thought of it. I did not want to have to make this decision - if only someone else could make the choice for me. Indeed, I continually asked people to tell me what to do.

I will never forget the day that I made my choice. It was a hot, sunny, Sunday in July. I was sitting under a huge elm tree talking to a friend about my dilemma. He told me that whatever decision I made, it would have to be mine - and only mine. If I chose to have this child I would have to raise him or her alone, without a father. If I chose to end the pregnancy, I would have to live with the consequences of that decision alone, as well. He also told me

that he thought having an abortion was the best solution for everybody concerned.

I had a choice to make. I HAD THE CHOICE TO MAKE! If I decided to have this baby, I would be on my own. The reality of single parenthood is that once a baby is born, the parent is alone with this child. Once the "Operation Rescue" people have rescued the fetus, they are rarely heard from again. Birthright cares for the pregnant woman; ensures her shelter; provides the new family with clothing and furnishings; lends her an ear when needed; but, ultimately, sends her off with only a reassuring pat on the back.

Governments in our society do very little to aid single parents. Too many single parent families must receive Social Assistance. Even when a young mother obtains adequate employment, child care costs are exorbitant, and the quality of care received often leaves much to be desired. The government will only subsidize child care if your child is placed in a registered facility - there are four such facilities in Fredericton that take children under the age of two years - and there are waiting lists.

When a single parent decides to pursue an education to better his/her chances of employment, a battle is ensured. Single parents do not receive higher loans/bursaries to allow for additional expenses. Income Assistance does not contribute towards your income unless you are already a client - that means that if you have been on unemployment for eleven months, you would be ineligible for Income Assistance while attending an educational facility.

Therefore, when making her decision whether or not to continue a pregnancy, a woman must adequately reflect on all the possible scenarios for her and her child's life. I choose not to address the issue of adoption here, as for many women the question is: Do I abort, or do I have and keep, this child? Given the reasons provided and more, a woman must be able to make her own choice regarding abortion. She is the one who must live with the consequences, nobody else.

For me, my son was born thirteen months ago. I made my choice and have never regretted it. Sacrifices have and will be made because of my choice; however THE CHOICE WAS MINE!

CHANGING YOUR NAME

The most common situation in which a name change occurs is in the event of marriage. In most cases the bride will assume the groom's surname. However, there are other situations in which a person might wish to have their name changed.

It is legally possible to have your name changed, for whatever reason, as long as you are over the age of 19 years. If you are younger than 19 years old, you may change your name with your parent's consent. However, if you are being married, these age requirements do not apply. If you are old enough to get married, you are old enough to change your name.

MUST YOU CHANGE YOUR NAME WHEN YOU MARRY?

No. Although it is common to do so, there is no requirement that a woman assume her husband's surname when they are married. In New Brunswick, the Change of Name Act provides several options for choosing the surname that is to be used after marriage. These choices include the following:

(a) you may retain the surname you have been using immediately prior to marriage. This may be your maiden name, or a surname from a previous marriage. It should be noted that there is no legal requirement that a husband and wife use the same last name. It is now widely accepted in our society that a woman may

wish to retain her maiden name.

(b) you may assume the name of your spouse. Usually this means that the bride will assume her new husband's name. The reverse is also possible, but quite rare. It is interesting to note, however, that there have been several cases reported in New Brunswick where the groom assumed the bride's family name.

(c) you may create a combination surname from the names of both spouses. This name may contain only two parts and is joined with a hyphen.

(d) you may wish to revert to your original surname.

WHOSE SURNAME DO THE CHILDREN TAKE?

Children born within a marriage may be given the mother's surname, the father's surname, or a hyphenated surname composed of the names of both parents. There is no legal requirement that a child take the father's name, although it is common to do so. If the parents are not married when the child is born, the father must give permission before the child may be given his name.

WHAT ABOUT WHEN A CHILD IS ADOPTED?

When a child is adopted, he or she will be given the surname of the adopting parent(s). The child's previous surname is then erased by sealing those records and replacing them with the records of adoption, which will contain

the new name. This is all done when the court issues the adoption order.

CAN I CHANGE MY FIRST NAME OR "GIVEN NAME"?

Yes, this is possible and much less complicated than having your surname changed. Requests are rarely refused, except when a change of name would cause confusion, for example, if you wanted to take the name of a very famous person.

DO I NEED TO GIVE REASONS FOR WANTING TO CHANGE MY NAME?

No, although you can expect to be asked when you make your application. Most reasons, whatever they may be, are considered valid. However, if it appears that you are changing your name for a fraudulent purpose, your request may be refused.

HOW DO I GO ABOUT HAVING MY NAME CHANGED?

In order to get your name changed, you must apply to the Bureau of Vital Statistics/Department of Health and Community Services. They have prepared information kits which explain the process you must go through. Fees vary, depending on the type of name change you require.

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