

Revealing His Scars Needn't Be a Heavy Matter

DEAR MS. BEHAVIOR:

I'm a 41-year-old gay man who used to weigh nearly 400 lbs—not an easy way to live within gay male culture—and now I weigh 198. I lost it naturally (without gastric bypass), but after the huge weight loss, I was left with extra hanging skin. I had to have several cosmetic surgeries, including a tummy tuck and procedures to remove extra skin from my arms, my thighs, and even my face. After years of solitary misery, I am finally interested in having a relationship.

However, I'm scared and need advice. If I'm out on a date and it's going well, should I warn him about my scars (across my middle, under my nipples, on my arms, thighs, and behind my ears) before taking my shirt off? How about my pants? My friends say I should, but won't that just put the guy off?

—Former Fatty

DEAR FORMER FATTY:

There's no need to waste your date's perfectly good boner by issuing a warning about your scars. And if you're thinking you should preempt the action with a confession even earlier, think again. If you mention your surgery over dinner, you're risking pre-empting your impending frottage by frightening your date into envisioning something far more dramatic than what you actually have.



MS.
BEHAVIOR

Granted, if you had something communicable, you'd need to share the information before getting naked. Your scars, however, are your own. Your date may notice them, but he's unlikely to either catch them or to freak out.

By the time a human is in his or her 40s, a lot has happened to the body. Your case may be more extreme than most, but despite what the perfect-looking actors on *Desperate Housewives* would have you believe, most people your age have begun to experience their share of bruises, breaks, illnesses, surgeries, and general physical distress—if not warts and herpes—or the effects of emotional battle scars, like having endured numerous break-ups and deaths.

Wow. This is beginning to sound grim—but it's not. The point is that while shallow people do populate the universe, you're not seeking a shallow person for a relationship. You're seeking someone who isn't all about perfect pecs and glutes of steel.

Ms. Behavior doesn't mean to sound all Mary Poppins about it, but the truth is that

someone will love you for your scars and for your former-flabby essence. You used your immense strength of character to lose all that weight and change your life; that says something really important about who you are. Now it's just a matter of skimming through the fat (in the dating world), to find that person.

DEAR MS. BEHAVIOR:

Six months ago, my friend Sally was dumped by her partner of 20 years, Joy. Sally has been a total sloppy mess, crying in my living room everyday.

The worst part is that Joy left Sally for another friend of ours (Monica), who left her girlfriend, too. However, 20 years is a long time; now Joy is coming back around to try to patch things up with Sally, and Sally is willing to take her back. It's good to see Sally smile, but it's sad that she's so easily won back by Joy the Cheater. Sally has made only one demand of Joy, which is that she stop seeing Monica immediately.

All seemed okay until yesterday, when I got a phone call from Monica, who is distraught that Joy is going back to Sally. In a moment of panic and sorrow, Monica told me that she and Joy still see each other once a week and have sex. I don't know what to do with the information.

Monica probably wants me to tell Sally, so that Sally will end her reunion with Joy, and come back to her (Monica). Should I tell Sally? Should I keep it to myself? Help!

—Confused

DEAR CONFUSED:

You and your gaggle of friends don't do much to contradict the notion of Lesbian Drama, do you?

Ms. Behavior normally advises her readers to stay far away from these domestic disputes, and to avoid, at all costs, being a snitch. However, your allegiance in this instance is so clearly to Sally that it seems you really must inform her, regardless of the consequences. Not telling your very close friend this news would be a far bigger betrayal (and risk to your friendship) than telling her. She may, of course, be upset with you—they don't call it "killing the messenger" for nothing—but hopefully she'll ultimately view your gesture as protective.

More advice: See if you can find a stable friend or two, who don't engage in the high art of dyke drama. **JO**

MERYL COHN is the author of *Do What I Say: Ms. Behavior's Guide to Gay and Lesbian Etiquette*. Signed copies are available directly from the author. Send questions or correspondence to msbehavior@aol.com.

OUTREACH

»AIDS & HIV

CAREAssist pays for health insurance premiums, prescription drugs and insurance plan co-payments and deductibles for eligible people with HIV/AIDS. Program of the Oregon Department of Human Services and the Ryan White CARE Act. (8 am-5 pm Monday-Friday. 503-731-4029 or 800-805-2313. www.healthoregon.org.)

CASCADE AIDS PROJECT (CAP) educates youth and adults about HIV prevention, supports people with HIV and their families and advocates for sound HIV policy and legislation on the national, state and local levels. Spanish-language assistance available. (Suite 300, 620 SW Fifth Ave. 503-223-5907. Oregon AIDS Hotline 800-777-2437.)

CITYGUYS hosts monthly HIV testing nights at The Escape and Steam; provides free risk reduction counseling, condoms and lube; and offers free rapid HIV testing and STD screening at the Men's Wellness Center (5-9pm Tuesdays and 11am-2pm Wednesdays for HIV/STD and 5-9pm Saturdays for HIV only). 928 SW Stark St., 503-445-7699. cityguys@cascadeaids.org

CLACKAMAS COUNTY COMMUNITY HEALTH IN OREGON CITY offers anonymous and confidential HIV testing and counseling for gay and bisexual men. No needles! Free condoms! Call for appointment or walk-in testing times. (3:30-6:30 pm Tuesday. 1425 Beavercreek Road. Clinic: 503-655-8471. Information: 503-742-5382.)

CLARK COUNTY offers free rapid HIV testing and hepatitis A and B vaccinations to men who have sex with men in Vancouver, Wash. (5-6:30 pm Thursday. 3701 E Fourth Plain Blvd. 360-397-8098.)

COLUMBIA COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH offers anonymous and confidential HIV testing, counseling and case management to anyone. Se habla español. We lend HIV books and videos and offer educational materials and free condoms. (503-397-4651 or 800-244-4870.)

DAILY BREAD EXPRESS provides home delivery of high-quality meals to HIV-positive individuals in need. Fresh meals delivered weekdays, frozen meals for weekends. Volunteers invited to inquire anytime. (Mara 503-460-3822.)

ESTHER'S PANTRY in Milwaukie provides food and personal care items to people with HIV/AIDS. Call to donate or for services. (503-349-4699. www.ourhouseofportland.org/programs/estherspantry.)

FUZEON INFORMATION GROUP welcomes people contemplating, using or caregiving for Fuzeon recipients. Facilitated by experienced patients, nurses and social workers. (5:30-7 pm second Wednesday. 5525 SE Milwaukie Ave. RSVP to Julia 503-230-1202, ext. 235. www.ohsu.edu/partnership/fuzeon.html)

HEALTH, EDUCATION, AIDS LIAISON (HEAL) offers information about alternative views of AIDS causation and HIV testing. Call for a free packet of information. (503-227-2339. bwport@comcast.net.)

MULTNOMAH COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT'S HIV COMMUNITY TEST SITE offers confidential testing by

appointment with or without your name. Some walk-in testing. Sliding-scale fee. Se habla español; other interpretation by appointment. (9 am-4:45 pm Monday-Friday except 11:00-4:45 pm Wednesday. 426 SW Stark St., Sixth Floor. 503-988-3775.)

HIV DAY CENTER offers hot meals, counseling, laundry facilities, clothing, showers and hygiene supplies, computers with Internet access, phones, mail drop, recreational activities, massage and haircuts. We are in need of volunteers to work in the kitchen, meal delivery drivers, massage therapists and folks to help cook lunch to clients on Fridays. Feel free to call Mara at 503-460-3822. (9 am-3 pm Monday-Friday. 2941 NE Ainsworth St. 503-460-3822.)

THE LINK, a social networking group for HIV-positive gay and bi men, meets the second and fourth Wednesday of every month for social events, discussions and other outings. (928 SW Stark St. 503-223-6339, ext. 555. thelink@cascadeaids.org.)

MANIFEST (formerly Q-LAND), a nonprofit men's wellness community, prevents and addresses HIV and STDs by empowering men to pursue their wellness passions together through programs like yoga, cycling, hiking, meditation, healing touch classes, vision teams, wellness coaching, information and referrals. (503-223-8822, ext. 1. www.manifestpdx.org.)

MULTNOMAH COUNTY OFFERS FREE HIV RAPID TESTING to gay, bi and trans guys in NE Portland. Se habla español. (5-7:15 pm Tuesday. 5329 NE Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. 503-988-3030.)

OHSU HIV CLINIC provides comprehensive health care for people living with HIV/AIDS. Services include HIV specialty care, psychiatry, counseling, addiction treatment (including buprenorphine/suboxone), case management, same-day visits and online chart access. Appointments are available regardless of insurance. (503-494-8562.)

OUR HOUSE OF PORTLAND provides Oregon and southwest Washington's only network of integrated health and housing services for people with HIV/AIDS. Programs include Our House (24-hour residential care), Neighborhood Housing and Care, Community Services and Swan House. To volunteer, contact Kathryn Siebert. (503-234-0175. www.ourhouseofportland.org.)

PARTNERSHIP PROJECT provides services to people with HIV/AIDS, their families and those at risk. Programs include HIV Case Management; Supporting Healthy Options for Prevention (SHOP), behavior change counseling to motivate people to protect themselves and their partners; and ALL ABOUT HIV, providing basic information for people living with HIV/AIDS. Se habla español. (Intake Line: 503-517-3590. SHOP: Laura or Kurt 503-230-1202 or 877-795-7700. ALL ABOUT HIV: 503-230-1202. Positive Living: Julia 503-230-1202, ext. 235. www.ohsu.edu/partnership.)

PORTLAND AREA HIV SERVICES PLANNING COUNCIL is a county decision-making body that identifies services needed for people living with HIV/AIDS and allocates federal funds annually in a six-county area. Need volunteers from all walks of life. (20 NE 10th Ave., Second Floor. 3653 SE 34th Ave. 503-988-3030, ext. 25703. www.hivportland.org.)

POSITIVE DIRECTION SERIES offers life skill workshops to people living with HIV/AIDS at Cascade AIDS Project. Topics include employment, parenting, health, women's self-image and sexuality, budgeting and tenant education. (Shyle Ruder 503-223-5907, ext. 202. www.cascadeaids.org.)

POSITIVE LIVING SERIES is a seven-week self-management series for people living with HIV/AIDS designed to assist you in taking care of your illness, give you skills to carry out normal daily activities and provide you with the tools to manage emotional changes. (Julia 503-230-1202, ext. 235. www.ohsu.edu/partnership/fuzeon.html.)

TALK is a five-week program for people living with HIV designed to reduce stress around talking about your HIV status and negotiating safer sex. New sessions start monthly. (Josh 503-223-5907. jferre@cascadeaids.org.)

QUEST CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE HEALTH offers conventional and alternative health care, nutrition classes, support groups and recreational sports activities for people seeking a wellness focus to living and dying, especially those living with HIV/AIDS or cancer. (2901 E Burnside St., 503-238-5203. info@quest-center.org.)

THE RESEARCH & EDUCATION GROUP provides access to HIV/AIDS research trials of new drugs and therapies for people in Oregon and southwest Washington. (2311 NW Northrup St. #105. 503-229-8428.)

THE RISK REDUCTION ZONE, a program of Outside In, provides a queer safe space that offers HIV, hepatitis C and STD prevention programs; Internet resources; peer counseling; referrals; and support groups in a nonclinical setting. (1030 SW 13th Ave. 503-535-3895.)

SELF-INJECTION MEDICATION SUPPORT GROUP provides a monthly education and support group for people taking any medication that requires self injection (Fuzeon, Insulin, Interferon, Vitamin B12, Testosterone) or those who are considering taking those medications. Providers, care givers and support people are also welcome. Group meets the fourth Tuesday of the month from 1-2:30 p.m. at Our House at 2727 SE Alder St., Portland, OR 97214. (For information or to RSVP contact Julie Graven, RN Partnership Project Nurse Case Manager at 503-720-6939 or 503-413-6389 www.ohsu.edu/partnership.)

SOCIAL AND SUPPORT GROUP discusses HIV issues for men at Quest Center. Meet other nice guys, share information and have fun. (7-8 pm Tuesdays. 2901 E Burnside St., contact Arthur at 503-290-9389.)

SWAN HOUSE is a specialized adult foster care home for low-income people with HIV/AIDS who need assistance with personal care, mobility, medications or drug/alcohol/mental health support. (Business: 503-786-4829. Volunteers: 503-234-0175. www.ourhouseofportland.org/programs/swanhouse.)

TOD'S CORNER in Milwaukie provides clothing, household items, companion pet care, cremations and more to people with HIV/AIDS. Call to donate or for services. (503-349-4699. www.ourhouseofportland.org/programs/todscorner.)

WASHINGTON COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT offers low-cost HIV testing at community health clinics for guys who have sex with other guys. No appointment needed. Results in 20 minutes. Se habla español. (Beaverton: 5:30-7:30 pm Monday. 12550 SW Second St. Hillsboro: 4-5:30 pm Tuesday and 9-11 am Friday. 266 W Main St.)

»COMMUNITY General

BABBLE-ON TOASTMASTERS meets at Red Coach Restaurant to develop communications and leadership skills, including prepared speeches, impromptu speaking and running effective meetings. (4-5:30 pm Sunday. 615 SW Broadway. 503-330-2706. www.babble-onfm.org.)

BISEXUAL COMMUNITY FORUM is a space to meet people and freely discuss issues relevant to the bi community at Red and Black Cafe. Everyone is welcome. (7:30 pm first Monday. 400 SE 12th Ave. Laury 503-285-4848.)

DEAF & HEARING OUT REACH (DHOR) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to building community among deaf and hearing queers and allies. Visit our Web site for programs, services, events and community resources. (dhordpx@gmail.com. dhordpx.blogspot.com.)

DOUBLE RAINBOW FOUNDATION is available to help all queer parents who co-conceive children to be treated equally. We believe, regardless of gender, two adults in committed relationships who agree to co-create children should be given the same rights as heterosexual couples. (www.myspace.com/doublerainbowfoundation.)

ELDER RESOURCE ALLIANCE is a coalition of organizations and individuals working to enhance the lives of older members of the sexual minorities community through education, advocacy, outreach and resource development. Activities include sensitivity trainings, creating social change, recreational activities, information and assistance. (3:30-4:30 pm first Wednesday. Friendly House Community Center. 1737 NW 26th Ave. Rachel 503-224-2640. eracoordinator@yahoo.com.)

EQUITY FOUNDATION is a nonprofit organization founded by gays and lesbians to build communities that embrace the dignity and worth of all people. Equity has distributed more than \$3 million in grants and scholarships throughout Oregon. (503-231-5759. www.equityfoundation.org.)

FIFTY+ LESBIAN SOCIAL GROUP meets the third Saturday of each month (4-7pm). For additional information call 503.642.3360 or 971.216.1173 or email sutaytig@aol.com.

GETTING BI PDX is a women's group that meets for discussion, coffee and planning social events. (www.gettingbiipdx.com.)

KBOO-FM's Out Loud queer news and public affairs show, featuring local guests and announcements, airs second and

continued on page 42