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Savage Love

WORDS OF PURE WISDOM by Dan Savage



I'm a 47-year-old man and my wife is 49. We got married four years ago. Two days ago, she came back from the doctor and told me she has genital herpes. I am floored. She said she just found out. She said she must have contracted it years ago and never had an outbreak until 10 days ago. She has been to the doctor countless times over the last 20 years. I don't know what to think. Is it really possible she didn't know?

I know she needs me to be a loving husband now, but it's hard when I can't believe she just found out about this. If she knew about it and lied to me, my trust is destroyed. Also, how can our marriage survive when I can't bring myself to have sex with her? What do you think?

Marriage In Serious Trouble

I think you're being a douche, MIST.

But, hey, everyone's entitled to a little douchebaggery now and then. The wife's got a sexually transmitted infection—that's upsetting and you're freaked. Understandable. You're also overreacting and misinformed, MIST, and continued douchebaggery on your part may end your marriage. So let's set down the douchebag and start getting informed, okay?

"His wife could have been exposed to the herpes virus decades ago," says Karen J. Pataky, a nurse practitioner and clinician at Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington. Which means it's possible that your wife didn't know, MIST—believe it. Why would she suddenly have an outbreak? "Her immune system could have kept it contained all this time," says Pataky. "As we near 50, our immune systems become a little less competent to deal with certain things."

As for all those trips to the doctor? "None of the medical situations that MIST describes would lead a physician to check for herpes antibodies; she would not know through routine blood tests, either." (MIST included some details about his wife's medical history that I shared with Pataky.)

And guess what, MIST? If your wife could have been infected for years without knowing, then you could have been infected for years without knowing. Pataky connects the suppurating dots: "It's possible that he is the one who infected her and he has not had an outbreak. Or he had a small outbreak and it went away quickly and he didn't think twice about it."

So what do you do now?

"He can get a blood test if he wants to know if he has antibodies to herpes," says Pataky. She adds that the presence of antibodies only indicates that you've been exposed, not whether you will develop symptoms. If it turns out that you're not already exposed, MIST, you can use condoms at all times to protect yourself—but condoms don't provide 100 percent protection against herpes. So why not do the decent, loving thing and just assume you're already infected and refuse to let a piddling thing like herpes destroy your marriage?

"Cancer, HIV, heart attacks—that's horrible news," says Pataky. "This is not horrible news. Herpes is not something to ruin a marriage over, medically speaking. It's never life threatening and it's possible to go years without any outbreaks."

So, MIST, do you love your wife more than you fear a relatively mild STI that you've probably already been exposed to and may have exposed your wife to in the first place? If the answer to that question isn't "yes," MIST, you're a bigger douche than I thought.

I'm dating again after taking a break due to a spate of bad relationships. Four weeks ago, I met a guy I felt a genuine interest in and he let things develop. Then he told me that he would be moving to Las Vegas at the end of July, but wanted to date until he left. With Pride Weekend coming up and plenty of opportunities to find someone who may actually be living in Seattle for more than a few weeks, I declined. After bouncing back, I met someone even more wonderful. We share this electricity and he's someone I could see myself with long-term. Then he tells me that he, too, is moving at the end of the month! Am I the goodbye committee for the gay scene in Seattle? Any wise words to help a lost little 'mo?

Left Behind

Yeah, LB: Stop whining. In four weeks, you've met two guys you could see yourself with long-term. There are fags out there having a hard time meeting guys they can see themselves with through happy hour. Keep going out, keep meeting guys, and, again, stop whining.

Oh, and speaking of lost little 'mos...

Tyler Whitney is an up-and-coming conservative activist. Just 18 years old, Whitney is working for the GOP's most rabidly antigay presidential candidate, Tom Tancredo, as webmaster; he heads up a rabidly antigay political group on his college campus; and he carried a "Go Back in the Closet!" sign at an antigay protest. Which is odd, since Whitney is gay and has recently been outed.

Well, not so much outed. Whitney had begun quietly coming out to a few friends—presumably his more tolerant right-wing buddies—when Between the Lines, a gay paper in Michigan where Whitney goes to college, decided to hurry Whitney's coming-out process along.

Predictably, conservatives are rallying around their pet self-hating homo. Bay Buchanan, senior adviser to Tancredo, says Whitney's "sexual preference is a personal matter" and that it should have "nothing to do with the campaign."

Sorry, Bay, but gay-bashing thugs—people like you, your horrible brother Pat, your vile candidate—can't have it both ways. If Whitney's sexual preference is a personal matter, then so is mine. If Whitney's sexual preference shouldn't have anything to do with the campaign, then neither should mine—nor should the sexual preference of any other American. So long as the GOP insists on attacking gay and lesbian Americans, Whitney's sexual orientation—to say nothing of his hypocrisy—is relevant to a debate that the GOP started.

Some stupid homos, of course, are saying that we should feel compassion for poor Tyler Whitney. Oh, he's just a kid, too young to be outed, have a little sympathy, blah blah blah.

Uh... nope.

Someone who's 18 and gay is old enough to drive, join the army, vote, and come out. Someone who's 18 and gay and not ready to come out is old enough to know better than to march with assholes carrying "Straight Power" signs at antigay rallies. And someone who's 18 and gay and politically active, as Whitney is, is politically savvy enough to know that working for antigay politicians makes him a prime outing candidate.

I say this as someone who doesn't support outing in all instances. Hell, I recently talked someone out of outing a public figure. A Savage Love reader was contemplating outing an innocuous celeb back in April. I advised him against it because, as I wrote to him privately, outing is brutal and it should be reserved for brutes. Whitney more than qualifies.

Want to feel sorry for someone? Feel sorry for Sean William Kennedy, a 20-year-old gay man who was beaten to death outside a bar in South Carolina. If Kennedy was old enough to die at the hands of a thug who, without a doubt, votes for the same assholes Whitney does, then Whitney is old enough to be outed.

Thanks to Karen J. Pataky of Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington for the excellent advice. When was the last time you donated to Planned Parenthood? Give now at www.ppmw.org.

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