# A Bum Rap

June 1, 1999 By Dominic Hamilton-Little

In certain circles it is almost fashionable to have HIV—the red badge of conspicuous consummation. Yet other STDs are rarely discussed—even crabs are good for a laugh only *after* a disinfected measure of time. But nothing is so wrapped in sepulchral silence as rectal warts. Upon discovering that I was writing about my own, a friend exclaimed, “You’re disclosing that in print? How…vivid!”

Though indeed vivid, rectal warts won’t kill you. And I’d posit that our collective horror is based on how they illustrate a negative ramification of the sex that gay men enjoy. Plus, whilst in bloom, they make anal intercourse a titch problematic. Intra-anal warts are predominantly in those who receive, and are a strain of human papilloma virus (HPV) different from perianal (around the rim) warts, which can occur among those who haven’t had the pleasure of anal amour. Though they don’t always cause discomfort, they are contagious and associated with the development of dysplasias and squamous cell carcinomas… yeah, that would be cancer.

After testing positive, I had unprotected sex with other positive guys. In 1993, I thought that though I might soon be dead, at least I could enjoy natural sex again. Or so I rationalized. In short order I got herpes, syphilis and rectal warts. Two pills a day keep the herp at bay, potent antibiotics cured me of the syph, but the warts won’t wane.

Upon noticing the polyps peppering my nether lip, I twirled off to my gay physician, who squeamishly declared, “This is a job for a proctologist!” Enter Dr. Coldfinger, straight from central casting. After gleefully thrusting an icy metal dilator into my caboose, he informed me of more warts inside my love canal and swabbed the lot with acid. I endured three further visits, each time departing with an itchy kitty and no change in the parasite population.

The emotional distress caused by these sexually communicable microcauliflowers left me feeling more damaged than HIV ever has. Asymptomatic HIV envelops one in a glamorously macabre, Lady of the Camellias aureola. Fabulously fatal—but when? Warts, on the other hand, are disfiguring, contagious bumps you can see, touch and feel. To endure this damage at the core of my sexual pleasure zone bruised me psychically as I can only imagine KS lesions would.

Next stop, laser surgery. I thought it would be more final and (foolish me) less painful than the other option: liquid nitrogen cryotherapy. It wasn’t until the anesthesia wore off that I felt the pain. I popped tons of Tylenol, but nothing prepared me for the surreal agony of my first post-op bowel movement. Preternaturally shrill screams filled my flat as I nearly fell off the loo with tears

streaming down my face and blood down my legs. To survive this, I'd have to live on prescription painkillers and an all-fiber diet. Contemplating life from a sitz bath, I was relieved that at least the doctor removed the warts while redesigning my rectum.

Four sex-free months later, healed enough to be reveling in a delicious soiree of anal sex, I felt something familiar just inside my euphemism. This pain, though purely mental, smirched an otherwise pleasant interlude. Later, alone, with all the ennui of the soiled jade, I paraphrased King Henry II: Will no one rid me of this meddlesome condyloma?

Three years passed before I mustered the courage to submit to further treatment. Incapable of celibacy for too long, I was pleased to enter a relationship in which I remained strictly insertive, and since the HPV was currently only intra-anal, I was not compelled to explain away any unsightly growths.

Anal surgery No. 2 was performed by a far gentler doctor, who left a smaller wound. He gave me a stool softener with the painkillers, along with the Chernobyl of antibiotics, Flagyl, to help the healing. Flagyl's violent side effects took my mind off my wounded bum; the explosive diarrhea was actually welcome.

Six months later, my rosebud is still tender. I *hope* that this surgery has finally excised my friends. However, I can't look at an unsheathed cock quite the same way. With asymptomatic HIV as elusive as it can be, reinfection resembles random data in some conference abstract. But anal warts are too tangible to ignore and the strongest argument I've yet discovered for playing safe. Besides, "Hey, let's talk about rectal warts!" isn't exactly cocktail chatter.

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