AIDS Sweeps Week

HIV comes to daytime TV for Day of Compassion

June 1, 1995 By Casey Davidson

Sex, murder, evil twins, lust, adultery, amnesia. Now that's a soap opera. But AIDS isn't. Soaps don't portray real-life trauma well, but the shows will all be trying hard for the third annual Day of Compassion on June 21.

This is the day everyone from fictional Port Wherever does something AIDS-related.

The idea is to bring AIDS awareness to people who are faithful to daytime television, including viewers who tune into all the sick, syndicated romps through our own trashy collective conscience (Richard Bey, Geraldo, Leeza, you know). Can't wait for that Jenny Jones? style compassion!

General Hospital -- with all its randy characters (well, anyone air-kissing is suspect now that I'm single) -- is going beyond the Day of Compassion with AIDS. In May, cute boy Stone, who is supposed to be 18 (played by the 24-year-old Michael Sutton), tested HIV positive. He and girlfriend Robin, whose character is 16 (Kimberly McCullough, 17 and an eight-year veteran of the show), will follow a path through illness that the show's publicist promises will not be sugarcoated.

Originally, GH set up the storyline with safer sex scenes. "We've shown teenagers pulling condoms out of their back pockets in a car, laughing," says ABC's Scott Barton.

Then the plot thickens. "In April, Robin and Stone [had] unprotected sex for the only time," says Barton. (The two have been dating for nearly a year.) "She is on the pill. Five years ago he had an HIV test because a former girlfriend of his who was a guttersnipe was found dead of a drug overdose." He had tested negative.

Stay tuned. "We'll play it out on a daily basis," assures Barton. "In real time."

The AIDS story runs during the summer when kids are out of school, but is also structured to include sweeps -- when TV ratings (and rates the networks can charge for ads) are determined -- in May and November. It's educational and sensational. And, while GH should be commended for taking on such a tough subject, we'll be watching to see how the storyline is treated. They've promised to handle the story sensitively and make the situation as realistic as possible, but the soaps, where most characters are plainly heroes, villains or victims, are usually better at painting things black and white than at illuminating all the grays of reality. Even overdosing guttersnipes

deserve compassion.

Little Souls Inc., a fancy doll company that makes one-of-a-kind, expensive ($250) dolls found in such notable collections as Demi Moore's, has just launched a new line of AIDS dolls called Ribbon Kids that will be sold to benefit the Children's Hope Foundation, a New York City kids-with-AIDS charity. The dollmakers managed to inspire a load of top designers to create a look for the dolls. They sent the basic doll in her bathrobe to people such as Todd Oldham, who dressed her in his current collection and painted her fingernails, and Betsey Johnson, who pierced the doll's nose to create a mod look for the Ribbon Kids (and get them runway modeling work).

Now that they're all dolled up, look for them on sale at specialty doll stores.

Once de rigueur at the Oscars, this year's March telecast broadcast to more than a billion people the notion that red ribbons don't mean much anymore. Of the nearly 100 people who graced the stage only 12 wore ribbons, and only four were stars: Sharon Stone, Jamie Lee Curtis, Andie MacDowell and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Maybe Hollywood thinks the ribbons are just "so five minutes ago." Or maybe it's in response to all the ribbon-bashing that's gone on (in POZ and elsewhere).

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