How Do You Really Feel?

Elizabeth Taylor’s bravura; President Clinton’s shame

December 1, 1994 By Bruce Bibby

“It’s homophobic!” cried Elizabeth Taylor, talking about how this country isn’t taking AIDS seriously. "I mean, the kind of attitude that still exists is, if it’s heterosexual AIDS, it’s got to be from IV drug users or anal sex. It can’t just be plain old missionary mums and dads, which is *bullshit*!"

Not long ago, I was assigned to interview Taylor, the ballsy queen mother of Hollywood, about her zillion-dollar perfume business. But Elizabeth, being the red-blooded goddess she is, helped turn our chat into a discussion about sex, which, via a discourse on homosexual politics, progressed to a frank talk about AIDS. "Men don’t stop and *think*,“ she continued, ”that a woman menstruates once a *month*. That it’s an *open passage*."

Speaking of open passages, my slack-jawed mouth had been just that for the past hour or so, which was putting the star’s all-white Bel Air living room in danger of unsightly stains. Taylor, 60ush, is still breathtakingly alluring (even with her ever-fluctuating dozen pounds or so), and despite the seriousness of our talk, I could hardly concentrate. Can you imagine? Try a simple conversation -- not to mention a discussion on the politics of butt-ramming -- with the world’s most famous beauty, the world’s most famous living *person* really, and see if *your* saliva doesn’t drip a little. But Elizabeth (as she asked me to call her) was about to spill some juicy dish so I composed myself.

To show how dismal some people’s AIDS awareness is, she continued: "A straight, *intellectual* guy came to me and said, “Elizabeth, you are the expert on AIDS. I know that AIDS can be transmitted heterosexually, but it’s just through the rectum, isn’t it?”

Here Taylor stopped and let forth her trademark cackle. She milked the moment with sardonic laughter before revealing her response to the preposterous question.

"I said, ’You *asshole*! No, the vaginal juices, *dear*!’"

As far as facing up to AIDS and all its fetid baggage goes, a lot of those assholes are still around. And some of them are as celebrated as Taylor herself. Take President Clinton. Director Jonathan Demme, accepting an award from the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) for

his film *Philadelphia*, recalled that when the President gave a private screening of the AIDS flick, he got up to leave just as the film's stars Tom Hanks and Antonio Banderas embraced onscreen.

Demme described how Clinton later gave him a detailed tour of the White House. "Never once," said Demme, "not even *once* did the President mention my movie." After the GLAAD awards, Hanks, if a bit reluctant, told me that he agreed with Demme that it wasn't Clinton's finest hour. No kidding. Does Clinton (and his ilk) think that gays and lesbians and all their funky glory are going to go away just because he leaves the movie theater?

When I did an interview with Cindy Adams, the venerable, vampy New York City gossip columnist, who's about the furthest thing from a lesbian I can imagine (although she does have a fair amount of glory), she was chirping on about her husband, her jewels, her Cadillac and her disdain for Hollywood when I popped the A-word. She looked at me as if I had asked what her real hair color was. Startled silence. Then, haltingly, she gave what was probably an honest answer: "I don't understand anything about it."

She's a fucking syndicated columnist! Gossip or not, shouldn't she make an effort to know something about it?

Elizabeth Taylor sure took the time. "After the '60s and promiscuous '70s," she says, "the attitude toward sex now is so archaic. And until we can get rid of the stigma of sex and gay sex, I don't think people are going to pay attention and take precaution. It's scary as hell."

What would be scarier -- for the Secret Service, at least -- is if Jonathan Demme had told me about his White House encounter before I chatted with the President in Beverly Hills last year. It was a Hollywood cocktail fundraiser attended by the creamiest of celluloid liberals. Warren, Annette, Whoopi. Everybody was in a do-good political mood. (You can tell because everyone was wearing pants.)

But when it came time for my audience with Chief No. 42, all he wanted to say to me was how important it is "not to teach our children violence through the movies."

He was whisked away by walkie-talkie gorillas before I could ask Clinton how we're supposed to temper this generation's bashing of gays and HIV positive anybodies (even though I know I'm supposed to neither ask nor tell.) Too bad. I also wanted to compliment the President on his daring choice of tasseled loafers with his Donna Karan suit. To no avail. The Secret Service must have sniffed a fag.

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