I Got All My Sistahs With Me

This year I'm sending valentines to my girlfriends

February 1, 1998 By River Huston

Do you believe in love? 'Cause I don't have a clue what it is. Sure, I've been romantically involved with a number of people in my lifetime, but I've always harbored doubts. Do I really love him? Is she the one? Even in my current relationship, I feel like I'm mangling mental daisies: "I love him, I love him not, I love him, I want to bludgeon him with a sharp object..."

But one thing I do know: I love my girlfriends. Therapist, rabbi, support group, manicurist—who needs 'em with gal pals like mine? When my life-threatening disease has worked my very last nerve, I just ring up one of my *compadrettes* for advice, laughter or emotional ammo.

On days when I feel like "HIV" is tattooed on my forehead, I turn to my immunocompromised sisters, who can relate to the underlying terror of living with this virus. But whether or not I feel like a bug-infested bitch, my pals are always there for me with unconditional love. So I thought I'd share some of the true loves of my life, a.k.a. the girls, with you.

Sherri, the Miami matchmaker, is an HIV positive yenta who is quick to dispense advice to the lovelorn. When my man and I argue, I call the Sherri hotline. Before the conversation is over, she has me secure in my hot babeness. Not one to pass up a chance at recruitment into her HIV dating agency, Positive Connections, she then informs me, "Our group has at least twenty eligible HIV positive guys, and half of them have all their teeth—at least the front ones. So don't settle. Disease or not, you're a fox. I could fix you up in a second." Before I know it, my phone is ringing off the hook—a slight problem after my man and I kiss and make up. With my self-esteem restored, all I need is my daily dose of Karen to put a smile on my face.

My best friend, Karen, is Florence Nightingale with attitude. We met at AA five years ago, but I think we were separated at birth: We grew up in the same 'hood, went to the same school and have the same genes that cause our hair to grow riotously in the most unseemly places. We also share a proclivity for sex and drugs, so it's a miracle that Karen is HIV negative. Sometimes I think she is doing penance by working for the Red Cross and taking in HIV positive strays. When the only thing I have to look forward to in life is chocolate, Karen gives me alternatives *sans* sugar coating. "Look at the bright side. You could have to undergo genital mutilation because of tribal laws, gain thirty pounds overnight, get audited by the IRS or, worse, be married to my husband." At that, I shudder and gaze lovingly at my little Yorkshire Terrorist, Buddy. (He may be a stud, but he loves like a gal pal.)

Walking a dog may be a great way to meet a man, but I met someone much better: Ellen. I was immediately struck by her and had a lesbian moment (no, not *that* Ellen). Our friendship grew during our daily dog walks, which is fitting because Ellen's greatest virtue is her loyalty. She is HIV negative but has accompanied me to the hospital so many times that she may as well be positive. I like to be distracted when I'm getting an IV line in my arm, and I can always count on Ellen for a good story, whether it's a half-hour description of her wedding dress or the size of her husband's organ.

Speaking of organs, Andrea, my New Mexico soulmate, has recently switched from the obelisk to the honey tunnel. Another HIV-enhanced goddess, Andrea reminds me that girls smell better than men and have less gas. Her newfound love of women is inspiring since I am a LIT—Lesbian in Training. I suppose we could be mistaken for girlfriends—we wear the same shade of lipstick (Raisin Rage), have the same bone marrow disease and even get rashes in the same places (I'm not going *there*). She is also the biggest supporter of my holistic approach and the only other person I know with HIV who doesn't pop protease. This is especially important when the whole world thinks you are crazy for not doing said drug.

My *muchachas* never judge me for any of my actions. They might call me to the mat if I get too outrageous—you know, like those special moments when I'm drawn to the mall with my sniper's rifle. But they make me laugh, know how to listen and give me all the lovin' I need. Happy V-Day, girls.

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