And What About The Dating?

December 9, 2013 By Rae Lewis-Thornton

A couple of weeks ago my mentor asked me about my love life. I wasn't expecting the question but I gave an honest answer. It went something like this

"How's your love life?"

"I don't have a love life."

"Do you want one?"

"Or are you done?"

"Well, I want a dating life but on my terms. I seem to find men who just want causal sex and I want someone to value me. I mean, sex for sex sake just ain't cutting it anymore for me, not at 51 years of age."

"I totally understand,"

"I mean, I am going around the country talking to young women about living whole. I'm just trying to practice what I preach."

"Do you want to get married again?"

"Well, now I think I may be done with marriage," and we both laughed and continued to clean up the aftermath of Thanksgiving dinner. I've thought about that conversation a lot since Thanksgiving.

The fact of the matter I am still alive and would love some companionship. Call me idealistic but it would be great to listen to Mozart and read a book curled up under a man. I'm just not in the market for quick sex. For sure dating with a sexually transmitted disease (STD) is complicated but not impossible. Over the years, my dating life has taken so many different turns for sure. I remember those early days of HIV when I was living in secret and afraid of rejection. It was the hardest thing on the planet it seemed at the time. To disclose both of my STD's I thought was a hard bill of sale. To tell that I had herpes and HIV was hardddddd and clothed with shame. You might be able to explain one mistake, but how do you explain two?

It was scary!! The thought of rejection was scary, but I knew that I couldn't live in isolation for the rest of my life. I also believed that I had a moral obligation to disclose. I just didn't see it as fair to take away a persons choice. At first I was so afraid to date and didn't for months after I was diagnosed with herpes. Then I met a guy that was all that and a bag of chips, so I finally disclosed and low and behold he had herpes also. Go figure! It was hard at first. Our sex life for sure had some road blocks. There were a couple of times when I was having an outbreak and he wasn't and vise-versa. Yet overtime it all seemed to workout. The only problem was, he was working it out with more than me and I don't share.

After him I learned to be more comfortable in my skin with the fact that I had herpes. Then came along HIV. I had never been rejected even after herpes, "But who the heck would want me now?" I thought. You have to remember this was early in the AIDS Pandemic. HIV had only been around 6 years when I was diagnosed and the HIV antibody test was also new. The HIV antibody test was

developed in 1985. I donated blood the winter of 1986 and learned that I was HIV positive the spring of 1987. Back then HIV was the STD of STD's. Who was going to date me? I was afraid beyond anything logical.

Then over time, I had to sink or swim. I couldn't live in isolation for the rest of my life. I was a wonderful young woman who had a lot to offer. So I bit the bullet. After I became really comfortable with a man and was sure that I wanted to take it to the next level. I would disclose. I thought it important to disclose in a setting that was conducive to an honest discussion, like at the kitchen table with all my clothes on. I learned in those early days that people just wanted you to be honest with them.

I've come a long way since those early days. Married, divorced and dating yet again. My problem

today dating with STD's isn't fear of rejection. It's finding a man who don't want to just "hit it and quit it," as the young people say, but someone who wants to share a meal and listen to Mozart with me. Someone to cheer me on as I do this work around HIV/AIDS. Someone who isn't ashamed to be dating "the woman with AIDS."

I've learned over the years that it was so much easier for my dating life when my HIV status was a well kept secret. Then a man could date me without fear of judgment. People thought for sure that my ex-husband had HIV, which of course he didn't. Now don't get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with two people with a STD dating, in fact it may even be an easier conversation. Thier is even an online dating matching service called Positive Singles.

My problem is, I tend to attract men who are not infected, who want to be with me, but are afraid of the "public" me, so they cling to the private me. Anyone who knows me, knows that I declared those days over years ago. If you cant walk with me in the daylight, we can't hug in the dark. I'm just saying!!

So here I am again, thinking about dating and wondering what my future holds. I'm so comfortable in my skin. Thank God that all my therapy has made me a better woman for me. Now if a man comes along and sees my value and respects my worth, it's a date.

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