

Editorial Piece

Is Valentine's Day all about love?

-by Trevor Stratton, CAAN APHA Advocate



It's hard to avoid this time of year, when most stores are pushing every kind of Valentine's Day gift from the \$1.99 discount card to fur coats and fancy ties. Did you notice the day after Christmas that Rudolf and Frosty were replaced with chocolates, edible underwear and heart shaped candies at almost every store's check out stand?

For Aboriginal people living with HIV/AIDS this time of year can also be a time of reflection. While some of us have life partners and caring relationships with our lovers others have been single for a very long time. Sex and Relationships can be a difficult issue for APHAs, especially for those who have given up on romance, love and sex because it is too complicated. As the CAAN APHA Advocate, I hear the stories of APHAs who have all but given up on romance, as if they no longer are able or willing to hold onto any hope.

Attraction is a complex thing especially when you're positive. I've noticed that there are so many different kinds of couples. Recently, a number of my friends who are HIV positive have entered into relationships after previously saying that they probably would never find a partner. Two of my friends who are both HIV positive found each other and I thought that was so sweet. They're attraction and commitment to each other inspires me to let others know about it.

There are also couples where one partner is HIV positive and the other is HIV negative, the technical term used to describe this is sero-discordant. More commonly used however and the term I prefer is "magnetic couples".

I have had magnetic relationships and they can be difficult. In fact, I was married for 10 years to an HIV negative woman. She is still HIV negative because we used a condom every time.

Sometimes sex in a sero-discordant/magnetic relationship it can feel like there is a third person in the bedroom. It has to do with the safer sex negotiation. We are no longer talking about the idea of protecting yourself/your partner against HIV transmission; we're talking about the fact of it. HIV is in the room.

The stigma is, because we are positive we are not supposed to have sex. The reality is, as human beings we are entitled to love.

As an APHA, I hope the campaign will remind our leaders that HIV/AIDS is a serious concern for all of us, HIV positive and HIV negative alike.

As individuals, when we find the courage to share our love, there are great rewards and the potential to grow stronger. Together, we can reduce our risk along the way.

This Valentine's Day, please remember Aboriginal people living with HIV/AIDS because life isn't always a box of chocolates.

For more information please visit www.caan.ca/endstigma

Trevor Stratton is an HIV-positive, 42 year old Mississauga Ojibwe consultant from the Niagara region, currently working in the position of Advocate for Aboriginal people living with HIV/AIDS for the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN APHA Advocate). Trevor has 7 years hands-on experience working and volunteering in Aboriginal HIV/AIDS at the local, regional and national levels. Harm Reduction, Awareness, prevention and addressing HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination top the list of his activities.