



APR - MAY
NEWSLETTER

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**Glass
half
empty?**



AIDS ACTION
COUNCIL OF THE ACT

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Stand up and be counted

International Candlelight Memorial

In 2009, stigma and discrimination still impact on people and communities affected by HIV.

To honour the memory of those whose lives have been touched by the epidemic, the AIDS Action Council is calling on our communities to face the stigma which continues to be perpetuated at an individual level, within our communities, in Canberra and beyond.

An end to stigma and discrimination is essential to a successful response to HIV. Join us and be part of the movement to end HIV discrimination at the 2009 International Candlelight Memorial.

Sunday 17th May, 2009

5:00pm Multifaith Service

All Saints Anglican Church, Ainslie

7:00pm Memorial Ceremony

National Museum of Australia

Worried about your memory?

We all forget things from time to time, but the loss of memory with dementia is different. It is persistent and progressive, not just occasional. It may result in the person losing a job. It may mean forgetting to light the gas. It may mean not being able to find the way home. Eventually, it may mean forgetting how to dress or how to bathe.

Early symptoms also vary a great deal. Usually though, people first seem to notice that there is a problem with memory, particularly in remembering recent events.

Warning signs of dementia

1. Memory loss that affects day-to-day function
2. Difficulty performing familiar tasks
3. Confusion about time and place
4. Problems with language
5. Problems with abstract thinking
6. Poor or decreased judgment
7. Problems misplacing things
8. Changes in personality or behaviour
9. A loss of initiative.

A number of conditions can mimic dementia and if treated may be reversible ring our 1800 100 500 for the *Worried about your memory?* Checklist or talk to you GP

Up Front

Discrimination. Negative behaviour or attitude directed towards a certain group. It is no mystery then, that observing and countering discrimination underpins all of our work. Indeed, discrimination fits within the orbit of stigma which includes a whole range of prejudicial attitudes, labelling, discriminatory practices and unpleasant experiences.

The law generally does its best to protect vulnerable groups from the impact of discrimination, but it can only do so much. It is difficult to protect groups from what other people think, and yet such thoughts may well play out in subtle ways to create discriminatory situations.

We may well think that discrimination is a fading issue simply because the worst of it has been legislated away; discrimination on the basis of HIV, sexuality, gender and race no longer technically exist, and that's good. But, while discrimination may be reduced, we may still wonder whether the prejudice that underpinned it has gone as well.

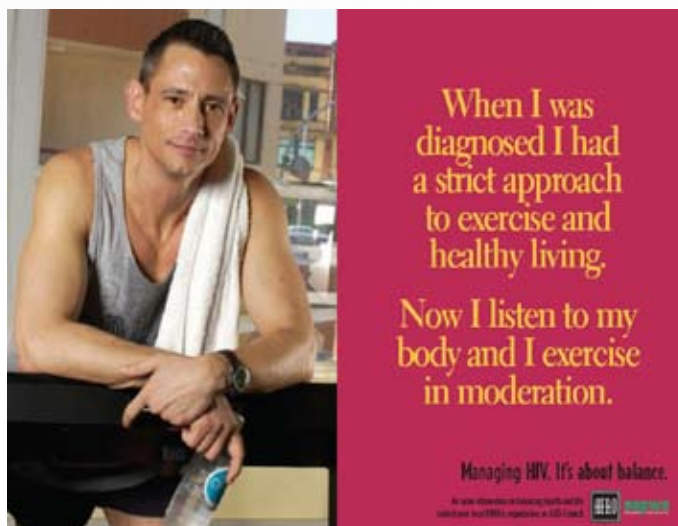
The fight for the recognition of same sex relationships is a case in point. Last year we argued that "near enough is not good enough" and said that anything short of equivalence to marriage was dangerous, because it created a permanent status for same sex relationships as being less than equal to heterosexual ones. Despite this poor outcome here in the ACT and elsewhere in Australia, most saw these changes as a step in the right direction, and many also saw this as "mission accomplished". There were further positive outcomes in the Federal Government's Omnibus Bill late last year that amended around 80 pieces of legislation that discriminated against same sex couples. This so-called same-sex law reform is discussed elsewhere in this newsletter and will be problematic for some.

No matter how far we have come, there will always be further to go. Whether we are gay or straight, male or female, black or white, young or old, thin or not so thin, positive or negative, we will all face some form of discrimination at some time. Worse, we will all discriminate at some time too, whether we acknowledge it or not.

This is a challenge we all face.

The removal and/or minimisation of discrimination lie at the heart of Australia's relatively successful response to HIV. We all acknowledge that there remains work to be done, but we argue that this work includes the elimination of the stigma and discrimination that continues to impact those affected by HIV. This year's Candlelight Memorial is our opportunity to stand up and be counted on this issue. Let us take this chance to commit to ending discrimination inside and around us.

Andrew Burry



HIV positive women and relationships

Nada Ratcliffe

So, you think dealing with relationships can be difficult? Well, think about how difficult it may be for a woman living with HIV. A great deal of anxiety can be experienced particularly around the issue of disclosure. For gay men, it is difficult enough and as the majority of people living with HIV in Australia are gay men, a potential partner having HIV, or being open and happy to work around it, is a real possibility.

After an HIV diagnosis, women are usually given clinical information on pregnancy, medications, diet and so on, but often very little about their sex lives, when sex may be of more immediate concern. A positive diagnosis does not mean an end to sex. However, some women who receive such a diagnosis will not be aware that many positive women continue to have fulfilling sexual relationships.

Qualitative and quantitative research indicates many positive women avoid sex or have infrequent sexual relations as they fear rejection if they disclose their status, or fear that they may infect a partner. As a result, they may experience a reduced sense of intimacy, relationship difficulties, anxiety and depression. The fact remains that if safe sex practices are observed, there is no reason why positive women cannot have satisfying and rewarding relationships without risk of HIV transmission. Similarly, if safe sex is practised, a woman herself, will not be at risk of sexually transmitted infections that may exacerbate HIV.

It is the decision of each woman to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of disclosure and when and if to tell a partner or potential partner. It is always a difficult decision for anyone as there is no going back once someone discloses their positive status. The same goes for disclosing to friends, family or anyone with whom she has a relationship. What makes it even more difficult is that the longer one takes to disclose, the more complicated it can become and the greater the anxiety experienced. A newly republished edition of *Treat Yourself Right. Information for Women with HIV and AIDS** reports that:

“almost all of the women who took part in recent Australian research and were currently in relationships had disclosed to their partner and these women reported their partners were very supportive or that their HIV status didn't make a difference to how their partner felt about them.”

It may also be confusing and frightening for a partner when he/she hears from their female partner that she is HIV positive, so it can be helpful if a counsellor, medical practitioner or trusted friend is on hand to provide support. If it is someone who is experienced in the area of HIV, that person can answer any questions that may arise. The Council has an experienced HIV counsellor who is available at no cost to people living with HIV, partners, friends or family members.**

Something Rich and Strange

Stephanie Buckle

It was a marvellous and long awaited development last November when legislation was passed removing discrimination against same sex couples from almost all Commonwealth laws.

Same sex couples and their children will now be treated in exactly the same way as other Australian families, which is what they have repeatedly said they wanted.

This is a most significant achievement for all gay men and women, regardless of whether they are in a committed relationship or not. The lack of equality in the way society had dealt with gay as opposed to straight relationships has long contributed in many subtle and far reaching ways to homophobia. As long as inequalities were enshrined in law, straight people could continue to feel smugly “normal”, and gay people could see evidence that society thought of them being somehow outside the mainstream.

This new legislation is about inclusion, bringing gay and lesbian people in, instead of leaving them out, bringing gay couples under an umbrella that protects all couples. Over the years, I have seen many heartbreaking and enraging examples of gay partners left out in the cold. One example – a man whose partner of twelve years died of AIDS, was suddenly confronted within twenty four hours of his death, by his partner's very ex wife. They had never actually divorced – she contested her ex husband's will, which left everything to his gay partner, and was successful in claiming his entire estate. My client lost his home as well as his partner. Other examples abound, but they are now part of history, rather than of an ongoing battle.

One thing catches at my sense of celebration about all this, and that is a fear that “something rich and strange”** might be lost. In being outside the mainstream rule book about how relationships ought to look and behave, and often outside mainstream notice, many gay and lesbian people have found ways to have relationships which don't fit any norm but which nevertheless suit them.

Four men live together, share the mortgage according to the capacity of each, are the best of friends, and negotiate sex with each other daily. A gay couple invite another man into their household for six months for fun times. One partner in a long term lesbian relationship has a sex change operation and becomes a man, the relationship continues under the same roof, but on a basis of friendship rather than sexual partners. Stories abound of gay men in open relationships, having fuck buddies, and enjoying an infinite variety of casual/long term/serial relationships.

Continued page 4

Some women report that living in a close relationship without disclosing HIV status can cause greater emotional distress than the rejection that could result from disclosure. In fact, some women who have kept their status a 'secret' for a long time may feel a strong sense of relief when they do tell their partner. After disclosure, some women feel a sense of confidence and may go on and use their story to become more public, educate others and advocate for the rights and dignity that they deserve – nothing less.

*Copies of this resource are available at Westlund House and can be sent to you. Phone Westlund House on 6257-2855 or view it online at www.afao.org.au

** Bookings can be made for free counselling for all people affected by HIV. Ph: 6257-2855 or contact the Counsellor personally by email on stephanie.buckle@aidsaction.org.au

Same sex law reform

Andrew Burry

Late last year, the Federal Government passed an omnibus bill that amended around 80 pieces of legislation that contained discrimination against same sex couples. Long overdue, these measures went a considerable way towards providing a greater level of equality to all relationships, irrespective of gender and/or sexuality.

Given the 80 pieces of legislation involved, it is hardly surprising that the effects are complex and detailed, and that there are a number of different government departments involved. These include the Australian Tax Office, Department of Health and Aging, Veterans Affairs and Immigration to name a few.

Some of these changes came into effect on January 1st this year, and all of the remaining ones will come into force from July 1st 2009. Whilst many of these changes are procedural and therefore minor, others may have significant impact on some of our community. In general, these changes are positive, however for some there may be quite significant and negative consequences. Regardless, it is clear that around Australia and within the ACT, there is very little understanding of what these changes are, how individuals and couples should respond to them – if at all – and how to find out more information about your own circumstances.

The AIDS Action Council (AAC) has been working with a number of agencies locally and nationally to try and ensure that disadvantages are minimised. Over coming weeks, AAC will also be developing information resources to assist and inform those who may be potentially affected.

The main change lies in the definition of what constitutes a relationship under the new legislative framework. This definition will be used to determine entitlements and benefits by major agencies such as the Australian Tax Office, Centrelink, Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). Until July 1st 2009, you will only be assessed as being a couple if you have a “marriage-like relationship” with a person of the opposite sex. This means that a same sex couple receives benefits and entitlements as single people, and these payments are generally higher for individuals and a partner’s income is not taken into account.

From July 1st, however, a marriage-like relationship is replaced by a definition of “de facto” relationship which will be assessed irrespective of the gender of the couple. Clearly, this will mean that some people in same sex de facto relationships will have their Social Security or Family Assistance payments reduced or cancelled after that date if they are newly assessed as a member of a couple. Some people may have new entitlements because income and asset thresholds are higher for couples.

The determination of whether a domestic arrangement amounts to that of a couple is detailed and complicated, and 40 or more criteria may be taken into account. The process of assessment by Centrelink, for example, will involve the divulging of considerable personal detail that may feel quite intrusive for some people. It will mean disclosing your sexuality to the relevant government officials, and this may be the first time of coming out or some of our community. Centrelink is required to assess your relationship on these criteria under the law in order to gain an understanding of the whole picture of your finances and living arrangements. A de facto relationship may exist even where there is no sexual relationship, if Centrelink determines that there is sufficient interdependency between a couple to constitute care and commitment.

AAC and others are lobbying for federal resources to be applied to a community information and education campaign, and as we go to press we are not yet sure if this will occur. Regardless, if you have any questions about your circumstances or are worried about how your relationship will be assessed, we encourage you to contact us at Westlund House on 02 6257 2855. If we don’t have the answers immediately, we will certainly commit to find them on your behalf.

National Condom Day

For National Condom Day (14th February) the AAC and SHFPACT worked together on an initiative to target young people. The two organisations worked quite closely to develop a condom pack especially for the day (below) that would have a chocolate heart attached, as an incentive, to be handed out to young people in the lead up to NCD. Our volunteers did a fantastic job helping us to put the condom packs together.

After spending several hours at the Woden and Civic bus interchanges, 1800 condom packs were handed out. SCOPE YWCA Youth Service and SWOP assisted with handing out the packs.



Continued from page 3

Many heterosexuals may view these kinds of relationships with amazement, and perhaps even a tinge of envy. Centrelink, which already struggles with heterosexuals sharing houses together as housemates, will certainly struggle with categorizing many of these beautifully divergent gay relationships. I hope that in the process of being inclusive, none of this rich diversity of “homonormative” culture is lost.

* apologies to Shakespeare

Introducing the legal advice service

finance

housing

workplace

family

relationships

immigration

reproduction

advice.

This service is being launched in response to requests from members and clients for advice and referrals for a variety of matters, where legal assistance is often the first step.

From family concerns to issues in the workplace, from having children to dealing with immigration, these concerns and many more impact on the health and wellbeing of the communities which the AIDS Action Council and Westlund House serve: people living with HIV and their friends and families, sex workers, and the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities.

This service is running for a three month trial from. The AIDS Action Council will evaluate the success of the trial and seek feedback from the community.

Goodman Law

We are very grateful to Goodman Law, who has very generously agreed to provide this service on our behalf.

The advice provided through this service will often be all that is required. Where further advice is necessary, Goodman Law have committed to offering rates which will be significantly discounted.

John Davey

The solicitor in attendance will be John Davey. John has extensive experience in various fields and has a strong track record in advocacy, particularly in areas of discrimination affecting gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities.

John is also a registered migration agent.

Using the service

Consultations through the legal advice service last up to 30 minutes.

Appointments are recommended - call 02 6257 2855 during business hours. It may be possible to see the solicitor in attendance without an appointment, but this is not guaranteed.

The service is completely confidential and free for members (for more information on membership, see page 8) and clients of the AIDS Action Council. Clients using

Westlund House now on Facebook

Keep up to date with what is happening at the Westlund House Resource Centre, home of the AIDS Action Council of the ACT.

- News and Updates
- Volunteer opportunities
- Training
- Workshops and groups for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Same Sex Attracted people
- Special events
- Discussions

Simply search for Westlund House on Facebook or go to our website and use the link on the front page.



this service can be fully confident that professional privilege will apply.

Service times and location

All consultations take place at Westlund House, corner of Gordon St and McCoy Circuit Acton, a 10-15 minute walk from the Civic Bus Interchange.

Appointments are available between 6.00 pm and 9.30 pm on the following Thursday evenings:

- 30 April 2009
- 14 May 2009
- 28 May 2009
- 11 June 2009

Long Yang Club Canberra

Long Yang Club Canberra (LYCC) is a social club whose goal is to foster friendship between gay Asians and gay non-Asians. LYCC has been around since 1989, and endeavours to offer a social atmosphere where the principles of the club can be realised. The club meets for various activities throughout the year, at least monthly, but often twice monthly. There are also special events, such as an Annual Tennis Tournament (just completed, March), Christmas in July, Car Rally, etc, with also occasional short trips out of Canberra. We also play tennis each Sunday afternoon (very social!!), and welcome visitors for tennis or just afternoon tea.



The membership secretary can be contacted for information on joining, or on playing tennis, at pacman@webone.com.au.

Please see details of upcoming events on our web page <http://lycccanberra.wikispaces.com/>

Coming Out in the Consult

After 18 months of planning and preparation, a forum was held on 19 February for local GPs, nurses and counsellors. The aim was to increase their effectiveness with working with gay men as well as men who have sex with other men, encouraging a more comfortable Doctor – Patient relationship that would encourage these men to talk openly about their sexual health and then be able to seek appropriate treatments when needed from their GP.

The AIDS Action Council helped to host this event - one of the most significant events for the organisation - in collaboration with ACT Health and the ACT Division of General Practice. This was the result of a commitment by the SHHARD (Sexual Health, HIV, Hepatitis C and Related Diseases) advisory group to address the rising levels of Syphilis and Gonorrhoea amongst gay men.

The forum was held at The Realm in Barton and attended by 70 people with very positive feedback on the presentations and information provided, which included a comprehensive resource for the GPs put together by the Council.

Getting the best care

Marcus Bogie

After receiving a diagnosis of a chronic illness, your relationship with your doctor may grow and develop in many ways. Whereas before, you only attended for the occasional cold and sniffle, and perhaps a medical certificate for a few days, now visits.....

1. need to be planned with military precision,
2. are looked at as a last resort because you don't want to be reminded about your illness or
3. something in between.

Just because a doctor gave you the diagnosis doesn't mean you want to stay with them for ever – just like all relationships the doctor-patient relationship can change over time and the need to move on lies with what you need to get out of the relationship.

Hopefully the doctor who gave you the diagnosis is also a specialist, or has a real interest in HIV and can work with you to maintain your best possible health. Right from the word go, communication, like in all good relationships, is the key.

Is your doctor listening to your point of view?

Do you understand what the doctor is telling you?

Are you confident of speaking up if things aren't working for you?

After all you're in this partnership as well.

At the launch of the Australian Medical Association's (AMA) Code of Ethics in 2004, Dr Kerryn Phelps, the then president, is reported to have said:

"Our relationship with our patients is based on mutual respect and collaboration. The doctor and the patient must work together towards agreed health care goals that incorporate the patient's values and specific healthcare needs and the doctor's clinical assessments and judgments" and "A doctor's primary duty must always be to the patient"

I have been in a relationship with my doctor for around ten years, having moved on from various other ones over the previous years due to (amongst other things) communication break downs, moving towns or just not liking their personality - no hard feelings, this is my life and I want to get the best care possible.

The National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS (NAPWA), through their Treataware program launched a resource in 2008 called Getting the best HIV Care a checklist guide for people living with HIV. In part the resource says, "Making decisions about health and treatment can be challenging, especially when living with a serious illness like HIV. Some people say they would rather leave the decision-making to their doctor or to others. However, NAPWA recommends you take an active role in health decision making, because experience has shown that health outcomes are better if treatment and care is planned in a partnership between patients and their doctors."

This is a great resource for all people living with HIV and copies are available here at Westlund House Resource Centre or on-line at www.treataware.info. While this resource is written for People Living with HIV, if you take the word HIV out of the title then it's all about "Getting the Best Care". I am sure there would be bits and pieces to benefit all people who are in a relationship with a doctor or want to improve their relationship with their doctor.

A queer line for a straight guy

Professional detachment in the workplace, by Andrew age 27, ACT sex worker.

The first time I ever went down on a guy was like tasting one of those long colourful balloons that clowns twist into figures of dogs and bicycles. With my client wearing a condom, all I could sense was balloon latex and I didn't think anything more of it.

For a straight guy working in the adult industry and entertaining male clients, it may appear confusing when it comes to my sexuality. I'm modern, cultured and up with the latest styles. But you see, I'm so secure in my masculinity that I don't care. I am simply an actor with a job in a popular stage show, entertaining one audience member at a time. The studio becomes my personal theatre, where I start my working shift by changing into costume and slipping into my carefully rehearsed character. I remind myself there are few undergraduate actors that can truthfully say they earn several hundred dollars an hour in the theatre business, but I am one.

If discretion is the foundation of the professional sex industry, professional detachment is the foundation of my job. Going down on another clown balloon I'm mentally adding up my takings for the night, subtracting income tax, and working out how much cash I can spend on renovations to my city apartment this weekend. I have my annual car registration due next week. Business is picking up, so I'm budgeting for an island resort holiday in late winter, and I really want to buy a new bookcase and bedroom suite this weekend.

Incidentally, working in the sex industry makes you realise how expensive furniture really is. I often find myself standing in one of Fyshwick's many home wares stores thinking how that hatstand is two hours work and that dining room buffet is at least five hours of hand relief. And when the sofa salesperson asks if I want to buy optional fabric stain protection, I can't help thinking that's another three head-jobs I'm going to have to up sell tonight.

The reality of billing hundreds of dollars an hour is being mentally capable of doing a job that other people are not prepared to do. The adult industry isn't for everyone; I have to keep my stage show character and my personal identity separate. If someone doesn't like me, or says something to offend me, it's only my stage character they are responding to. I don't take it personally. I set my boundaries clearly before I walk in the room - even my doctor would be pushing his luck to propose the insertion of anything near my rear end.

Once tonight's show is over, I am a different person. I pack away my costume, pick up my cash and put the room, and my headspace, back exactly the way it was before I started my shift. I return home to my beautiful partner, and when I am with her, I am not thinking of income tax, budgets and furniture. I am thinking only of her, the only one who arouses me deep inside, and wrapped in her familiar loving arms I can finally let go freely and be myself.

Sero Disco – Why let HIV get in the way of a good relationship?

Thought about going out with a positive guy, but worried ...

In a relationship, but not confident about condoms ...

Heard about viral load, but not sure what it means for you ...

Thinking about how to tell someone you like that you are positive?

Looking after each other in serodiscordant relationships (where one partner is HIV positive and one partner is HIV negative) includes everything from communication to condoms. In Positive Life NSW's new campaign Sero Disco (Why let HIV get in the way of a good relationship?) they try to give you some practical answers to questions you might have asked yourself at some time. Does undetectable mean un-infectious? Is pulling out okay? How safe is oral sex? This campaign also covers disclosure and possible rejection, intimacy and keeping it hot as well as ending relationships.

A lot of attitudes to sex and relationships are based on individual preferences. That is why this campaign draws on personal stories. You be the judge of what works for you.



Canberra Bi Net

The Bi Net group is for Bi(sexual) and Bi friendly people who live in the Canberra Region. It encourages discussion about all things related to Bisexuality. This is not a personals list or match making service.

Come and make new friends, catch up with old ones and get to know the Canberra Region Bisexual community.

Information about the group can be found on the Yahoo group CanberraBiNet, or you can contact the coordinator on CanberraBiNet-owner@yahoogroups.com

For your *Diary*

April

- 23 Looking Out Workshop for Gay/Bi men over 25 years
- 25 Volunteer Facilitator Training
- 30 Looking Out Workshop for Gay/Bi men over 25 years

May

- 4 STRIP sexual health checks @ BitBent Belconnen 6:00 - 8:00 pm
- 7 Looking Out Workshop for Gay/Bi men over 25 years
- 11 STRIP sexual health checks @ BitBent Belconnen 6:00 - 8:00 pm
- 14 Looking Out Workshop for Gay/Bi men over 25 years
- 17 International AIDS Candlelight Memorial (see page 2 for details)
- 17 Eurovision Finals
- 17 International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO)
- 17 - 20 Australian Health Promotion Association 18th National Conference in Perth
- 18 STRIP sexual health checks @ BitBent Belconnen 6:00 - 8:00 pm
- 25 STRIP sexual health checks @ BitBent Belconnen 6:00 - 8:00 pm

June

- 2 International Whores Day

For more community events,
subscribe to the ACTQueer email list:
groups.yahoo.com/group/actqueer



Join the AIDS Action Council

The AAC belongs to you, the community.

Proud to be a grass-roots organisation, we rely on our members. Members help us to carry out important work for our community. Join today and become part of our team.

To join, contact Lynn Parry on 6257 2855 or visit www.aidsaction.org.au/membership

Bi-focal

Anonymous

What is an intimate relationship to me? As I sit pondering this question i count the types of intimate relationships I have in my life. I am currently engaged to a man whom I love; looking for a woman to engage with as a lover or partner and nearing the end of my pregnancy and about to fall in love with my child. I am willing to share my lover with my fiancée, he explores other lovers without me and we aim to create a secure and committed family life with our baby. The only difference is "Family" in this sense may include a more complex matrix of adults and children that the socially expected nuclear versions.

The point is that polyamore isn't new and raising children in a semi tribal structure is very old indeed, so why does modern western society expect that we should get all our love and needs met by one significant other? How can we expect every facet of our lives to be satisfied by one person? Are we expecting too much? I believe we are.

Ask yourself these questions; do my friendships give me what my lovers do? Does my lover replace the love I have for my blood family? Should I choose between loving my fiancée or our new born child? NO, they all give different love in my life and I can love them all as strongly as each other without running out of my love.

It is only our societal beliefs that make us feel guilty about wanting more relationships, somehow convincing us that jealousy and love go hand in hand and you can't share your committed lover with another. But one of the first lessons I learned as a toddler was to share my precious "things" with others.

If we could accept that each others needs are often broader than what one person can deliver and willingly share our "precious things" then we can all take the responsibility for our needs being met and increase the love in our worlds. As a result our connections with other human beings will grow and develop into more enlightened, less controlling and judgmental ones.

I for one on this planet want this style of love and relationships, which is why I struggle against my society's beliefs about normal nuclear families and judgmental expectations of how I should behave. Maybe this will cause you to question what kind of relationships you want in your life... as for me, I'm going to take responsibility for getting my needs met in a respectful and enlightened manner with all the people in my life.