

ORIGINAL

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ADDRESS

BY

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AND

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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



PRESENTED AT THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE BREAKFAST

TAMPA, FLORIDA

MARCH 18, 1987

(GREETINGS TO HOSTS, GUESTS, FRIENDS, ETC.)

I'M DELIGHTED TO BE YOUR GUEST THIS MORNING. I'VE BEEN A VISITOR TO FLORIDA ON MANY OTHER OCCASIONS AND EACH TIME I'VE SPOKEN ABOUT CIGARETTES AND THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST SMOKING. I'LL BE SPEAKING TO THAT ISSUE TWICE LATER TODAY.

BUT HERE, AT THIS BREAKFAST, I'M GOING TO TALK -- NOT ABOUT SMOKING -- BUT ABOUT ANOTHER MAJOR PUBLIC HEALTH MATTER: AND THAT'S AIDS.

I WANT YOU TO KNOW SOME OF THE FACTS AND SOME OF THE ISSUES, AS I SEE THEM, BECAUSE YOU MAY HAVE TO MAKE SOME DECISIONS REGARDING EMPLOYEES WHO PRESENT THE SYMPTOMS OF AIDS...OR MEMBERS OF YOUR OWN FAMILY WHO MAY ONE DAY SHOW THE SIGNS.

THOSE ARE REAL POSSIBILITIES, GIVEN THE FACT THAT THE STATE OF FLORIDA IS EITHER 3RD OR 4TH IN NUMBERS OF AIDS CASES, DEPENDING WHETHER YOU'RE COUNTING ALL REPORTS SINCE 1981 OR ALL REPORTS FOR JUST THE LAST 12 MONTHS.

EITHER WAY, YOU ARE UP THERE WITH NEW YORK, CALIFORNIA, TEXAS, AND NEW JERSEY.

WE DON'T HAVE A TALLY ON AIDS CASES IN TAMPA ITSELF, AND THAT MEANS THIS CITY HAS NOT YET REACHED HAD ITS 300TH REPORTED CASE OF AIDS.

I SINCERELY HOPE YOU NEVER DO. BUT THE REALITY OF THE SITUATION TELLS ME -- AND SHOULD TELL YOU AS WELL -- THAT NUMBER 300 IS ON THE WAY. IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME.

BUT THERE'S ANOTHER AND SOMEWHAT LESS CALAMITOUS REASON WHY I WANT TO DISCUSS THIS ISSUE WITH YOU THIS MORNING. I WOULD IMAGINE, AS LEADERS IN THIS COMMUNITY, YOU COULD PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN HELPING TO DETERMINE THE WAY CHILDREN IN TAMPA ARE INTRODUCED NOT ONLY TO AIDS BUT ALSO TO THE LARGER SUBJECT, WHICH IS THEIR OWN HUMAN SEXUALITY.

FIRST, LET ME TOUCH LIGHTLY ON THE RECENT AND BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DISEASE SO FAR, AND THEN I WANT TO EXPLORE SOME OF THE KEY QUESTIONS IT POSES TO SOCIETY.

ALMOST SIX YEARS AGO, IN JUNE 1981, THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE OFFICE IN ATLANTA BEGAN TO GET SOME RATHER ALARMING REPORTS FROM STATE HEALTH AGENCIES. WE WERE INFORMED OF 5 CASES OF PNEUMOCYSTIS CARINII PNEUMONIA IN LOS ANGELES.

FIVE CASES IS NOT MUCH...BUT THIS LETHAL DISEASE IS SO RARE THAT A HANDFUL OF CASES IN A SINGLE YEAR IS LIKE AN EPIDEMIC. SOON THE REPORTS TRICKLED IN OF OTHER SUCH CASES OCCURRING IN OTHER CITIES AS WELL.

OUR PEOPLE INVESTIGATED AND THE TRAIL LED TO MANY INDIVIDUALS WHO, FOR SOME MYSTERIOUS REASON, WERE SICK AND THEIR BODIES WERE NOT FIGHTING BACK AS YOU'D EXPECT THEM TO.

APPARENTLY OTHERWISE HEALTHY, NORMAL PEOPLE WERE ACQUIRING SOME KIND OF "BUG" -- A VIRUS, MOST LIKELY -- THAT ATTACKED AND DESTROYED THE NATURAL IMMUNE SYSTEM.

THE ODD THING WAS THAT THE VIRUS ITSELF WAS NOT KILLING PEOPLE. PEOPLE WERE DYING OF EXTREMELY VIRULENT DISEASES BECAUSE THIS VIRUS -- WHATEVER IT WAS -- PREVENTED THE BODY FROM FIGHTING THEM OFF.

WE'D NEVER COME UPON A SYNDROME QUITE LIKE IT BEFORE, AND SO WE GAVE IT A SOMEWHAT AWKWARD TITLE. WE CALLED IT THE "ACQUIRED IMMUNE DEFICIENCY SYNDROME," BUT WE SOON SETTLED JUST FOR THE INITIALS... A.I.D.S....OR "AIDS."

AND IT'S BEEN AIDS EVER SINCE.

YOU'VE READ THE STORIES AND SEEN IT ON TELEVISION, SO I WON'T GO THROUGH THE ENTIRE 6-YEAR HISTORY ALL OVER AGAIN. INSTEAD, I'LL JUST TOUCH ON A FEW KEY POINTS:

FIRST OF ALL, WE'RE TALKING ABOUT A DISEASE THAT IS SPREADING. THE NUMBER OF VICTIMS IS DOUBLING IN LITTLE MORE THAN A YEAR. FOR EXAMPLE, AS OF JANUARY 1986, WE HAD A CUMULATIVE TOTAL OF 16,000 REPORTED CASES.

TODAY THAT TOTAL IS 30,000. BY THE WAY, OVER HALF OF THEM HAVE ALREADY DIED OF THE DISEASE...AND THE REST WILL.

LAST YEAR WE HAD OVER 13,000 NEW CASES ADDED TO THE TOTAL. THIS YEAR WE EXPECT ANOTHER 23,000 NEW CASES.

BY THE END OF 1990 THE CUMULATIVE TOTAL WILL BE CLOSE TO 270,000.

MAKE NO MISTAKE ABOUT IT. AIDS IS SPREADING AMONG MORE PEOPLE... AND IT IS FATAL. THE CLOSEST EVENT I CAN COMPARE THIS TO, I'M SORRY TO SAY, IS THE SITUATION IN EUROPE SEVERAL CENTURIES AGO DURING THE ARRIVAL AND SPREAD OF SMALLPOX AND THE BUBONIC PLAGUE.

SECOND POINT: EVEN THOUGH SCIENTISTS HAVE HAD A LOOK AT THE AIDS VIRUS, WE DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT IT IS. AND UNLESS WE KNOW THAT, WE HAVE NO WAY OF STOPPING IT. YES, WE'RE MAKING PROGRESS IN THE RESEARCH EFFORT, BUT IT'S VERY SLOW GOING.

IN 1984 THE SEARCH WAS NARROWED DOWN TO SOMETHING CALLED A HUMAN RETROVIRUS AND OUR SCIENTISTS AT THE NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE WERE EVEN ABLE TO PIN-POINT A SPECIFIC ONE. THEY CALLED IT THE "HUMAN T-CELL LYMPHOTROPIC VIRUS TYPE III," OR SIMPLY "HTLV-III."

APPARENTLY THE SAME VIRUS SHOWED UP IN THE WORK OF THE PASTEUR INSTITUTE, WHERE IT BECAME KNOWN AS THE "LYMPHADENOPATHY-ASSOCIATED VIRUS," OR "LAV." SCIENTISTS NOW AGREE TO CALL IT BY THE SINGLE COMMON NAME OF "HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS," OR "H.I.V."

IDENTIFYING THIS VIRUS WAS A VERY IMPORTANT STEP. ONCE WE KNOW WHERE THE AIDS VIRUS IS, WE'RE THEN ABLE TO RECOGNIZE THE PRESENCE OF ANTIBODIES SPECIFIC TO THE AIDS VIRUS IN AN INDIVIDUAL'S BLOOD SERUM. OF COURSE, THOSE ANTIBODIES AREN'T VERY EFFECTIVE, BUT THEY SHOW UP NEVERTHELESS.

AS OF 1985 WE'VE HAD A TEST THAT CAN DETECT THE PRESENCE OF THESE ANTIBODIES IN A PERSON'S BLOODSTREAM. ON THE BASIS OF SUCH TESTING SO FAR, PLUS OTHER EPIDEMIOLOGICAL STUDIES, WE BELIEVE THERE ARE BETWEEN A MILLION AND A MILLION-AND-A-HALF AMERICANS WALKING AROUND TODAY WITH THE AIDS VIRUS IN THEIR SYSTEMS.

THEY HAVE AIDS...BUT THEY AREN'T YET SICK WITH AN AIDS-RELATED DISEASE, SUCH AS PNEUMOCYSTIS CARINII PNEUMONIA OR KAPOSI'S SARCOMA OR ONE OF THE VIRULENT MEGALOVIRAL DISEASES.

ONE MAJOR COMPLICATION IS THE LENGTH OF THE INCUBATION PERIOD. IT APPARENTLY CAN STRETCH ANYWHERE FROM A YEAR OR SO IN SOME PEOPLE TO 10 YEARS IN OTHERS, IF OUR COMPUTATIONS ARE CORRECT. SO WE STILL CAN'T PREDICT DEFINITELY WHICH PERSON WITH THE H.I.V. WILL OR WILL NOT GET AN AIDS-RELATED DISEASE.

BUT THE RISK IS VERY, VERY HIGH. IN FACT, SOME RESEARCHERS NOW FEEL THAT ANYONE WITH THE AIDS VIRUS WILL EVENTUALLY CONTRACT AN AIDS-RELATED DISEASE.

AND THE MORTALITY RATE FOR PEOPLE WITH AIDS-RELATED DISEASES APPEARS TO BE 100 PERCENT.

THERE'S OTHER RESEARCH GOING ON AS WELL. I'M SURE YOU'VE READ ABOUT THIS OR THAT DRUG BEING TESTED ON AIDS PATIENTS. THE MEDIA, FOR EXAMPLE, HAVE GIVEN MUCH COVERAGE TO ONE DRUG, AZIDOTHYMININE, OR A.Z.T.. THIS DRUG SEEMS TO PROLONG THE LIVES OF SOME AIDS VICTIMS DYING OF PNEUMOCYSTIS CARINII PNEUMONIA.

BUT I'M AFRAID THAT'S ALL A.Z.T. DOES...IT PROLONGS SOME LIVES, IT DOES NOT SAVE THEM.

PEOPLE ASK ME, "DR. KOOP, WHEN CAN WE EXPECT AN EFFECTIVE VACCINE TO BE AVAILABLE?" AND I HAVE TO TELL THEM THAT I DON'T SEE ONE COMING ANY TIME SOON. YOU MUST REMEMBER THAT IT TOOK 19 YEARS TO DEVELOP THE HEPATITIS B VACCINE AND THAT WAS A COMPARATIVELY EASY VIRUS TO UNDERSTAND.

VACCINE DEVELOPMENT IS ALSO A VERY DIFFICULT SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENT. IF NOT PRODUCED WITH GREAT CARE, A VACCINE CAN CAUSE AS MUCH ILLNESS AND DEATH AS THE DISEASE IT'S SUPPOSED TO ATTACK.

SOME SCIENTISTS PREDICT THAT WE MIGHT TAKE THE VERY FIRST STEP IN VACCINE DEVELOPMENT LATER THIS YEAR. LET'S HOPE THEY CAN, BECAUSE IT'S A LONG PROCESS AND THE SOONER WE CAN START THE BETTER.

NOW, FOR MY THIRD POINT:

WE DON'T KNOW VERY MUCH ABOUT AIDS...BUT WE DO KNOW WITH COMPLETE CERTAINTY THAT THE VIRUS IS TRANSMITTED FROM ONE PERSON TO ANOTHER EITHER IN BLOOD OR IN SEMEN. IT'S A PECULIAR TRAIT FOR A VIRUS, BUT THERE IT IS.

HOWEVER, THIS IS ALSO ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PIECES OF INFORMATION WE HAVE SO FAR. IT EXPLAINS, FOR EXAMPLE, WHY THE INITIAL ALARM ABOUT AIDS WAS SOUNDED AMONG HOMOSEXUAL AND BISEXUAL MEN. SOME OF THEIR SEX PRACTICES NOT ONLY PRODUCE SEMEN BUT MAY ALSO CAUSE SOME BLEEDING.

AND, AGAIN, BLOOD AND SEMEN ARE THE ONLY TWO BODY FLUIDS THAT CARRY THE LIVE AIDS VIRUS IN QUANTITIES SUFFICIENT TO BE TRANSMISS-
ABLE.

THAT INFORMATION ALSO EXPLAINS WHY 17 PERCENT OF ALL AIDS CASES ARE INTRAVENOUS DRUG ABUSERS WHO USE A DIRTY NEEDLE THEY'VE BORROWED FROM ANOTHER ADDICT WHO ALREADY HAS AIDS.

WHEN WE FIRST BEGAN TO CONFRONT THE AIDS EPIDEMIC, THE PEOPLE AT HIGHEST RISK WERE HOMOSEXUAL AND BISEXUAL MEN. I'M AFRAID THEY STILL ARE: 2 OF EVERY 3 CASES INVOLVE THESE MEN, EVEN THOUGH THEY'VE BECOME MUCH MORE CAUTIOUS ABOUT THEIR SEXUAL PRACTICES BECAUSE OF THEIR FEAR OF AIDS.

BUT NOWADAYS WE'RE RECEIVING MORE AND MORE REPORTS OF THE AIDS VIRUS OCCURRING AMONG HETEROSEXUALS -- MOSTLY WOMEN -- WHO ARE NOT I.V. DRUG ABUSERS. IN FACT, THEIR HETEROSEXUAL ACTIVITY SEEMS TO BE THEIR ONLY RISK FACTOR.

AS OF LAST WEEK, 4 PERCENT OF ALL REPORTED AIDS CASES WERE AMONG HETEROSEXUALS...A PERCENTAGE, BY THE WAY, THAT'S CLIMBING.

SOME PEOPLE SAY, "WELL, 4 PERCENT...THAT'S NOT MUCH. WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS ABOUT?"

MY ANSWER IS THAT WE'RE PROBABLY SEEING ONLY THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG. THESE CASES REPRESENT THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYMPTOMS IN PEOPLE WHO'VE BEEN INCUBATING THE VIRUS FOR 1, 2, 5, OR MAYBE EVEN 10 YEARS.

IN FACT, OUR EPIDEMIOLOGISTS IN ATLANTA SAY THAT, WHILE THE OVERALL AIDS CASE-LOAD COULD GO UP 9 TIMES OVER THE NEXT 5 YEARS -- TO SOMETHING LIKE 74,000 NEW CASES IN 1991 ALONE -- THE CASE-LOAD AMONG HETEROSEXUALS WILL GO UP 20 TIMES IN THE SAME PERIOD.

THAT IS, WHILE WE REPORTED ABOUT 500 NEW CASES OF AIDS AMONG HETEROSEXUALS OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS, WE CAN EXPECT SOMETHING LIKE 10,000 SUCH CASES DURING 1991 ALONE.

OVER THE PAST 5 YEARS, WHEN IT LOOKED AS IF THE KEY GROUP AT RISK WERE HOMOSEXUAL AND BISEXUAL MEN, WE BEAMED VIRTUALLY ALL OUR INFORMATION AND EDUCATION EFFORTS TO THOSE MEN.

BUT NOW THAT THE RISE IN THIS DISEASE IS OCCURRING AMONG HETEROSEXUAL MEN AND WOMEN, WE NEED TO DIRECT OUR INFORMATION AND EDUCATION EFFORTS OUT TO THE SOCIETY AT LARGE.

THAT'S VERY HARD TO DO IN THIS COUNTRY. WE'RE A VERY LARGE AND VERY DIVERSE SOCIETY AND THE COST OF SENDING A MESSAGE TO EVERYONE WOULD BE ASTRONOMICAL...IF, IN FACT, IT COULD BE ACHIEVED.

SO WE'VE HAD TO SET SOME PRIORITIES AND MAKE SOME TOUGH CHOICES. AND I THINK WE MADE THE RIGHT CHOICE, WHEN WE DECIDED TO FOCUS ON INFORMING YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT THE DANGERS OF AIDS.

ALL YOUNG PEOPLE -- WHETHER HETEROSEXUAL OR HOMOSEXUAL -- ARE NOW AT HIGH RISK AND THEY HAVE A NEED AND RIGHT TO KNOW WHAT WE KNOW.

I TRIED TO KEEP THESE YOUNGSTERS IN MIND, WHILE WRITING THE SURGEON GENERAL'S REPORT ON AIDS, WHICH I RELEASED LAST OCTOBER. LET ME TAKE JUST A MINUTE HERE TO EXPLAIN HOW THAT REPORT CAME ABOUT.

THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE HAD BEEN ROUTINELY KEEPING THE PRESIDENT AND HIS CABINET INFORMED OF DEVELOPMENTS ON THE AIDS FRONT. THEN, IN LATE 1985, THE TREND LINES BEGAN TO MOVE SHARPLY UPWARD AND OUR CONCERNS DEEPENED. BUT IT WAS OUR SENSE THAT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WERE STILL UNCLEAR ABOUT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DISEASE.

IN FEBRUARY 1986 PRESIDENT REAGAN INSTRUCTED ME TO PULL TOGETHER EVERYTHING WE KNEW ABOUT AIDS AND PUT IT INTO A PLAIN-ENGLISH REPORT TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

FOR THE NEXT 8 MONTHS I MET WITH CONCERNED INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS FROM ACROSS THE SPECTRUM OF SOCIETY...

GROUPS LIKE THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION AND THE NATIONAL P.T.A....

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMISSION OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION...

THE SYNAGOGUE COUNCIL OF AMERICA AND THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS...

I TALKED WITH THE NATIONAL COALITION OF BLACK AND LESBIAN GAYS AND WITH THE WASHINGTON BUSINESS GROUP ON HEALTH.

I MET WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF LOCAL, COUNTY, AND STATE AND TERRITORIAL HEALTH OFFICIALS, ALSO...26 GROUPS IN ALL.

THEY WERE ALL VERY CONCERNED AND THEY ALL PLEDGED TO HELP GET MY REPORT INTO THE HANDS OF EVERY AMERICAN.

AFTER 8 MONTHS OF LISTENING AND WRITING, I DELIVERED MY REPORT TO THE CABINET AND TO THE PRESIDENT. IT WAS ACCEPTED...AND I RELEASED IT ON OCTOBER 22, 1986.

I HOPE YOU'VE ALL READ IT. IF NOT, PLEASE GET OUT A PENCIL AND TAKE DOWN THIS ADDRESS:

AIDS...POST OFFICE BOX 14252...WASHINGTON, D.C....20044

LET ME REPEAT THAT FOR YOU:

AIDS...POST OFFICE BOX 14252...WASHINGTON, D.C....20044

THERE IS MUCH SCIENTIFIC AND PUBLIC HEALTH INFORMATION IN THAT REPORT. BUT ON THE BEHAVIORAL SIDE, THERE ARE ESSENTIALLY JUST TWO MESSAGES, AND I HOPE THEY REACH EVERY ONE OF THIS COUNTRY'S YOUNG POEPLER.

THE FIRST MESSAGE IS SIMPLE ENOUGH. IT SAYS...

FIND SOMEONE WHO IS WORTHY OF YOUR RESPECT AND YOUR LOVE...GIVE THAT PERSON BOTH...AND STAY FAITHFUL TO HIM OR HER.

IN OTHER WORDS, SHORT OF TOTAL ABSTINENCE, THE BEST DEFENSE AGAINST AIDS IS TO MAINTAIN A FAITHFUL, MONOGAMOUS RELATIONSHIP IN WHICH YOU HAVE ONLY ONE CONTINUING SEXUAL PARTNER...AND THAT PERSON IS AS FAITHFUL AS YOU ARE.

MY SECOND MESSAGE IS FOR PEOPLE WHO DON'T YET HAVE A FAITHFUL MONOGAMOUS RELATIONSHIP FOR WHATEVER REASON. THE MESSAGE IS...
CAUTION: IT'S IMPORTANT THAT YOU KNOW WITH ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY THAT NEITHER YOU NOR YOUR PARTNER IS CARRYING THE AIDS VIRUS. IF YOU'RE NOT ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN, THEN YOU MUST TAKE PRECAUTIONS.

LOOK AT IT THIS WAY: STRICTLY FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF EPIDEMIOLOGY, WHEN YOU HAVE SEX WITH SOMEONE, YOU'RE ALSO HAVING SEX WITH EVERYONE ELSE WITH WHOM THAT PERSON HAS HAD SEX. AND, CONSIDERING THE LONG INCUBATION PERIOD FOR THE AIDS VIRUS, WE'RE TALKING ABOUT THAT PERSON'S HISTORY OF SEXUAL RELATIONS GOING BACK 10 YEARS.

EVEN WITH THIS KIND OF INFORMATION AVAILABLE, THERE WILL ALWAYS BE SOME PEOPLE WHO WON'T ABSTAIN YET WON'T ACHIEVE A FAITHFUL MONOGAMOUS RELATIONSHIP EITHER. THEREFORE, THEY MAY EXPOSE THEMSELVES AND OTHERS TO THE AIDS VIRUS.

TO SUCH FOOL-HARDY INDIVIDUALS I OFFER THE FOLLOWING ADVICE:

* DON'T HAVE SEX WITH SOMEONE WHO ALREADY HAS AIDS. THAT'S OBVIOUS ENOUGH.

* DON'T HAVE SEX WITH SOMEONE WHO COULD BE CARRYING THE AIDS VIRUS...A PERSON, FOR EXAMPLE, WHO PRACTICES HIGH-RISK BEHAVIOR. THAT INCLUDES HOMOSEXUALS, INTRAVENOUS DRUG USERS, PROSTITUTES AND OTHER PERSONS WHO HAVE MANY DIFFERENT SEX PARTNERS. AND THE SAME MESSAGE GOES TO ANY OF THOSE HIGH-RISK INDIVIDUALS.

* AND FINALLY, IF YOU DO DECIDE TO HAVE SEX WITH SUCH A PERSON ANYWAY, THEN -- IF YOU'RE A MAN -- USE A CONDOM FROM START TO FINISH. IF YOU'RE A WOMAN, MAKE SURE YOUR MALE PARTNER USES A CONDOM...AGAIN, FROM START TO FINISH.

A CONDOM WON'T PROVIDE 100 PERCENT PROTECTION -- FEW THINGS IN LIFE DO -- BUT SO FAR IT SEEMS TO BE THE BEST PROTECTION AVAILABLE.

IF SEXUALLY ACTIVE PEOPLE WILL HEED THESE MESSAGES, THEY WILL ACHIEVE A HIGH DEGREE OF PROTECTION AND WILL MOST LIKELY NOT BE INFECTED WITH THE AIDS VIRUS.

WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO TO COMBAT THIS TERRIBLE DISEASE?

IN MY REPORT ON AIDS, I ALSO ADVISE NOT TO HAVE SEX WITH FEMALE OR MALE PROSTITUTES AND TO STAY CLEAR OF DRUGS AND ALCOHOL, BECAUSE THESE SUBSTANCES LOWER YOUR ABILITY TO THINK CLEARLY AND PROTECT YOURSELF FROM DANGER...ESPECIALLY THE DANGER OF HAVING SEX WITH AN AIDS-INFECTED PARTNER.

SOME PEOPLE OBJECT TO MY ADVICE BECAUSE ITS SOUNDS TOO MUCH LIKE A LESSON IN MORALITY. AND I GUESS IT DOES. BUT IN THIS CASE, MORALITY AND SCIENCE WALK HAND-IN-HAND.

NOW, LET ME PAUSE FOR A MOMENT AND FOCUS ON AN ISSUE THAT IS GAINING ALMOST AS MUCH ATTENTION AS THE AIDS VIRUS ITSELF. THAT ISSUE IS...HOW SHOULD WE EDUCATE OUR YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT AIDS AND ABOUT THEIR SEXUALITY. HOW SHOULD WE DO IT? WHO SHOULD DO IT? AND WHEN?

I BELIEVE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ACTION OUR SOCIETY MIGHT TAKE TO PROTECT ITS YOUNG PEOPLE FROM THE MORTAL THREAT OF AIDS IS TO PROVIDE THEM WITH EDUCATION CONCERNING THEIR OWN SEXUALITY...EDUCATION THAT IS FACTUALLY CORRECT, PERSONALLY SENSITIVE, AND MORALLY STRONG.

THE TERM "SEX EDUCATION" IS ONE I'M NOT AT ALL COMFORTABLE WITH. MOST OF THE TIME, WHEN YOU HEAR THE PHRASE, "SEX EDUCATION," YOU IMMEDIATELY THINK OF CLASS HOURS DEVOTED TO HUMAN REPRODUCTIVE BIOLOGY, INCLUDING CAREFULLY PHRASED EXPLANATIONS ABOUT THE USE AND ABUSE OF THE MALE AND FEMALE GENITALIA.

I'M TOLD THAT YOUNG PEOPLE CALL THESE CLASSES "ORGAN RECITALS."

MOST SCHOOLS NOW OFFER THIS MINIMUM KIND OF SEX EDUCATION SOME TIME DURING THE JUNIOR HIGH OR MIDDLE SCHOOL YEARS AND THAT'S A GOOD THING, ALTHOUGH IT MIGHT APPEAR TO BE A LITTLE LATE. I PERSONALLY WOULD URGE THAT THE MATERIAL BE PRESENTED EARLIER, AMONG 9-, 10-, AND 11- YEAR-OLDS.

BUT NO ONE SHOULD BE RIGID ABOUT THE AGES. DEVELOPMENTAL AGE IS MUCH MORE IMPORTANT A MEASURE THAN CHRONOLOGICAL AGE ANYWAY.

IN ANY CASE, GRADE-SCHOOL CHILDREN ARE EXTREMELY CURIOUS ABOUT THEMSELVES...THEIR OWN PHYSIOLOGY...AND THEIR OWN FEELINGS.

THEY ARE ALSO KINDER AND MORE GENEROUS THAN OLDER CHILDREN...OR EVEN MOST ADULTS, FOR THAT MATTER. AND THEY ARE, ABOVE ALL, SUSCEPTIBLE TO BEING LOVED AND TO OFFERING MUCH LOVE IN RETURN.

AND SEX EDUCATION WITHOUT THE CONCEPT OF LOVE AND RESPONSIBILITY IS LIKE A PIECE OF PIE THAT'S ALL CRUST AND NO FILLING.

MY OWN PREFERENCE, THEREFORE, WOULD BE TO HAVE OUR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS INTRODUCE CHILDREN TO THE SUBJECT OF REPRODUCTIVE BIOLOGY WITHIN A MORE GENERAL DISCUSSION OF THE NATURE OF SENSITIVE AND AFFIRMATIVE HUMAN RELATIONS.

THAT'S EASIER TO SAY THAN TO DO, I KNOW. AND SOME PARENTS DO GET UNEASY ABOUT HAVING THE SCHOOLS IMPART CERTAIN HUMAN VALUES TO THEIR CHILDREN. THEY THINK THAT SUCH INSTRUCTION SHOULD BE DONE AT HOME. I'M SURE THERE ARE MANY HERE THIS MORNING WHO FEEL THE SAME WAY.

WELL, I AGREE. I ALWAYS HAVE. BUT MANY PARENTS HAVE TROUBLE TAKING THE NEXT STEP: THAT IS, DOING THE JOB THEMSELVES. LATELY, I'VE WONDERED WHY THIS WAS THE CASE.

I SUSPECT THAT MANY PARENTS HAVE TROUBLE DEALING WITH THE PHYSIOLOGY AND BIOLOGY OF SEX MAINLY BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T GET ANY OF THIS INFORMATION WHEN THEY WERE KIDS EITHER. AND THEY FEEL INADEQUATE.

I WOULD GUESS THAT TWO-THIRDS OF THE PEOPLE HERE HAD NO SUCH EDUCATION WHEN YOU WERE OF SCHOOL AGE.

MANY PARENTS ALSO REGARD ANY TALK ABOUT SEX AS A KIND OF INVASION OF PRIVACY -- THEIR OWN AS WELL AS THEIR CHILDREN'S -- AND PUT IT ASIDE FOR THAT REASON, TOO.

BUT I THINK THERE'S ALSO A THIRD REASON, WHICH MAY BE THE MOST IMPORTANT REASON OF ALL, YET THE MOST DIFFICULT ONE TO DEAL WITH. IT HAS TO DO WITH THE NATURE AND THE QUALITY OF CONTEMPORARY ADULT HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS.

AS I INDICATED EARLIER, "SEX EDUCATION" OUGHT TO DEAL WITH RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN WHO ARE LOVING, CARING, RESPECTFUL, AND TOLERANT.

SUCH RELATIONSHIPS USUALLY INCLUDE SOME FULFILLING SEXUAL ACTIVITY, BUT THEY ARE NOT DEFINED ONLY BY THAT ACTIVITY. THERE'S MUCH MORE TO HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS THAN JUST "GOOD SEX." AND YOUNG PEOPLE OUGHT TO BE ADVISED OF THAT.

FOR MOST ADULTS, A SATISFYING RELATIONSHIP TRIES TO BALANCE THE EMOTIONAL, INTELLECTUAL, PHYSICAL, AND SEXUAL FACTORS THAT MAKE UP THAT RELATIONSHIP.

EVERYONE DREAMS OF SUCH A RELATIONSHIP. IF WE MEET A MAN OR WOMAN WHO CAN GIVE US THAT KIND OF RELATIONSHIP, WE WILLINGLY GIVE HIM OR HER OUR LIFELONG PROMISE.

NOVELISTS CALL IT "TRUE LOVE." SOCIOLOGISTS CALL IT "MARITAL FIDELITY." THE SURGEON GENERAL CALLS IT "MONOGAMY." BUT WHATEVER YOU CALL IT, WE ALL WANT IT: THAT IS, A BALANCED, LOVING, AND FULLY CONSIDERATE RELATIONSHIP...A RELATIONSHIP THAT'S ENRICHED BY SEX, NOT OVERWHELMED BY IT OR DEVOID OF IT EITHER.

WE MAY ALL WANT SUCH A RELATIONSHIP...BUT IN "REAL LIFE" WE MIGHT NOT ACHIEVE IT. WE KNOW THE REAL WORLD IS IMPERFECT...IT'S FULL OF GIVE-AND-TAKE.

GROWN-UPS KNOW ABOUT HUMAN IMPERFECTION AND CAN DEAL WITH IT. BUT CHILDREN DON'T...AND CAN'T.

WITHOUT A COMPASSIONATE UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPERFECT NATURE OF MANY HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS, A CHILD'S EDUCATION WILL BE...ITSELF...VERY IMPERFECT.

SO IF PARENTS ARE TO EDUCATE THEIR CHILDREN ABOUT HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS -- SEXUAL AND OTHERWISE -- THEY MUST FIRST UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT THE NATURE OF THEIR OWN. FOR MANY, THAT'S HARD TO DO.

PARENTS -- ADULTS -- ARE NOT VERY GOOD ABOUT TALKING TO EACH OTHER ABOUT THEIR SEXUALITY. THEY FEEL FRUSTRATED, GUILTY, AND EVEN ANGRY ABOUT THEIR INABILITY TO DO THE THING THAT THEY KNOW -- INTELLECTUALLY AND EMOTIONALLY -- THEY SHOULD DO.

BUT THEY CAN'T. I WON'T ASK FOR A SHOW OF HANDS...BUT I WOULD GUESS THAT THERE ARE MANY MEN AND WOMEN HERE THIS MORNING WHO HAVE TRIED TO FACE THIS VERY ISSUE IN THEIR OWN LIVES. IT'S A VERY COMMON EXPERIENCE...AND IT'S A DIFFICULT ONE AS WELL.

IS IT ANY WONDER, THEN, THAT MANY PARENTS HAVE TROUBLE TELLING THEIR CHILDREN ABOUT THE FULL-DIMENSIONAL NATURE OF AN IDEAL HUMAN RELATIONSHIP, IN THE CONTEXT OF WANTING TO IMPART SOME KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SEX.

NEVERTHELESS, I WANT PARENTS TO TRY. I WANT PARENTS TO DO THIS WITH COMPASSION...WITH RESPECT...WITH LOVE...AND WITH SOME UNDERSTANDING NOT JUST OF THE CHILD WHO'S LISTENING...BUT ALSO OF THE ADULT WHO IS SPEAKING.

IT REMAINS AS MY SINCEREST WISH THAT THE PARENTS OF THIS COUNTRY WILL BE THE PRIMARY TEACHERS OF SEX AND HUMAN RELATIONS TO THE CHILDREN OF THIS COUNTRY.

BUT IF SOME PARENTS SIMPLY CAN'T DO IT, THEN I BELIEVE THERE'S A COMPELLING SOCIAL NEED FOR OUR SCHOOLS, CHURCHES, SYNAGOGUES, AND OTHER COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS TO DO WHATEVER POSSIBLE TO PROVIDE OUR CHILDREN WITH THE MOST HELPFUL KINDS OF INFORMATION.

OUR CHILDREN DON'T LIVE IN A VACUUM, AS WE ALL KNOW. THEY LIVE IN A REAL WORLD OF PLEASURE AND DANGER, ALONG WITH THE REST OF US.

BUT WE ADULTS HAVE SOME EXPERIENCE WITH IT AND SOME SENSE OF HOW TO SURVIVE IN IT WITH OUR LIVES AND OUR VALUES INTACT.

I BELIEVE, THEREFORE, THAT EACH OF US -- IN OUR HOMES OR IN OUR SCHOOLS -- HAS THE MORAL RESPONSIBILITY TO PASS THAT INFORMATION ON TO OUR CHILDREN.

THE GOVERNMENT -- THE U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE IN PARTICULAR -- WILL HELP IN ANY WAY IT CAN.

BUT THERE ARE LIMITS TO WHAT THE GOVERNMENT CAN AND OUGHT TO DO. THE TASK BASICALLY BELONGS TO THE HOME AND TO LOCAL SCHOOLS AND OTHER COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS. IT SHOULD NOT BE LEFT, BY DEFAULT, TO THE MOVIES, TELEVISION, OR THE STREET-CORNER. WE CAN'T DO THAT, AND STILL PROTECT THE MILLIONS OF YOUNG LIVES THAT ARE AT RISK OF AIDS.

THIS HAS BEEN A GRIM MESSAGE AND I GUESS I AM A GRIM COURIER. I ONLY HOPE THAT EVERY AMERICAN WHO HEARS OR READS MY MESSAGE, WILL BELIEVE IT AND DO HIS OR HER PART TO STOP THE SPREAD OF AIDS...PROTECT AND SAVE THE LIVES OF PEOPLE AT RISK, INCLUDING UNSUSPECTING YOUNG PEOPLE...AND RETURN HUMAN SEXUALITY BACK TO ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE: AS PART OF THE TOTAL COMPLEX OF HUMAN, CARING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS.

SUCH RELATIONS OUGHT TO BE POSITIVE, HOPEFUL, AND SAFE. IN MY BOOK, THAT'S THE REAL MEANING OF THE PHRASE "TRUE LOVE."

WHICH LEADS ME TO MY OBSERVATION. IT'S NOT MINE REALLY. IT'S THE LAST SENTENCE OF THE BRIDGE OF SAN LUIS REY, THE LITTLE NOVEL WRITTEN BY THORNTON WILDER, ONE OF THIS COUNTRY'S TRULY GREAT WRITERS.

WILDER CONCLUDED THAT NOVEL BY OBSERVING...

"THERE IS A LAND OF THE LIVING AND A LAND OF THE DEAD AND THE ONLY
BRIDGE IS LOVE...THE ONLY SURVIVAL, THE ONLY MEANING."

THANK YOU.

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