

**'YOU IMPROVISE
TO SURVIVE'**

**An anthology of writing by gay, queer, and
trans prisoners on surviving.**

**assembled by the prisoner correspondence project
Montreal, Spring 2009**

January 21st, 2009

I find myself wishing there was something good I can say about safe sex in prison as I know prison, but there does not seem to be. Once two people have tested for one thing or other or for everything (why not also test for V.D. while you are at it?) and both are negative, you don't need safe sex devices. Just don't stray. And what about the virus being able to hide in the body til later announcement? There are so many red and yellow lights that you can end up real mixed up over what to do. At some point you have to throw caution to the wind.

I took a tremendous amount of chances in my day, but never again. I will not test my destiny or fate. It takes experience to be able to navigate the prisons sexually and make the best choices. I have 28 years behind me and intend to stay negative the rest of my life, thank you!

So bye for now but not forever...
Love, Amazon (Alias "ChiChi")

As for what the prisoners themselves/ourselves think of it, again that can go either way depending on the individual. The liberal element don't mind or care and may do it themselves, and the conservative (if you wanna call it that) element is critical of it, by the latter meaning the religious type or your extreme right –wing cadre (Nazi's, skinheads, etc.). A lot of people play it off, are in the closet, don't wanna be subject to peer pressure, stigmatization, or worse. So up front they are anti-homo/trans, etc., but in reality they would fool around with us if they could get away with it.

[...]

With further regard to safe sex practices, I can't really say I have used anything to safeguard against catching something, whether the virus, HEP, any variety of venereal disease. First, where would I get a condom? I only know one transwoman who ever showed me one. I hear they are now experimenting with giving us condoms in a single prison, it is hard enough in most instances to just have a place to do it outside of the cell. You have to take what is there, meaning the opportunity, when it presents itself if you are not the cellmates. So that is a matter of timing and place, and many times that comes on you unexpectedly.

Back in the 1990s, when I was in the SHU with my girlfriend Belladonna, I was real paranoid about having sex and was not having it in any way that involved exchanging fluid. Once I explained this to a cellmate and she was agreeable, so we just did a different method – no insertion, just between the legs for friction. She was not supposed to ejaculate on me but ended up doing it anyway. I was down about it, upset but not angry. She apologized that she had just gotten carried away in passion. It was cool. She tried to get me to penetrate her but I woundn't. Back then I was real, real careful.

A lot of theories and wives tales abound in these places about how safe you can have regular sex, penetration but withdrawing before ejaculation, for example. Some feel that is safe, some say no, that even as you are stroking, semen can/does seep out and that can infect you with whatever. The same for oral: some say its okay to do oral as long as there is no ejaculation in the mouth, others say it is the same as anal, that semen seeps out while you are doing oral. I have heard and read both arguments propounded as facts, and I guess they are true to their habits and opinions, and that takes time.

This booklet is the first edition of an anthology we are in the process of putting together, of writing by gay, queer, and trans prisoners across the US and Canada, outlining and documenting their daily negotiations of risk, safety, and survival.

The statements, anecdotes and experiences laid out here were gathered since January of 2009 as the basis for a safer sex resource series, which are being developed collaboratively with our inside penpals. They are included here in the order they were received, as is, without edits or changes.

The aim of this anthology is to archive and celebrate the resistance and survival of our penpals, friends, and allies on the inside, in the face of forced exposure to epidemic rates of HIV and Hep C, violent medical negligence, administrative retaliation, the criminalization of queer sex/desire/intimacy, and other forms of structural antiques violence.

Through these resources, this anthology, and our project more broadly, we seek to nurture community between inside and outside queers, and forge new strategies for trans and queer survival inside and outside of prisons. In the process, we hope to forge gay, queer and trans cultures of self-determination and self-defense!

We are always looking for new penpals. To get involved, or to talk about other ways you can support the project, contact us at

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AMAZON (1)

January 2nd, 2009

When I read the callouts one of the first things that came to my mind is that "there is no 'safe sex' in prison!" That is my opinion based on my experience, personal and otherwise. It's safe to say that no one is tripping on safe sex in these California prisons as a general statement. I have knows that some queens who talked that way and had condoms, and that was one in 28 years so far. I myself have vowed devotion to safe sex, but that did not last long. These days, though, I can honestly say I am "more careful" in having sex, not having safe sex as it is classically defined (condoms, dental dams, etc). Sex is too critical a topic to tag with absolutes (eg. Safe sex or no sex). It goes into some very complex things and issues that cannot be subject to a philosophy of "to have sex or not have it". And this is so, not just in prison, but in society as well. At best it can be limited and not had as frequently for some who want to be careful healthwise, but it can never be totally suppressed or confined to a safe-sex formula.

I started *voluntarily* testing for the virus in late 1990s. I was sure I had it. I was "shocked and awed" when the test came back "negative for HIV-1 and HIV-2 virus". In my activism I had read up on the virus, many books, pamphlets, etc. I knew that from the literature the virus can "hide" in the body and not show on a test for years, then suddenly surface. This was medical fact I had read by doctors studying the virus. So I was not all that relieved when the first test came out negative. I began to test annually, each year. In the seven or so tests I have taken since then, all have come out negative. The last time I went in for a test the doctor said why am I testing again if I am not engaging in risk behavior? I told him what I had learned from the medical literature. He and the nurse said that is old findings, that if its not understood that that can't happen. Bullshit. They really tried to convince me not to test. So I lied, said I was doing risk stuff, sex, with many partners. So they tested me: "negative". I had gone six years without sex (excluding penile / anal masturbation). Then it just started happening again, but incidents far between and avoiding fluids if possible. What has contributed to having less sex, for me, is my translesbian orientation. I am a transsexual lesbian and only go with queens now, not with "straight" men, and with genetic women. So there

AMAZON (2)

January 20th, 2009

Part of our fight over here is the provision of condoms for sex between prisoners. I suppose some prisoners will actually limit their sexual activity to safe sex where the means for it are available. To be blunt, I never in my life ever used a condom, in or out of prison. Out of prison I had a lot of encounters with males, some who were perfect strangers, and never once did we ever even think of condoms, which were, very easily accessible. Well, I was last out in the end of 1980; the AIDS virus was not known then and sex was a lot more prevalent and carefree. At least compared to post-AIDS scare times.

I have to admit frankly that every transsexual I have ever known (except for one long exception) never practiced safe sex. They would not even if handed a condom on the spot. I don't know why it is this way but it just is. These are very hard prostitutes, very hard girls. They in the life for life. There is no way out. It is the only life they know. Safe sex is not a part of it. They want the real things, come what may.

I have read and still have the safe sex-in-prison pamphlet that you all sent me a while back. It does, of course, make a lot of sense theoretically. Accessories are not so available in a prison setting (plastic for dams, condoms, lubricants and etc.). For example, you go to the hole, it is just you and your cellmate and really no personal property or even basic things like washcloth, writing gear, cosmetics and so forth. You want to have sex. What do you do for safety? What *can* you do? You can't do anything. You are in there for months on end. You wanna have sex. What is going to happen?

A question was asked about how prisoners/guards feel about same-gender sex in the prisons. Over here in the California Prisons that I have been in it varies, but mostly the guards are against it: of course and mostly intolerant about it. There is the rare exception, though where they might not mind or care, as long as it is not done in front of their face. Then you have the instances in which some guards have engaged in sex with the prisoners, in any combination. Most don't care what you do behind doors just don't let them see it.

As a queer we can't cell up with just anyone because others don't want us in their cell because of their phobias and social status. So the higher-ups would much rather "us" find our own cellies to skip all that drama. I've went to staff once and told them that I'm gay and I can't live with anyone straight so I want to live with Steven and he would like to live with me so they celled us up no problem.

You can not show any kind of affection in public. You can only do it in your cell. I know these two guys who didn't live together they wanted to have oral sex with each other. The only place that doesn't have cameras and a little privacy is church. So these two guys went up there and got caught by some inmates, they felt disrespected so they bear the shit out of both of them. They both ran around with black eyes and fat lips.

What tools and resources are provided to have sex more safely? Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha ha!

Here in prison gays don't support one another. Everyone is out for themselves.

has been less sex for be based on that factor, generally. But still, there is the occasional fling.

The risk of something like the virus comes with the life. It is very literally a life and death game. It is out circumstance, at least by the breed of queens over here, in these prisons, on the streets. You talk about condoms, you will look silly, fake. It is a risk like anything else in everyday life, not just our life. Driving a car, getting on a plane, walking down the street.

At the same time this things about "safe sex", though it may make sense is some practical aspect, tends to come across like some kind of control mechanism, though I have never heard it said: it is how I myself kinda feel about it.

January 8th, 2009

This is my 28th year in prison. I am working on getting out. Time's up. But it will have to be a fight in the courts because the prisoncrats are still on this big power trip here in California (and everywhere else!) that just feels we don't have shit coming. Drop dead. Go to hell, all of that. Getting out is a big deal for us lifers, of course, but you know what? Even so, if I don't make it out I will be content to die in prison as long as I have my womanhood.

All I do now is look forward to the day when I can walk into a women's prison with a big smile on my face! That is going to make all my years in these dumps worth the while.

[...]

I can't really offer advice about having "safesex." I don't practice it. I practice "being careful." In my own way. It does not involve use of things plastic, rubber, etc. Mostly avoid body fluids, which is the main way of transmission. That is tricky, but hey, it's the life. You improvise to survive. That's all I can offer.

[...]

The last few months I have been getting news of old friends who have died, old lovers. Since I have been in this prison the last seven years

about five men who I knew have died here. Cancer, old age, alcohol or drug-use related illness. Some died just from the prison not giving them the medical attention they needed. These kinds of deaths affect us, or at least they really hit me hard. Life goes on as if nothing happened, even here.

Men who died I never knew, just saw here every day, no longer here, vanished in a single breath. No one pauses, no one says a prayer. They were just one of the so many faceless, packaged "inmates" in a prison, nobody. It rubs off from the way cops think about us, like cattle. We start thinking of ourselves that way too. I did not mean to bend your ears with this. It just happened that last night I heard another one of my best friends and cellmates died of O.D., a real beautiful young transsexual woman.

Bye for now but not forever,
Amazon

MATT JONES

I'm writing about barebacking (without a condom).

I had a boyfriend here in prison for a couple months. Here in prison or at least this prison there is no such thing as safe sex. It is against the rules. So the only way that I've found to be safe is to have an AIDS and hepatitis test. You can show your partner your results. So when I met Steven I asked to see his AIDS / hep test results and saw that they were current and negative, so we ended up fucking like wild rabbits in heat. I've heard of guys using sandwich bags and plastic wrap as condoms. As for lube, we've discovered baby oil works the best!

Safe sex means a lot to me everywhere I am. The treatment for AIDS has come a long way which I think tends to make people think its ok to have unsafe sex because they figure they can still live somewhat normal lives. I understand how people want "all" of their partner, but there are ways to do that safely, and it takes time. You can just decide to have unsafe sex with someone without a little investigating first. By that I mean, you ask to see an AIDS test first, possibly a hep test also. If you trust that person to not be sleeping around you could have safe unprotected sex.

In terms of how sex is treated by the guards and administration, it is against the prison rules to masturbate or have sexual contact. Actually, we really aren't allowed to have any contact with each other (including hugs, hand holding, etc.) When we want to have sex here we wait until count time. Because at that time the guards are at their breaks. Only the block sat is walking around with a clip board doing role call. Once he walks by we can have about 30 mins to ourselves. Others use that time to smoke, masturbate, etc.

If we get caught, both people get thrown in the hole, your good time is taken and you are not allowed to ever cell up with that person again. But some of the higher up staff knows what goes on. They know who are couples and tend to cater to them a little. I think the reason why is they would rather us be together because its less of a security risk for them.

PATRICE DANIELS

I know some other states in the USA hand out condoms for safe sex and segregate homosexuals. I don't know why PA and other states don't. I wish I could do more than this letter but I am only just one, it takes many to change rule and I dont have that pleasure.

Thank you, Toddles from P.A.

Here in Illinois they do not pass out condoms although they know gay sex is rampant. I wish they did. Their argument is "to pass out condoms would mean we condone gay sex between inmates." You can receive up to 1 yr. in solitary confinement if you are caught having gay sex.

I have never been caught. Primarily because I limit my gay sexual encounters to 1 act. Mutual masturbation. It is the SAFEST and QUICKEST way to "get off." I am deathly afraid of contracting HIV so I stay away from anal and oral sex period.

Especially when I consider how endowed I am – that will definitely mean some amount of bleeding for my partner. No matter how prepared they are. So – I always keep it safe. I get the same result from a hand job – an orgasm. Mutual masturbation is fun and very safe.

J . A . B R O W N

Safe sex is always important in or outside of prison to me. But the only difference is, on the outside, I have a choice. In prisons here in NY state, it's either abstinence or play at your own risk. The state doesn't provide, or offer, protection.

The guards discriminate and discourage queer sex in prison (at least in the "male" jails that's how it is) and the hetero prisoners are no exception to the rules.

Queer prisoners – the vast majority of us are already sick – do not care to respond at all about the lack of anything pertaining to us, and especially in the way of protection. Moreover, sadly enough, considering our mentality as a queer universal whole, we are not "united" and probably will never be again, (in light of being strong enough / united enough to push for change), until we are segregated again among ourselves [as] queer prisoners.

I for one am particularly glad you mentioned the issue of barebacking, because it is – without doubt – long overdue. I myself have come to understand that some incarcerated queer folk are so vindictive in nature that there has been incidents where they've gone as far as to forge positive HIV reports on themselves – for whatever intent they had. So as you can probably see, some solution is definitely in order.

In terms of the issue of allowing / issuing condoms, by *not* providing them, it doesn't discourage sexual behavior and promiscuity, but rather only threatens to give a world-wide epidemic a lot more momentum.

May you always prevail in your struggles.

T O D D L E S

I am responding to the "Fucking without Fear" project. I can only give what I know from state prison in the U.S.A. state of Pennsylvania. I have been in prison for 5 yrs and I am open about my sexuality. In the state of P.A. which is considered a commonwealth state, sex between inmates is not allowed even if both inmates are of age and consensual between each other. They give us no information on how to have safe sex in prison because it is prohibited so of course no lube or condoms are provided.

The Department of Corrections is aware that sex happens in their prisons, but all they do is give you punishment by placing you in a R.H.U. (restricted housing unit), they used to give you single cell status if you ever got caught in a sexual act. I myself got caught masturbating my cell mate and got a misconduct and placed in the hole (R.H.U.) for 60 days even though my cell-mate and I both wrote statements saying it was consensual. He also got a misconduct and 60 days hole time, we were both granted ½ time so we only did 30 days and once we were put back in population we were both put back into cells which we had cell-mates.

They put us right back into situations where we might do sexual acts with our cell-mates again. If that's the case why not let us do sex acts with consent? Also provide condoms so we can have safer sex? Also in the state of P.A. they have banned all pornography which could promote some inmates to act out with each other instead of using their fantasies on porn, to masturbate instead of having sex.

I have stated what administration thinks about sex in prison. The guards are different, since being caught, some guards are very understanding and some actually put you down or say rude comments. Other prisoners are equally disrespectful, even some of the inmates you know engage in homo sexual activity try to be rude to hide their own sexuality. The prisoners who are open about their sexuality usually hang together so they can be more comfortable about who they are, that is the only time gay desire or pleasure can be public, other than that it is mostly hid.

Gays in prison do not really support one another because in Pennsylvania it is not allowed and against the rules.