

## LET'S STRAY TOGETHER

(continued from page 59) like lifestyle lounge.com and swappernet.com, and started meeting other couples for friendship and sex. Still, reality didn't always live up to fantasy. On just their second swinging adventure, they made the rookie mistake of driving to a distant suburb to meet a couple in their home. Neither Kevin nor Teri turned out to be attracted to either of their prospective counterparts, but, unaware of what the other was thinking, both reluctantly agreed to sex anyway. "Both of us were pretending to be interested because we thought the other person was," Teri says. "Each of us took one for the team. I felt like such a whore." Now they will meet new couples only in public places, and they've devised a set of secret signals to indicate the need for escape or rescue.

Although that dismal experience nearly put an early end to their swinging, today they happily admit to being "sluts"—a term of endearment in the swinger community. In the past year, they have enjoyed the favors of 14 other couples, though they had to be prodded for an exact tally ("We're not number queens," Teri says). While each personally enjoys this lush sexual bounty, half the fun comes from seeing the other at play. "We have fun having sex together when we're alone," Kevin says. "But I'm happy watching her have sex with another person, because I want her to have fun." Says Teri: "I get the most benefit from watching him [with another woman]. It turns me on. I love it when I see these hot women hitting on him."

In their class, Teri and Kevin are tag-team evangelists preaching the joy of the swap. They cover basic vocabulary (the highly prized "unicorn" is a single woman who swings, so named because they're so rare) and situational taxonomy (soft swap is play that includes everything but sexual intercourse; with full swap, anything goes). They give a questionnaire to help people determine if swinging is for them (How comfortable are you being naked and aroused in front of other people? How would you feel if you saw your significant other sexually pleasuring another person?). They offer their top ten reasons to swing (Encourages honesty and communication in a relationship! Keeps you fit—you can't get naked in a crowd if you're not in shape!). They advise how to set up online profiles and get in to swingers' clubs (the good ones are in the suburbs; reservations are required). And, of course, they cover sticky situations—how to avoid them or gracefully exit them.

"I like being instrumental in promoting sexual freedom and making people feel good about sex rather than dirty about it," Teri says of the class. "Sex is powerful, and anything that gives an individual a sense of empowerment is a really good thing." —SHANE TRITSCH

## HORMONE THERAPISTS

(continued from page 59) "The idea that they're doing something about sex works really well for us," says Jim Sharp, senior vice president of original programming and development for Comedy Central. "I love the educational slant to it, though they don't hit



Thinking it would be fun to make a Web-based video series, Clark asked himself, "What do I like?" Answer: "Sex and comedy."

you over the head. And it's edgy and fresh and smart."

That the show would find *any* audience seemed unlikely four years ago, when Clark, now 30, was living in Chicago and hoping to land work making films. Thinking it would be fun to make a Web-based video series, he asked himself, "What do I like?" Answer: "Sex and comedy." A further thought: "Sex education kind of sucks." If he could use humor to help the information go down, he might have something.

His brainchild languished for two years while he scrimped enough to buy the necessary equipment. Camera finally in hand, he tapped his Woodstock High School pal Hasler as host. "In high school, she was the girl who always talked about sex," he says. "She's funny, and I knew she could communicate with a young audience in a disarming way."

A mother of three who had gotten pregnant at 18, Hasler had her own motivation—to help teenagers become better informed "so they don't make the stupid mistakes I made when I was younger," she says.

Finally, Clark recruited an actress, Britney Barber, to provide comic relief. The three wrote and filmed four episodes—on female masturbation, abstinence, older boyfriends, and birth control. Clark directed, shot, and edited, and he posted the first video in June 2007. To his astonishment, 100 people watched within the first week.

In August, after the fourth and final episode went up, a popular blog mentioned it, as did the online magazine salon.com—and viewership exploded past 10,000. In the span of two months, the *Midwest Teen Sex Show* had gone viral. Clark thought, "Maybe we should keep doing this."

Over the next 20 months, the troupe continued to create new monthly episodes—shot on a shoestring in and around Chicago and Woodstock—and added cast members. And the audience continued to grow. "What kept us doing it was realizing a lot of people were responding to this," Hasler says. "It's getting them information they wouldn't have paid attention to without the ridiculous jokes and other entertainment being there."

In early May, Clark drove to Los Angeles to gear up for the pilot, there to be joined later in the summer by Hasler and Barber for writing and shooting. (The pilot could be finished by late summer. If it tests well on audiences, a series on Comedy Central could follow.) For his part, Clark was relishing the idea of having a larger budget and a crew to pitch in. "I won't have to worry about focusing a shot and ordering pizza for everybody and finding parking for someone else and yelling to find a cast member who has just wandered off," he says. "Now we can focus on making the jokes, making it funny—making a great pilot."

—SHANE TRITSCH

## The Happy Ex-Hooker

HER MISSION: COAXING PROSTITUTES AWAY FROM THE SEX TRADE

**DURING THE 25 YEARS SHE PEDDLED HER** body for money, Brenda Myers-Powell mostly seethed. "I was angry at everyone," she says, "my family, God, but mostly myself because I couldn't stop." Today, Myers-Powell is at peace and brimming with purpose, not just because she escaped a life of prostitution and drugs but also because she is now using that experience to help other women do the same. In October she joined the Women's Justice division of the Cook County Sheriff's Office, serving in a new program aimed at helping women leave the sex trade. When a prostitute is arrested, Myers-Powell and another former prostitute are there to show her a different path. They offer access to counseling, social services, temporary housing, and other help in getting off the streets. Myers-Powell calls the work her "mission on earth."

Raised on the West Side by an alcoholic

## THE HAPPY EX-HOOKER

grandmother, Myers-Powell began turning tricks on weekends at 14. On Good Friday in 1973, when she was 15 and the mother of two infant girls, she “turned professional,” she says, meaning she began working full-time as a prostitute. Wearing a green two-piece outfit, rubber shoes, and a \$7 wig, she went to work in front of the Mark Twain Hotel on Division Street. She made more than \$300 that night, enough to pay that month’s rent and buy groceries for her daughters. “I felt like I’d made it,” she recalls.

Two years later Myers-Powell became a call girl, working for a pimp and servicing a higher-end clientele at plush downtown hotels and suburban cathouses. At her peak, she was pulling in more than \$1,000 a night, though she took home less than half that after her bosses took their cut.

Over the next decade and a half, she worked as a stripper in New Orleans, got lured to Los Angeles by a man who appeared to have good intentions but turned out to be another pimp (“I was looking for my Richard Gere even before *Pretty Woman*”), and stripped at clubs in South Central Los Angeles. There she developed an addiction to crack cocaine and wound up unemployed, homeless, and prostituting herself on violent streets (she was stabbed several times). In 1994, she returned to Chicago and tried to go straight—she earned a nursing certificate and briefly found work—only to relapse into drug use and prostitution.

Her life changed irrevocably one night in 1997, when she got into an argument over money with a john. After he shoved her from his car, her clothes got caught in the slammed door. The black Mercedes sedan sped off, dragging her for five blocks and leaving her face and left side mangled. Following a stay in the hospital, she made the decision to get clean. “I knew I was going to die if I didn’t do something,” she says.

She checked herself in to the residential treatment program for prostitutes at Genesis House on the North Side. After a year and a half of rehab, she dedicated her life “to helping other women unconditionally.” She volunteered at Genesis House, answering phones, cooking meals, and mentoring other women. That experience served as perfect training for the intervention work she’s now doing at the sheriff’s office. While it’s still too soon to gauge the program’s effectiveness, Myers-Powell sees glimmers of hope—as of mid-May, two prostitutes had started using the program to transition to a new life. “Most women think they can’t make it or they won’t be accepted in society after they’ve been on the streets,” she says. “I want to be an example of hope for them.”

Today Myers-Powell wears faint scars on her nose and forehead from the accident—



Of prostitutes trying to leave the streets, Myers-Powell says, “I want to be a beacon of hope for them.”

remnants from her life as a prostitute but also a source of pride. “I couldn’t be doing what I love to do now without those years,” she says. Clean for 12 years, married, and raising a recently adopted son in Calumet City, she enjoys a contentment she was once afraid could never be hers. “I’m happy,” she says. “And I like being happy.”

—BEN STRAUSS

## Both Sides Now

GAY MEN IN HETERO MARRIAGES—  
AND THEIR CIRCLE OF SUPPORT

**GORDON HAD BEEN MARRIED FOR MORE than 25 years, raising his kids and cementing his career as a middle manager, when he began fantasizing about other men. After getting professional counseling, he made an agonizing admission to his wife: He was gay. (“Gordon” is a pseudonym. He asked to use it because he has not come out publicly.)**

“She was devastated, of course,” he says. But her next response was as startling as his revelation: She wanted to try to make the marriage work. For reasons that ranged from their children to their finances, Gordon says, “I was relieved, because [staying together] was what I wanted, too.” Still, this was more than a decade before *Brokeback Mountain’s* gay cowboys each married a woman—and gave us the term “Brokeback marriages.” As a gay guy pretending to be a

straight husband, he says, “I thought I was the only one.”

That changed when he heard about the Oak Park-based M Group—a support group (mgroupchicago.org) bearing a deliberately innocuous name that has been helping gay and bisexual men in heterosexual marriages for more than 25 years. Now an 18-year member and the group’s leader, Gordon says, “When you go to the group and find you’re not alone, there’s a level of comfort that you haven’t experienced before. It’s a place to go to be who you really are.”

Statistics are hard to come by because many mixed-orientation marriages are closeted. In 2006, *The New York Times* wrote that an estimated 1.7 million to 3.4 million American women once were, or are now, married to men who have had sex with men—a figure derived from the 1990 University of Chicago study *The Social Organization of Sexuality*.

Gordon, a 60-something professional who lives in the northwest suburbs, is happy to leave the numbers to the statisticians, venturing only: “I think there are a lot more than we realize.” That’s because, he says, many husbands don’t acknowledge their feelings toward other men until they get older. It’s a phenomenon he has seen often in the group. “When they got married, many of the men, myself included, didn’t have a clue,” he says. “Others had thoughts or feelings about men but just thought it