



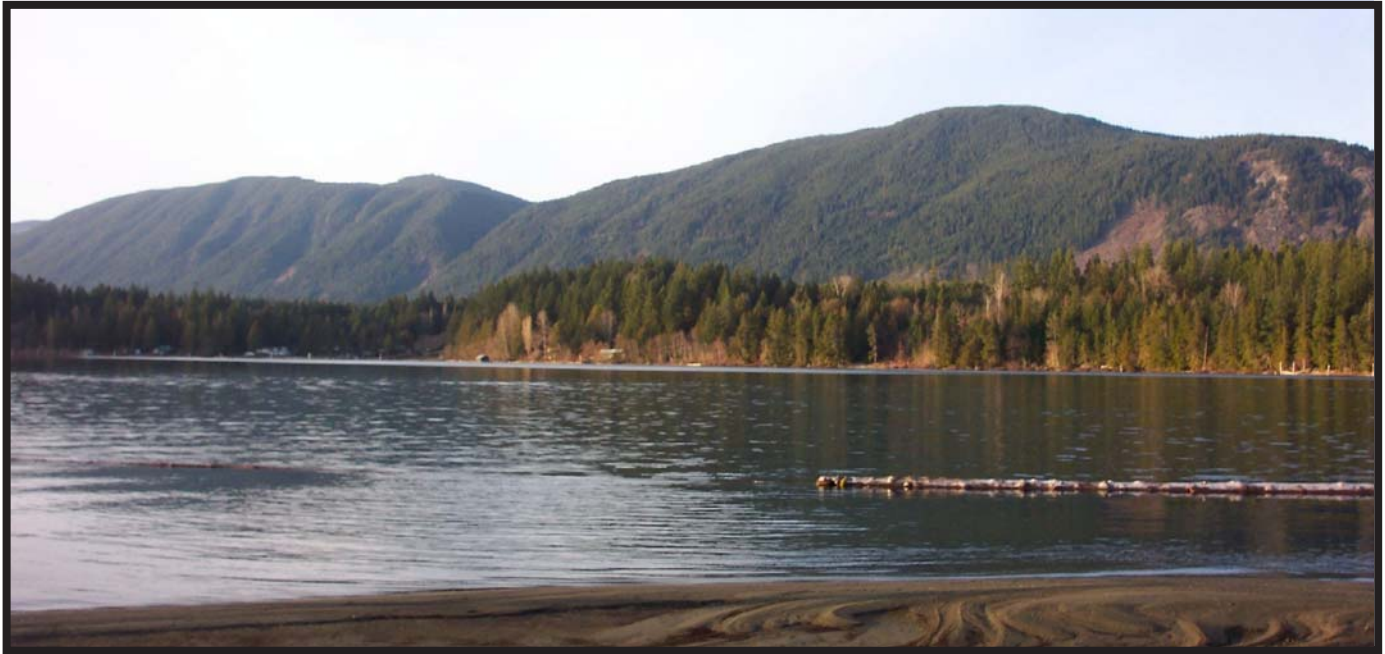
# The Positive Side

Positive Women's Network

[www.pwn.bc.ca](http://www.pwn.bc.ca) ○ [www.pwn-wave.ca](http://www.pwn-wave.ca)

April-May-June 2005

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the view from the February retreat: Lake Cowichan

## "What was the best thing about the retreat?"

Some women answered simply: "The people." Others noted, "Going at my own pace, or "the energy, the scenery." Several said "No cooking or care taking of family."

The February retreat took place on Lake Cowichan, Vancouver Island. It was a change from our usual destination of Bowen Island.

This issue we feature four retreat tales: three interviews and a report of the Saturday Night Sex Talk. Two of the tales are from first timers' perspectives, two are from women who've been on retreats before. The view of the lake is above. What follows is their views of the retreat.

*The Positive Side* April-May-June 2005

*Positive Women's Network*

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## Retreat Tales: Marilyn, Member

*Marilyn is so new to PWN, she's never been to any events. I talked to Marilyn a week after she returned from the retreat and had time to think over what she'd experienced. She admitted she was nervous about going on her first retreat, and wondered what it was going to be like.*

*How did it feel to get away from your regular routine?*

Pretty good, pretty cool. It was good to take a break.

*What did you think of the retreat centre and the lake nearby?*

It was very nice, although we didn't spend time on the lake. I liked the fact that it was so rustic. And the food at the centre was fantastic!

*What discussions grabbed your attention?*

There was a good discussion on confidentiality. Confidentiality is common sense, but it's good to talk about it. The sex night talk was great: when to disclose, when not to disclose, what you need to know. I didn't get too involved in discussions, as I'm more of a listener, but it was good to listen.

*"Confidentiality is common sense, but it's good to talk about it."*

*How did you connect with other women?*

It happened naturally during activities, and I participated where I could.

*As a first timer on the retreat, how do you feel now that you've had time to absorb it?*

I feel great. I was a little worried about going away with so many people cause I worried I might get sick, but it's been a week and I haven't yet! The only thing I would change would be choosing roommates. Staff shouldn't let members choose roommates, because there wasn't enough mixing between old timers and newcomers. But overall, it was a really positive experience, and I would do it again, definitely.



*Cabins and Main Lodge*

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## Retreat Tales: Tamara, BSW Student

*“The amount of wisdom was amazing.”*

*Tamara is currently a member of the PWN support team. A placement student from the UBC School of Social Work, Tamara has been with us since September.*

*What did you think of the retreat centre and the lake nearby?*

It was isolated, but peaceful. It felt like a safe place to be. There were not a lot of staff from the lodge around, just the women who prepared the food, so it was nice.

*How did it feel to get away from your regular routine?*

It was awesome. It was such an amazing group of women and I got to see all these hidden talents. At the beginning of the retreat, HIV was the focus bringing everyone together. At the end, you knew people on a totally different level- creative, emotional sides of people.

*What discussions grabbed your attention?*

Treatment by care providers is still a huge issue, confidentiality is still a problem. Everyone has a story of being in an open waiting room and having the receptionist say out loud, “Oh, you have AIDS...” How come this is still happening?

On the way, just waiting for a taxi in a big group of 20 people makes (the public) ask where you’re from and women were understandably careful. But at the retreat, they didn’t have to be careful.

Even if you didn’t want to talk about HIV, the fact that you didn’t have to hide it was obviously great.



Support Worker Allison with Tamara

*How did you connect with other women?*

It was more about similarities than differences. I felt a real spiritual connection between women. The amount of wisdom there was amazing.

*As a first timer, how do you feel now?*

It was an unbelievable experience. The retreat gave me an accurate picture of how HIV plays a part in peoples’ lives, how PWN plays a part in peoples’ lives. And I get a sense of the work that still needs to be done.

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## Retreat Tales: Alex, member

*Alex is a long-time PWN member who has been to Bowen Island retreats. She lives on one of the Gulf Islands.*

*You've been on several retreats. How was this new space?*

The facilities were good. It was nice to have the sleeping quarters away from the eating area, because it was more private. I missed the hot tub, though! The kitchen staff were the only staff people we saw, and we hardly ever saw them, so that was nice too. But they took good care of us. The location was lovely, with walking trails, and the lake.

*How did it feel to get away from your regular routine?*

I was really tired, so it was nice to get away and have someone care for me. And it was nice to go somewhere that I didn't have to travel all day. When I go to a retreat on Bowen Island, it takes over eight hours to get there. This time it took only two hours! It was a change not to be tired from travel.

*What discussions grabbed your attention?*

I really enjoyed the Medicinal Herb walk with Della, an aboriginal woman from Duncan. I knew some of the herbs she identified, but I learned a lot too. I appreciated her energy.

I didn't really participate in the other planned events, as I was going through a hard time because of family issues- a family member was dying after a battle with cancer.

I really appreciated [retreat coordinator] Anna and [PWN placement student] Tamara, who were really kind to me. I appreciated Tamara's persistence in letting me know she

**"I appreciated the privacy I was supported to take."**

was there. And both of them were really fun too, which helped!

*How did you connect with other women?*

Because of what was going on at home, I found myself isolated at this retreat. But I had time to go off on my own, and I was supported to do so. I got to know new women and women from past retreats, but I also appreciated the privacy I needed and was supported to take. It was good getting to know Sangam (PWN support staff) too.

*How do you feel now that you're home?*

This was a very gentle retreat. From my perspective there were less structured activities, and I liked that. I didn't expect it, but there I was participating in "beauty night," hanging out with the girls and doing my nails.

I'm really grateful that women on the islands were able to participate in the way we did.

And as with all retreats I've been to, it was nice to watch people get to know each other and let down their guard. I enjoyed watching women talk in a way they never have before.

## Retreat Tales: The “Saturday Night Sex Talk”

by Kath



*Disclosure,  
dating, latex  
and lube were  
hot topics...*

On Saturday night, after a full day of art and music workshops, yoga, nature walks and massages, women joined together for a Fireside Sex Chat. Two of us who are long time members of PWN, decided we would organize and facilitate the ‘chat’. After all, how often do we get a chance to sit down with a bunch of positive women to share stories and support one another with our challenges?

At retreats on Bowen Island, conversations (or “juicy talks”, as they were referred to) would sometimes spark up in the hot tub. Since we didn’t have a hot tub at Cowichan Lake, we were hoping that the fireplace would be the spot for a frank and fun discussion on disclosure, dating, safer sex and whatever else came up.

When to disclose to a potential partner was an engaging subject. Some felt that you don’t need to disclose right away if you have safe sex, others would rather get it out of the way and disclose before the first kiss. Somebody quoted an HIV positive woman comedian from the US, who said “The only good time to tell someone you’re positive is when they’re in a coma!”

We talked about the different issues that arise from having an HIV positive vs. a negative partner. One woman shared her success story with online dating. Another talked deeply from the heart about feelings of low self worth and shame for being HIV positive. Many women talked about the fear

of rejection due to HIV.

Samples of lube, condoms, dental dams and latex gloves were passed around which lead us to the hot topic of safer sex. We talked about transmission and comfort levels around risk. Even within the room there was a wide spectrum of safer sex comfort levels. Some women use latex galore and others don’t use it every time. There was talk about oral sex and how risky it is or isn’t.

One woman shared what she and her partner consider to be the keys to healthy and safer sex - communication and lubrication! People stressed how important clear communication is and that ideally decisions about safer sex are mutual ones. There was a real feeling of respect in the room and the point was made about the importance of making our own choices as long as they are informed choices.

The discussion veered towards frustrations with health care providers around confidentiality and sensitivity issues. Many women are tired of being asked “how did you get it?” We talked about ways to deal with this as well as solutions for change such as educating health care providers by standing up for ourselves and through public speaking.

The fireside sex chat seemed to be a success. Even though some women chose not to speak they were definitely there to listen to others. We were joined by our common bond -we are HIV positive and facing it with courage and determination to live as well as we can. The sex chat was insightful, engaging and fun, even without the hot tub!



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## Advocacy:

# Blueprint for Action on HIV and Women in Canada

The Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada (PPFC) hosted a meeting on September 11 & 12, 2004 in Ottawa, Ontario. The purpose of this meeting was to bring together a small, representative number of groups who work in the area of HIV and women. The goal of the meeting was to explore the interest in forming a new coalition of groups in order to bring women's HIV/AIDS issues forward on the national agenda.

The group decided unanimously that the 2006 International Conference on HIV/AIDS would provide us with an opportunity to showcase women's specific HIV/AIDS concerns. To that end, the following coalition name was proposed: Blueprint for Action on HIV and Women in Canada: Toward 2006. The goals identified by the group are:

- ◆ to work to ensure that the international conference features a component addressing the global issue of women and HIV
- ◆ to develop a series of recommendations or demands to Canada's political leadership regarding specific policy and program changes impacting women living with and affected by HIV/AIDS in Canada.

These demands will be prepared through extensive consultation, including two stakeholders meetings scheduled over the coming two years.

The coalition plans to approach other AIDS organizations (national and regional), women's health organizations and other stakeholders to participate in this coalition. If your organization is interested in more information about this coalition, please contact Marcie Summers at PWN at 604.692.3010 or [marcies@pwn.bc.ca](mailto:marcies@pwn.bc.ca), or Kim Thomas at CAS: 1.800.499.1986, ext. 121 or [kimt@cdnaids.ca](mailto:kimt@cdnaids.ca).



And thank you to a departing advocate...

### Hats off to Monique!

Here's to Monique, who has been a valuable and passionate PWN voice over the past few years. Monique is stepping down from her volunteer roles as a Board member of the Canadian AIDS Society and as a PWN delegate to the Pacific AIDS Network. Monique has expended a good deal of energy both at the national and regional levels to ensure that the voices of women living with HIV are heard.

She has brought to her many years of volunteer work an astute understanding of the reality of women's lives, a passion and commitment to create social change, and a wicked sense of humor. Monique is taking a break in order to pursue theological studies. Thanks so much Monique. Your work has truly made a difference!

## Looking after yourself

# Checklist for Lipodystrophy

Many people living with HIV are concerned about lipodystrophy. Early changes may be difficult to see. Perhaps the most important thing a person can do is work with his/her doctor to recognize changes in body shape as early as possible. While only a doctor can diagnose you with lipodystrophy, you know your body best and can watch for changes.

If you begin to notice changes, consider talking to your doctor. Some things you might pay attention to include changes in how your clothes fit or how your body looks. Some who specialize in diet and nutrition for people with HIV recommend having a friend or family member take a close-up picture of your face and measure your upper and lower arms, thighs and calves about every three months.

You can share the pictures and measurements with your doctor and make them a part of your own medical file that you keep at home.

### Clothes

- √ Do your pants, shorts or skirts fit tighter around the waist?
- √ Do your pants, shorts or skirts feel looser in the butt?
- √ Do the sleeves of your clothes feel looser?
- √ Does the neck of your shirts feel tighter?
- √ Has your bra size increased or is it hard to fasten your bra around your ribcage?

### Body

- Are your cheeks the same fullness?
- √ Is your waist expanding?
- √ Are your butt cheeks the same fullness?
- √ Have the veins on your arms become more visible?
- √ Are the muscles on your arms and legs more visible?
- √ Do you notice any lumps on your arms and legs?
- √ Does your neck and upper back look the same size around or thickness?
- √ Are your breasts changing? (This may include getting larger, changing shape or feeling what some women describe as "heavier, thicker or different".)

from WISE Words, Number 16 – March 2005  
A Publication of Project Inform

View the whole article at [http://www.projinf.org/pub/ww/ww\\_0503.html](http://www.projinf.org/pub/ww/ww_0503.html)

## Condom Testing Reveals Best Brands

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The consumers group best known for rating cars and washing machines has turned its testing prowess to condoms to find out which ones measure up best and how other birth control methods compare. The nonprofit Consumers Union says in a new guide to contraception that the seven top U.S. types of condom they studied did not burst despite vigorous testing, and all models met international standards.

But results showed that the top brand, able to take the most punishment, was the Durex Extra Sensitive Lubricated Latex, according to the report. Other top-performers include the Durex Performax Lubricated, Lifestyles Classic Collection Ultra Sensitive Lubricated and TheyFit Lubricated. A melon-colored model distributed by Planned Parenthood performed the worst, bursting during a test in which the latex condoms were filled with air.

The group says its review of contraceptives was not politically motivated, although there is an intense debate among health professionals and advocacy groups about the focus on abstinence-only education by the Bush administration.

"We plan our testing programs quite a while in advance. This is purely accidental," said senior editor Nancy Metcalf.

Consumers Union uses standardized tests to rate the products it examines, which for latex condoms involves filling them with air. There is no accepted method to test silicone or non-latex condoms.

"You end up with a balloon 3 feet tall and a foot wide. They can really stretch an amazing amount," Metcalf said in a telephone interview.

The New York-based organization, which publishes the Consumer Reports magazine, also tested 16 other contraceptive choices.

"Condoms remain the only family planning and pregnancy prevention method that can help prevent sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, which causes AIDS," the group, which has issued similar reports on condoms periodically since 1979, said in a statement.

"Condoms have improved since the mid-nineties because industry manufacturing standards have become more universally used and more effective," added Edward Kippel, who led the condom test project.

Intrauterine devices or IUDs have also become safer than in previous years, as have birth control pills, including so-called emergency contraception, the group said.

While abstinence has a 0 percent failure rate, doing nothing to prevent pregnancy has an 85 percent failure rate, the group found. A U.S. government report published last month shows 98 percent of all U.S. women who have had sex have used birth control.

—Maggie Fox, Reuters Health, January 5, 2005

### IN BRIEF

The International Planned Parenthood Federation and The International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS have put out a report entitled, "Dreams and Desires: Sexual and reproductive health experiences of HIV positive women." It's available on line at <http://content.ippf.org/output/ORG/files/5306.pdf>

Positive Women's Network invites you to join us for



## SPRINGBOARD 2005

**Focus** on women & HIV/AIDS    **Debate** your knowledge & thinking  
**Move** your health & healthcare perspectives

### Program

4:00-4:30 Welcome & Reception

4:30- 5:30 Concurrent Workshops:

- Microbicide Development
- Treatment Access & Issues for Positive Women

5:30- 6 Refreshments & Draw for Prizes

6:00 Buffet Dinner

6:30 Keynote Speaker: Dr. Val Montessori,  
 HIV physician / researcher affiliated with Oak Tree Clinic  
 & the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS

Thursday April 14th, 2005. 4:00 - 7:30 PM, Listel Hotel, 1300 Robson Street, Vancouver

Free Registration: Positive Women's Network (604.692.3000) or [pwn@pwn.bc.ca](mailto:pwn@pwn.bc.ca)

Join us for a time of renewal as we continue the fight against HIV/AIDS

This event presented by



Generously sponsored by



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Positive Women's Network

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## Events and Program Information

**Quick Calendar:** go to [www.pwn.bc.ca](http://www.pwn.bc.ca) for for updates

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Drop-in Closed	Drop-in open 11:30-3:30  Lunch 12-2  Foodbank 12-2	Drop-in open 11:30-3:30  (Closed on Cheque Issue Wednesdays)	Drop-in open 11:30-3:30 Lunch : 12-2  Women's Wellness, 12  Mind/ Body Connection Group, 5:30PM. See details below.	Drop-in open 11:30- 3:30

### Member support on-line

If you can't get in to PWN to meet other members but you do have access to a computer, go to the Woman-to-woman bulletin board on Women & AIDS Virtual Education (WAVE). There you can talk about issues that matter to you with other women. You'll find how to protect your confidentiality while still getting access to support and information. Visit [www.pwn-wave.ca](http://www.pwn-wave.ca) to check it out.

While you're there, see the new information on HIV & HepC, HIV & Abuse, and newly revised and updated links to other resources. What else would YOU like to see? Let us know: [pwn@pwn.bc.ca](mailto:pwn@pwn.bc.ca) or 1.866.692.3001.

### Lunch & Haircuts on the Drive

On Tuesday April 26, stroll with Sangam for a change of pace. Let PWN take you out for lunch on Commercial Drive and then to get a new 'do. Call Sangam for information and to register by *April 21st*.

### New Support Group: Mind/ Body Connection

In April, Sangam (PWN) and Roseanne (AIDS Vancouver) will facilitate a new support group, the Mind/ Body Connection.

Studies have shown that support and decreasing stress can enhance the immune system. This structured group will deal with a different issue each week, (eg. personal relationships, emotions; coping strategies etc). We will meet Thursdays at 5:30 in room 103.

If you are interested in the group, join us for an **open house/ focus group on April 7th @5:30** in room 103. We'll have dinner, share information and ideas. Let's figure out some ways to support each other and ourselves and have fun doing it!

Please contact Sangam to register (604.692.3006) for the open house, as space is limited.

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## Events and Program Information

### Women's Wellness- Aboriginal Activities

Join us Thursday for lunch, then stick around for aboriginal activities focussed on women's wellness. These activities are open to any PWN member interested in participating. We start Thursdays around noon, and activities could include:

- ★ Medicine Cards (personal readings)
- ★ Sharing/Talking/ Healing Circle
- ★ Arts and Crafts- beadwork...
- ★ Exploring own culture and that of other First Nations people
- ★ Video Days (Aboriginal Theme)
- ★ Storytelling- sharing your own stories/ reading circle (First Nations Authors)
- ★ Music- listen to local/ international, traditional/ contemporary Aboriginal music artists.

Off- site activities are yet to be determined, but if there is enough interest, finances and commitment the following may also be a possibility:

- ★ Attending Sweatlodge/ Pipe/ Euwipi Ceremonies.
- ★ Attending local Pow- Wows and other First Nations events.
- ★ Guest Speakers/ Workshop Presenters

Please feel free to forward any questions, ideas and suggestions to Allison, either in person or by phone (604.692.3005).

### Foodbank

The Foodbank is open Tuesdays, and there is no pick up on any other day. The foodbank is closed the day before cheque issue (April 26, May 24, June 21).

### Get Out of Town...

yourself...

#### May Retreat, Bowen Island

The next PWN retreat will take place May 13-15 on Bowen Island. You should receive registration information by the end of the first week in April. If you don't, give us a call. Registration deadline is April 18.

or send the kids...

#### Camp Moomba

The Western Pediatric AIDS Society will once again offer Camp Moomba for kids living with or affected by HIV/ AIDS. Kids aged 6-17 are welcome. This year's camp is July 3-9. Call 604.684-1701 for registration information.

*Do you have something you want to share with other members? Deadline for submissions to the next newsletter is June 10. Send submissions to [janetm@pwn.bc.ca](mailto:janetm@pwn.bc.ca) or by mail (see last page).*

## Connect with Us!

### in person

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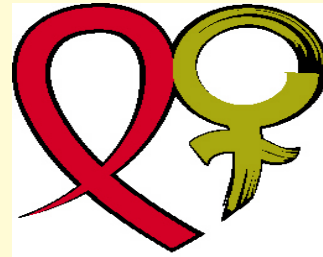
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### Positive Women's Network

*Positive Women's Network supports women living with HIV/AIDS to make informed choices about their health. We provide safe access to HIV/AIDS-related support, advocacy and education/prevention to women and their communities throughout British Columbia, Canada.*

### DISCLAIMER

*The information provided herein cannot replace the information provided by a medical professional.*

*In using this material, the user acknowledges these limitations and does not hold Positive Women's Network or its funders liable for any damages, costs or consequences that may result from use of this material.*

Unless otherwise noted, all materials in this newsletter are written by Janet Madsen, Communications Coordinator ([janetm@pwn.bc.ca](mailto:janetm@pwn.bc.ca))

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