

Dating service for herpes victims

# Quest fills 'definite social need'

United Press International  
ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, Ill. — Salesman Dan, 27, and Mary, 28, a doctor's office employee, have joined a dating service for herpes victims who want romantic or platonic companionship.

The Quest Foundation offers members 12 "introductions" over a six-month period for \$35. "It seemed like there was a definite social need for it. There were a lot of people out there offering with herpes and not quite sure what to do about it and not sure about future relationships," says founder John Forsythe.

An estimated 20 million Americans have herpes, a recurrent viral infection, according to the Centers for Disease Control. One herpes strain causes fever blisters, usually on the lips and external nasal openings.

Another, far more dreaded, usually is genital and is transmitted primarily by direct contact with lesions, most often sexually. Women infected late in pregnancy may transmit it to the fetus, which could be fatal.

The Quest Foundation, as a not-for-profit herpes dating service, began in January in the suburban Chicago suburb of Arlington Heights. It also hopes to act as a support group and counseling service.

Any profits will be donated to research facilities "in the hopes of hastening a cure" and anonymous statistical data "will aid in forming the necessary base of information needed to fight this ailment," Forsythe said.

"I imagine a lot of the people who have it end up feeling like their life is almost over and end up sequestering themselves from the rest of society for fear of giving it to someone else, or the stigma of having it," he said.

"We'd like to ease their minds a little bit and let them know what the dangers are — and aren't — and let them have a place they can come to and not worry about spreading the disease and the stigma," Forsythe said.

The response has been favorable. "I feel like we're doing something good for somebody," Forsythe said. "People were calling just to say they were glad we were doing it and just wanted to ask us questions."

Mary contracted herpes three years ago while on vacation at a Mexican resort.

"I had a relationship with somebody and that was it," she said.

"I was angry and depressed and it sort of put me in a position of having to change or re-evaluate what I had set up as

goals for the future — getting married, having children," she said. "For a while, I thought that I would never meet anybody and get married. And I sort of put myself out of circulation because of it."

Mary said she has a "fragile ego" and hopes the Quest Foundation will eliminate fears

*"When you meet somebody new, there are so many things that you're concerned about... and then to worry about what they're going to think once you tell them you have herpes. That's a real big pressure."*

of rejection because she has the "Scarlet H."

"When you meet somebody new, there are so many things that you're concerned about — are they going to like the way you look, talk — and then to worry about what they're going to think once you tell them you have herpes," Mary said. "That's a real big pressure."

Dan discovered he had herpes 2½ years ago.

He had been dating a woman for several months.

"When it got time to be honest, I thought, 'If she really feels something for you, nothing would matter,'" he said. "That was it. The relationship was over."

"I guess the person must not have loved me as much as I thought. I was kind of naive about honesty, but that's another good reason (for Quest Foundation). It would knock a lot of roadblocks out of the way when you meet people who have the same problem."

Mary, who works in a suburban Chicago doctor's office, went to her gynecologist.

"I had no idea that I had herpes. I just knew that I had something going on," she said. "I didn't know anything about it."

Mary still has not told her family.

"No way. There are two girlfriends that know about it — and that's it. As far as my parents go, they still think I'm a virgin. I live with them and there are a lot of things they don't know about. And that's fine. It doesn't affect them and it doesn't affect my lifestyle any way that they know about."

"I work in the medical field and if anybody at work knew about it I would not have a job and they would see to it that I would

never have a job in the profession again," she said.

Dan, a Chicago salesman, told of frustrating visits to doctors.

"The first two doctors couldn't even diagnose it," he said. "They wanted to know more about my affair than what I had."

So he went to a clinic because "they see more of it."

Dan also did not tell his family or friends.

"It's probably the best kept secret in my life," he said. Dan simply told dates he "didn't want to get serious. (But) people, once they get to know you, they see something's on your mind or something's wrong."

Herpes has brought anguish to Dan, as well as maturity and a new perspective on life. He calls himself a survivor.

"It's a hassle. Other than that, it's not the end of the world by all means," he said. "Being realistic, it might have been the worst and the best thing that happened to me in a long time."

"As far as women go, I wouldn't say I'm not mad at them. I appreciate them more because there are times that I can't be with one. You really don't know how much you miss (a relationship) until you can't have it."

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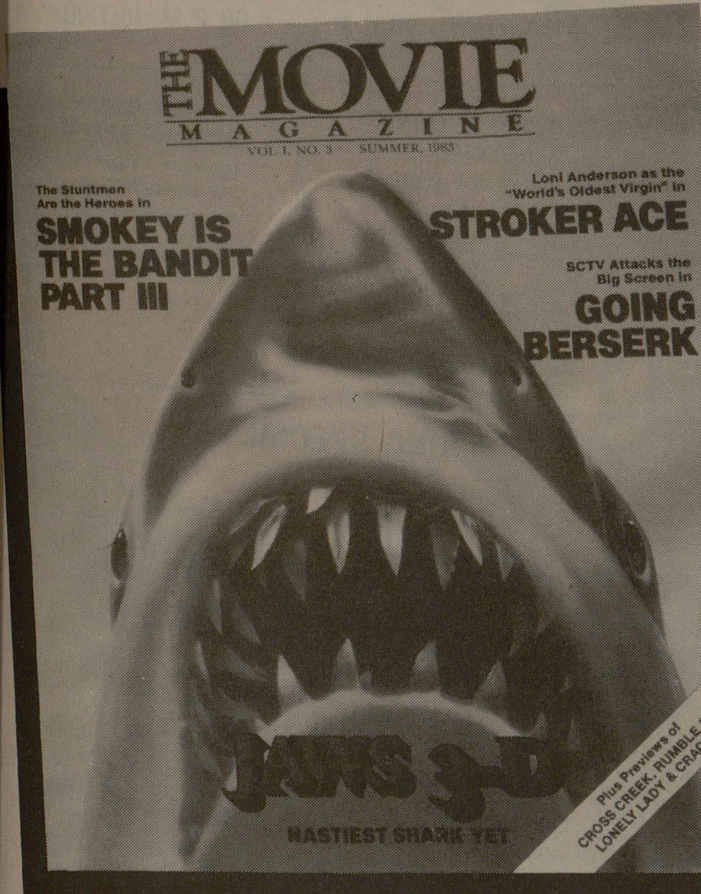
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