THE ANGELA WILLANS PROBLEM PAGE

Woman's Own
5/11/83
IPC magazines ✓

Writer and broadcaster Angela Willans has 19 years' experience in answering our readers' problems. She is the only advice columnist on the Executive of the National Marriage Guidance Council

She can't accept my father's death

My father died a month ago but my mother doesn't seem to have taken it in. She still gets up at 6.30 to make his breakfast and when we're out shopping she always buys something "for your Dad's tea." Her doctor has prescribed tranquillisers and says she's reacting normally but I'm still worried that she's heading for a nervous breakdown. The trouble is that she's all I've got as my husband was killed in Northern Ireland four years ago.

I'm so very sorry to hear about these two tragedies in your family. But you are both fortunate to have each other—so many widows are left without any close family support. Your job now is to be very patient and see your mother through the gradual, normal stages of bereavement. One of these stages is her difficulty in accepting that your father is dead—but it will pass. It is all very painful for both of you but with your doctor's help, and a call to the Samaritans if it's needed, you've no reason to fear total breakdown.

Heart attack fears

I'm 37 and married for the second time to a wonderful man who is also a very considerate lover. As a result I have an orgasm every time we make love. But I often feel I might have a heart attack because my heart flutters very quickly during my climax and the colour drains from me as if I were going to faint. Is this normal?

Reactions to orgasm differ between one woman and another but, of course, there are physical changes that accompany a sexual climax for all women—the rush of blood to certain parts of the body (and the draining away afterwards), the quicker heart-beats and the sense of abandoning control (which can feel as if you might lose consciousness). All these are perfectly normal and need cause no alarm for a healthy woman. If you have any other reason for doubting the healthy functioning of your heart, however, you should consult your doctor.

Will I catch VD?

Recently my boyfriend broke the news to me that a year ago he had VD. He says that he went to his doctor about it and that he no longer has it. Is there still a chance that he may pass it on to me if we make love?

If what he says is true, and he's completely cleared, then he is not infected and cannot infect you. But you're perfectly entitled to ask for more details. What treatment did he have from his doctor? And did he go for the follow-up checks that confirmed he was cured? And has he put himself at risk, during the past year, of catching it again by having another sexual partner? He's trustworthy enough to have told you about the past infection, so I'm sure he'll understand your need for *complete* trust and peace of mind.

I'm such a worrier

My family is always getting at me for being such a worrier. I know I do get anxious unnecessarily—I'm the sort of person who's never sure that I locked all the doors and turned off the cooker when we go on holiday. But how can I change? Trying hard not to worry only makes me worry far more!

Actually, that "did-I-remember-or-did-I-forget?" kind of worry, which is pretty universal, can be easily tackled by having a check-list of things to be done and ticking them off as you do them. But you're right, the general tendency to foresee problems at every turn *and find something to worry about* can't be cured by will-power alone. You really need something like a course in relaxation, meditation, yoga or exercises to loosen up your whole personality and free you from tension and anxiety. Write for information, enclosing a s.a.e., to Relaxation for Living, Dunesk, 29 Burwood Park Road, Walton-on-Thames, Surrey KT12 5LH.

Where do I start?

I've always wanted to write a book, or short stories for magazines. The only problem is that I don't know how to present it on paper when sending it to a publisher. Are there any books that would give me guidelines?

Any aspiring writer should invest in the annual Writers' and Artists' Yearbook, published every November (Black, £4·50). It not only gives the guidance you want on preparing your typescript but also lists British and overseas publishers of books and periodicals, with the type of work they want. My second tip for success is to keep on writing. It's surprising how many people want to be writers who have no joy in the actual business of writing! I wish you the very best of luck.

He was wearing my dress

The other day I found my son of nearly 15 trying on one of my dresses. He said it was because he was bored and that I should forget it. I haven't told my husband as I don't think he'd understand. But I'm very concerned about it.

At a guess, I expect you are worried that your son is going to turn out to be homosexual, unduly effeminate or a confirmed transvestite. There is no need for any such fear on the basis of this one incident. This kind of experimenting is very common, and part of every adolescent's perfectly normal curiosity about gender. Girls, for example, dress in trousers and try out "masculine" activities and, quite rightly, nobody gets alarmed. So I should forget it—but see if you can help your son to tackle his boredom.

From my bookshelf. An A-Z Of Children's Emotional Problems by Tom Crabtree (Unwin Paperbacks, £2·95) steers you good humouredly through all the everyday problems of bringing up children—lying, pocket money, sex education, shyness, for example. The author's aim is not to dish out advice but to instil confidence and understanding in parents, so that they can solve these family worries in their own way.

I'm scared I'll hurt my parents if I tell them I'm having sex

I'm in a terrible fix. I'm 16 and have a marvellous boyfriend I've known for years. My family are very fond of him and everyone refers to us as "childhood sweethearts." What they don't know is that we've begun to make love. We didn't mean to but it just happened and now we can't stop—and don't really want to. But we don't want a baby and I must get some contraceptive advice. The trouble is that, although I don't want to hurt my parents by letting them know I'm having sex, I do want my mother to know if I go on the Pill. One reason is that she and I are so close that I think she'd soon find out anyway—there's no way I could hide packets of pills or take them secretly. What shall I do?

Yes, I understand your dilemma. It's one a lot of girls share. On the one hand you're reluctant to let your parents know that you are sexually active so young. And, on the other hand, you want it to be known that at least you're thinking responsibly about the possible consequences. Well, of course, there isn't any way of reconciling these two wishes—one to be secretive and the other to be honest. You have to face the fact that you've made an important choice. For it was a choice to have sex—unless force or drink was involved, which it clearly wasn't in your case. So I should take on board the next responsible choice, which is to tell your mother that you're sleeping with your "childhood sweetheart" and are taking steps to avoid getting pregnant. She may be sad about the first fact and wish you had waited longer. But I think she'd be a great deal sadder if she found out by accident, or if you were running the risk of becoming pregnant.

No matter how difficult or simple, every problem is easier when it is shared. If it's not easy to confide in family or friends, send your problems to: The Woman's Own Confidential Counselling Team, Woman's Own, King's Reach Tower, Stamford Street, London SE1 9LS, enclosing a large stamped addressed envelope for a personal reply.

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