

On July 20, the San Francisco Gay Men's Community Initiative held a community meeting for friends, buddies and partners of crystal meth users. SFGMCI is committed to creating a community response to support those of us who live with, work with, play with or love men who are into meth. If you would like to join us in finding ways to get support, break the isolation, and take care of yourself, call SFGMCI at 415-820-9606 or email at info@sfgmci.org.

Richard Broussard attended the community meeting. This is his reaction:

METH: SILENCE = DEATH

By Richard Broussard

Last night I went to the Castro expecting to bitch about my ex-boyfriend's ongoing struggles with that monster meth and how his mood swings, drug-induced psychosis and paranoia (not to mention the dreaded "crystal dick") deeply affected me and ultimately killed any hope of our having a relationship. Covertly I looked out the corner of my eye at faces in the Rec Center for signs of battle fatigue in the others who showed up for this ad hoc community meeting for friends, partners and buddies of tweakers. Was I gonna be the only one who knew what it was really like to love a man who was slowly turning into a zombie by doing something so many still sadly refer to as "partying"?

In short, no -- I was not the only guy in the world who had an axe to grind. Most of the other men seemed to be just as pissed off at methamphetamine for robbing them of their men caught in the seductively deadly web "Tina" will invariably weave. What did surprise me though was just how many times we'd all been repeatedly told to "get rid of him!" As if it were just that easy. How does one live with himself after walking away from some-

one who is dying from a potentially fatal disease? Remember during the early AIDS years, how we all had to take care of our own ailing gay brothers? This new meth epidemic may be different in many ways, but by pretending that it's not as bad as all that will not help us to deal with its devastating effects on our loved ones -- and in the end on our community as a whole. Denial will not heal my heart.

These brave men who have been hurt simply by caring for men in the terror-grip of meth are much more than survivors of collateral damage. Around the room, they had more than a few practical tips on how to deal with their sketchy man. Collectively we had probably tried everything under the sun to help the meth user in our lives, which tended to make our lives more than a little crazy with not much to show for our efforts other than repeated cycles of frustration and disappointment. What made the evening for me was hearing hints on ways we could take care of OURSELVES . . . whether or not we hung in there through thick and thin or cut our losses and ran!

If you've ever been involved

with someone struggling with meth, you know how hard it is to know what's the right thing to do at any given moment. It's so much more than simply should I stay or should I go? How easy it is to second guess yourself and end up focusing on dealing with his shit (again). I may have ended up breaking things off with my meth-addled BF, but not until I felt he'd heard my reasons. I needed to do that just for me. By that time, I knew in my bones that absolutely NOTHING I could say or do would change his crank habit, but I did hope that speaking my heart and mind might at least help free me of some portion of the guilt that comes from leaving someone I loved who was in effect killing slowly himself in the relentless grip of his "methed-up" head trip.

I have found countless websites detailing the debilitating effects methamphetamine has on the user's brain chemistry and the slim chances for his eventual recovery from meth addiction. And I knew firsthand what it made him like in bed! Inhibitions gone, he could be insatiable. But at what cost? How sexy is it to run out of Viagra when your cock already looks like raw hamburger

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meat? Or to hear those voices whispering ONLY about you again?

I was all too well aware what it was like loving a tweaker; heck I dated him ten years ago and broke up with him for the exactly same reason back then! But he swore he'd changed now that he had become HIV-positive, now that he was taking much better care of himself. I am sure he wanted to believe that lie as much as he knew on some level that I would need to trust that that chapter of his life was safely in the past. I bit hook, line and sinker! But we were both adults and we took our chances and have to live (or die) with the consequences.

Which brings me to my most gut-wrenching moment of the evening: After getting my recent romantic drama of my chest, while listening to the other guys' tales of woe, feelings of heartbreaking grief welled up inside me. Spending so much time spotlighting what someday might seem like a trifling affair had served to distract me from feeling the pain of my beloved 21-year-old nephew's dark descent into the maze of meth dealing and addiction. Having held that precious baby in my arms and seen that little soul shine out from his eyes, I know exactly what he has lost. He has lost the same thing my ex-lover is losing. The one thing that keeps us human, our most treasured of possessions: our souls. Had he really sold his

soul hoping to recapture that first speed rush? Hopefully, he had some clue as to what the dangers were for becoming a meth addict before he tried the wicked stuff made from poisons no sane person would ever consider exposing himself to.

Don't get me wrong, pleasure is all good and it can even be liberating. Even getting high (on safer drugs) once in a while is cool too. But to drown that divine spark that dances in the eyes, that little light that tells others what's in your heart, is a crying shame. For that little death to happen in one man is a tragedy, but for it to happen on a grand scale in our community is a CRISIS! There's got to be more to gay rights than the freedom to kill ourselves, no matter how good we think it feels at the time. Is it not a twisted form of internalized homophobia to not value our collective spirits at least as much as we esteem our right to marry or serve in the military? Or is it "anything goes" and who cares? I cared for my man, I loved my sister's firstborn son, and I worry that we might find ourselves standing on the sidelines watching something vital to our community slowly die in part due to our not taking a stronger stand against meth use. Or perhaps worse yet, acting as if the little light doesn't even matter to us at all.

Living with AIDS since 1984, Richard Broussard has shared quality time with Shanti's Activity Program, Frameline LGBT Film Festival, STOP AIDS Project's Positive Force/PLUS and ThrivingInSF.