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soon outgrow. Some have thrown caution to the wind and live openly with a friend or lover. At any time, however, they may lose their job or apartment without any legal recourse. The worst consequence, however, is the constant gossip which is repeated about them. Bochinche is a way of life here; it is a most vicious form of gossip.

Several friends are intrigued by the book Like Coming Home: Coming-Out Letters. They are very moved by the letters and at least one young man is writing such a letter to his father and giving him a copy of the book. Others said they would like to write such letters, but would never dare give them to their parents or friends.

On a more personal note, I would like to contact Barry (age 64) who was living in Vermont when he wrote his letter for the above named book. I, too, came out in my sixties and would like to share experiences with him; I have a lot of questions. If he is still in Vermont and reads OITM, I would like to hear from him.

Tom F. Sousa

(ed note: Barry, contact OITM for the address).

To the Editors:

I read the article by Mimi DeSouza on "Lesbians and AIDS" in the January 1989 issue with interest. I agree that there is not enough written or discussed about lesbian sexuality either in the medical literature or within the lesbian community. I do not agree, however "that lesbians have to be just as careful as gay men and heterosexuals when engaging in sexual behaviors."

It is true that safe sex pamphlets and medical literature do not, in general, speak to lesbian sexual practices. We do however, know how this virus is transmitted. If individual women think about what they do during sex they can evaluate their own relative risk. This virus is found in large enough concentrations to be risky in se-

men, vaginal secretions, blood and breast milk. In order to catch this virus it has to enter your blood stream. So we need to think about what we do and how this would get vaginal secretions, blood or breast milk into our partners blood stream. The first thing to remember is that if neither of you have the virus you can do anything you want. So far lesbians have been lucky and there are not many with HIV infection. I believe that if your lover has not had sex with a man in over 5 years; does not use drugs by needle; did not receive a transfusion of blood or blood products before 1984; and has not been inseminated with untested semen, your risk is very low.

Now on to sex!! Ms. DeSouza writes that since lesbians were excluded from studies about oral sex the "knowledge (from these studies) can not be taken as scientific fact, only conjecture." I, of course, agree that lesbians should be included in scientific studies, but I think that if it is low risk for a man to have oral sex with a woman it is probably low risk for a woman to do the same. Swallowing vaginal secretions will not get you sick. The virus does not go from the stomach to the blood stream. It can theoretically go through a cut in the mouth or gums. But in the studies of men who have had oral sex with women the risk seems very very low. Similarly, although we do not have studies of lesbians who get vaginal secretions on their hands during sex we do have epidemiologic information about men who get vaginal secretions on their hands during sex, and again the risk is very very low. Sex which leads to vaginal or anal bleeding can be risky but only if blood, vaginal secretions, or breast milk from someone else gets in through those cuts, or the blood caused by the cuts gets through the skin of a partner.

We need to empower lesbians and other women by giving them clear information to make sexual choices, not confusion

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