

of a generation gap doesn't seem to do it justice.

I've had insights that have given me glimpses of how bad it has been and will be for me if I can't unlearn this. I'm certain I've missed out on a lot of great sex because of my beauty addiction. I've seen men in their fifties and sixties dancing near groups of shirtless twentysomethings, desperately trying to gain what I now see was not just sex, but some kind of acceptance no matter how small. It's horrible to be despised by the only people you think you can desire. I learned this a long time ago, as a teenager in high school yearning after straight classmates and to my dismay I'm learning it again.

As usual, I've put off changing myself as long as I could. It's only as the young men and women I've pursued became younger and younger than me that I've come to understand the costs. For example, how different the concerns of, say, somebody in their early twenties are from the concerns of somebody in their late thirties. Its only after vividly imagining my face twenty years from now and how I'll feel looking like that that I've understood how wrinkles are bad enough in themselves without also functioning as the bars of a cage.

No, I'm not looking to transform myself completely. What I'm in search of is freedom from my fetish, my addiction. Even if I'd rather have partners whose flesh is still fitted tightly around their bones to my dying day, I'd be happy just to learn how to get busy with and get off on a wider range physical types. I would have been much much happier if I had this capacity twenty years ago. I have the uneasy sense that

much less than twenty years from now the matter will have matured into one of survival rather than mere happiness.

So I'm making forays into this unknown territory again. It's terrifying to have to acknowledge the necessity of it much less actually do it. But I found something that makes me hopeful even while I fight against it as I do against change of any kind.

I've been to some social gatherings during the last year where there were guys of all ages. More than once I've caught myself feeling attraction to some features of men in their forties or older. Legs, torso, something.

(Even as I'm writing this I'm feeling stabs of embarrassment that I felt such unspeakable things towards these men. Just like the embarrassment I felt as a teenager coming out.) Now, the fascinating thing about this to me is that these stirrings of attraction don't feel like anything new at all.

They feel like something that I've been capable of all along and which from dire necessity I'm allowing myself access to only now. Furthermore, when some of these guys touched me, I felt some of these touches as enjoyable, even sexual. One of them who I really liked, I even touched back and when I did so it was not only a concession to courtesy. There was even a tremor of invitation to it.

This may not seem like much to you, but I know it for what it is: evidence that I can make myself free.

There's something else that I've noticed, although I don't understand it yet. I didn't get ill for my 39th birthday. Its almost as if I've been inoculated. Maybe I can even have my birthdays back. You never

know.

I was with two young friends this summer at Huntington Gorge, both in their early twenties, both buff and smooth (if not mesomorphs.) One of us said something about how beautiful the bottle green water was and we all glanced down at the same time. Just at that moment, a man we'd seen earlier who looked like he was in his sixties was vigorously swimming about a foot beneath the surface right in front of us.

"Beautiful," said one sarcastically. He turned to his boyfriend.

"Yeah," he said just as sarcastically. They looked at each other and laughed. They were, after all, sharing a fine joke and they were certain who the joke was on.

My guts twisted and I said nothing because I really didn't think anything I had to say then would make any difference. But I thought, looking at the old man's blurry outline in the water, his gray head, the crack of his ass: actually he is. But not sexy. And then (almost as if in a whisper): but he could be.

It seems to me as a gnarled and withered gray-beard of 39 that we've all got lots to learn and unlearn at any age.

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Participants are needed for a study of gay and lesbian relationships. The study requires completing a brief, anonymous survey.

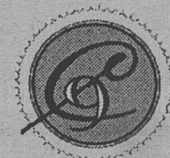
If you are in a committed relationship of at least four months' duration (with or without a civil union) and have not yet participated, please contact Dr. Susan Campbell at 802.443.2254 or scampbel@middlebury.edu for more information. Those who submit completed surveys may enter their names in a drawing for cash prizes.



"One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well."

-Virginia Woolf

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