

Whom Will I Love When I'm 64?

BY FRED POND

Scanning the *OITM* new books shelf, I was attracted to this title as I approach my 50th birthday this year. In gay years, some say that I'm near the grave – so considering this, I thought *Reeling in the Years* would be good book to pick up and learn about what's in store for me.

Having come out in my late twenties in early 1980s, I've usually been attracted to men my age or younger than me. As the years went by, I've dated and partnered with younger guys. Today the fact remains – my eyes are drawn to the younger twinks in the room – but why, I wondered. Smooth skin? My assumed power over a younger man? Am I hopelessly moored in a marketing decree promoting younger as more desirable? I hoped to find out

Reeling in the Years: Gay Men's Perspectives on Age and Ageism
Tim Bergling
 Southern Tier Editions / Harrington Park Press
 February 2004, 272 pages

between as 'The Untouchables' and 'Bridging the Gap.'

Bergling presents in the final chapter over thirty pages of graphed data portraying the survey's results clearly but without being overly scientific, adding comments representative of the data presented. Most of the book is filled with easily readable personal stories and experiences of the respondents – as well as the author's own comments and life experiences (he's attracted to younger men too). Bergling chronicles his recent relationship with a guy just out of high school, more than 20 years younger than he. He

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some answers in this book (as well as contribute to our community newspaper).

Reeling in the Years is the work of a researcher-author who created a web site to survey gay men about their ages and their perspectives towards gay men of a different age. This easily-read compilation of what he discovered is divided into eight chapters; beginning with 'Nothing in Common,' ending with 'Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow,' with such interesting titles in

shares that he is attracted to youthful enthusiasm, the wide-eyed look at life, as well as a lack of jadedness in his younger partners.

In addition to his source references, Bergling includes a list of resources on gay youth and senior organizations for those interested in more exploration, such as Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (www.smyal.org) and GLARP (Gay and Lesbian Association of Retiring Persons – who woulda thought? – www.gaylesbianretiring.org).

I enjoyed *Reeling in the Years*. The survey results are fascinating to consider. They reveal, for example, that older gay men report they do not attempt to dress younger or dye their hair, or even resort to cosmetic surgical interventions. Eighty percent or more agree that it's okay to date someone older. Gay culture is friendlier to young gays than older ones, report 80 percent of respondents across the age spans of 13 to over 60. Men who sought older partners reported being attracted to their partner's maturity, valuing it much higher, say, than the wrinkles around his eyes. Bergling interjects that we tend to isolate ourselves in our age groups, e.g. 'us kids' against 'the old guys,' an attitude which isn't limited to gays, of course.

As I've indicated above, the book is an easy read for the most part, and gay men of all ages would benefit from reading it, if for no other reason than to gain an understanding of the perspectives of our brothers of similar and not-so-similar ages. *Years* helped me place some previous relationships in perspective – for example, one of my younger partners had that attractive youthful optimism while another did not – but both definitely bridged to my 'age culture' rather than my reaching towards theirs. While initially attracted to younger guys, in the end I'm most comfortable with someone who's interested in similar interests, much more than his age: circuit boys aren't my focus, to cite the stereotype of a young gay man.

At the book's conclusion, I'm left with the feeling that Bergling will continue to be attracted to guys in early adulthood as he ages; some survey respondents reported settling down with a younger guy while others said they enjoyed being single. I was reminded that we're all in this world together – although here in Vermont as in other rural areas we can feel isolated – and we should reach out and communicate – actually talk about the issues of old and young. ▼

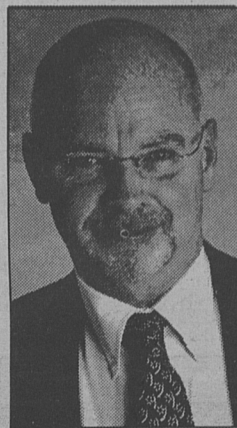
Fred Pond has enjoyed various supportive roles at OITM over a number of years from his almost-Vermont location in Lebanon, NH. Comments welcome at pondfc@yahoo.com.

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