

voices from the mountains

CONSCIOUS AGING

by Walter I. Zeichner

I have imagined for a long time being an old man on a mountain, with people coming to me for help with their health, physical, emotional, spiritual. The old man on the mountain, that people pay with chopped wood, stuff from their gardens, and other forms of barter.

I just turned 38 and started to experience the next phase of mid-life crisis, which started when I turned 35. I have been questioning my life, my work, my relationships, my impatience, my desire, my purpose. Should I travel? Should I stay home? Is parenting right for me (I am

foster parenting my nephew)? Why am I single? Do I want a partner? Do I want to be polyamorous or monogamous?

The answer to those questions is...I don't know. I have been sitting with "not knowing." That's not comfortable for me. I have spent my entire adult life knowing what I wanted, knowing my direction, and going for it. Now I am having a very different experience.

I was visiting a friend who is also experiencing a period of uncertainty and he said a wonderful thing to me. He said that he had taken time to

look inside himself and ask what he was afraid of. What he found was an unhappy old man who hadn't done what he wanted with his life. I decided to do the same. I meditate most mornings so I spent some time sitting with my fear. I found a bitter, lonely, unfulfilled old man inside me, who had been afraid to go after what he wanted. That is not where I want to end up.

Psychology often focuses on "the child within" or a person's "little kid." That can be a powerful part of the process of learning to love and nurture yourself. But, what about the old person within? What about who you are becoming?

I spent most of my late teens and early 20's assuming that I would not live a long life, that we would soon be nuked into oblivion, so the idea of who I was becoming was not much in my awareness. Now that I am moving towards my 40's I see life very differently, and I realize that it is possible, even likely, that I will become an old man. Who is the old man I want to be? Just as being aware of the child I was is important to me emotionally, I am finding that it is also important that I look forward to where I am going, who I am becoming. This is not so much about where do I want to be

was a bunch of us. Worlds like Heterosexual, gay, lesbian, transsexual-queer-well, those words meant nothing to us kids. We had no time to waste. The fun would be over soon enough.

I'm not a kid anymore. I grew up and became serious. I threw all my dresses in the trash and grew a mustache. I went through therapy and surgery and changed my name. But I still find myself hiding in the dark on hot summer nights. Only I'm not playing kick the can. This isn't fun. The night is closing in on me and I can feel the chill through my thin cotton T-shirt. I just want

to stand in a group, all of us laughing, so close we can smell the pine pitch on each other's skin. All of us together, in spite of the details.

I'm waiting for the sacred call.

It was so easy then, when I was a kid.

It could be so easy now. Sometimes I wish that I could come bursting out of the underbrush and run towards the tree with all my might and kick that can to free us all.

But there's a there's a better way to end it.

Ollie Ollie Oxen free.

living when I am 90, or what do I want my finances to be like when I am 65, but who do I want to be, and am I living a life now that will allow me grow into being that old man?

Living in the past or the future takes one out of the present. I am not suggesting that we spend all our time focused on the child in the past and the old person in the future, but that these aspects of ourselves have gifts and teachings for us if we pay attention to them. Visualizing and dialoguing with the inner child works, so why not visualize and dialogue with the old person within?

The extent to which fear dominates one's life is, I believe, directly proportional to the amount of dissatisfaction one experiences. When I find the old man inside me, if he isn't who I want to become, if I am afraid of him, of ending up "not OK" in some way, I need to talk with that internal old guy. I need to face him and learn from him rather than run and hide from him. When we hide from aspects of ourselves then we are giving up the power to make choices about our lives.

Gay and Lesbian people in particular have been told by this society that we are worthless and that being queer results in lonely isolation. Certainly this does not have to be true, and part of creating the old age we want involves paying attention now to the direction in which we are headed.

Walter I. Zeichner is a psychotherapist and Holistic Health Practitioner in Burlington, VT. He recently published the book "Virtual Survival Staying Healthy on the Internet."

The Crones Are Pushing Thirty Again.

ALVERTA PERKINS, AGE 74,
SO. BURLINGTON

The Crones, a group of women over the age of 40, has been meeting in the Burlington area since 1979! It was started because "older" women were active in community concerns, but were finding that most of their activist friends were much younger than they and they felt a need to connect with other women their own age.

Two women actually started the group by advertising in the women's newspaper called, "COMMONWOMAN" (no longer published) in 1979. A few other women soon joined and the Crones meetings began. The first group included heterosexual, bisexual, and lesbian women.

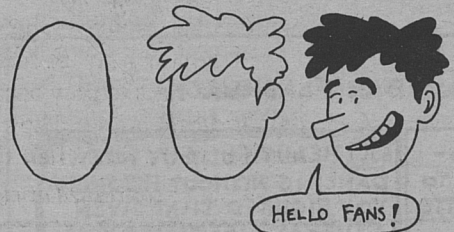
The minimum age was set at 45, but was dropped to 40 at the request of younger women. Conflicts arose quickly between the lesbian and heterosexual women. The lesbians did not want to spend time talking about husbands or boyfriends and the heterosexuals were not very interested in lesbian concerns and found the lesbians intimidating, so they dropped out.

At first, meetings were held monthly in members' homes. Over the years, the format has changed, and now The Crones meet less often and plan activities around such things as a movie outing, a walk/hike, canoeing, swimming, snow-shoeing or just a "hang-out" potluck. Food is almost always present; they do like potlucks!

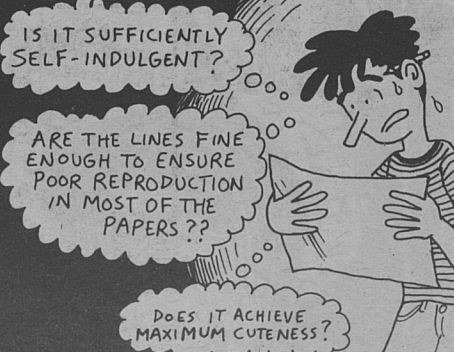
The group continues as lesbian and bisexuals. It serves an important role in being a social time for women over 40 and a place for newcomers in the community to meet other old (older) women, and at these gatherings women can learn about community activities and resources. It is difficult to meet peers in a new community or even if one has lived in an area for many years.

The bar scene is not acceptable to many and Burlington lacks a women's center. Ages now range from 40 to 74 and attendance ranges from 3 persons to 34. It is not a political group, as such, but individuals are political in their own lives and this may become a topic of discussion at a meeting.

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