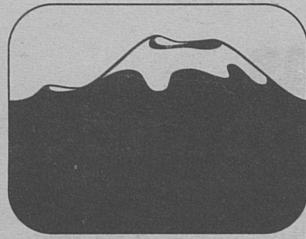


opinion

VOICES FROM THE MOUNTAINS
by jon appleton & carlos nakamura



Love Across the Generations: a personal view

This is a story with two perspectives and two voices. This month we hear from Jon Appleton. Next month his partner, Carlos Nakamura, will share his views on the same subject.

Jon's Story:

In the Western heterosexual world that was my domain for 56 years, there is something slightly smutty about the romantic/sexual relationship between men and women of significantly different ages. I notice this less in the gay and lesbian community. Gay men are invariably young and body beautiful and older gay men are invisible. Lesbians usually seem so happy for other women when they are able to find a soul mate that age difference seems insignificant.

Since men remain fertile all their lives (unless, like me, you were coerced into a vasectomy at age 32), and women tend to cease bearing children thirty years earlier, most cultures seem to accept, if not entirely approve of, the "older man." Heterosexual women detest the notion of older man-younger woman because men seeking younger women tend to have control issues or at least want to be adored as they were as teenagers. Meanwhile, most older, heterosexual women

have come to accept celibacy as a condition of "modern maturity." Or they have come to realize that they do a better job themselves of relieving their sexual urges.

My first wife, to whom I was married for thirteen years, was exactly my age. We married when we were sophomores in college. My second marriage lasted barely two years and my wife was five years my junior. My third marriage lasted fifteen years and my wife was six years younger than me. I could not be considered a "cradle robber," or as they say in Portuguese, *papa anjo* (angel eater). But my wives and other women I coveted more often than not had the physiognomies of young men. Unfortunately, they were incomplete for me. Nevertheless, it was I who felt inadequate.

It took a lot of growing up to realize that I could have a romantic relationship with a man. Until my first such relationship, my sexual contact with men was frequent but always anonymous. This first 'relationship' came out of the blue, but I believe I was finally ready for it to happen. I was in Japan and a young man I saw often at my place of work asked to speak to me in private. In our meeting, he told me that he was attracted to older men

and he was in love with me. I knew instantly that I wanted a romantic relationship with him. He was not anonymous. I knew him and I cared for him. I was touched and flattered and a felt like a teenager. He was twenty-

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two and I was fifty-six. He was the first man I ever kissed in a romantic fashion.

Could my relationship with my young Japanese friend have ever been sustainable? What was there to sustain this relationship besides the desire to be in each others arms? We clung to each other as to a life raft because facing the consequences of coming out was frightening. In that sense we needed each other. But I was fifty-six and he was twenty-two. What is a man to do? I was ashamed of what I was doing, not because I was gay, but because it seemed wrong to "take advantage" of such a young man. Subsequently, I have realized that we took advantage of each other, in both positive and negative

senses. I was mature, wise, circumspect and financially secure. He was young, attractive, enthusiastic and deeply in love with me. What could be wrong with this picture?

A year later, this relationship ended for reasons of cultural background, career paths, family situations (he had not come out to his family and I had to mine), and geographical location (he was posted to a remote town in Japan, quite far from Tokyo, where I lived). It is odd, but I must have expected this to happen, because I was only briefly sad in contrast to my intense feelings of abandonment when my high school girlfriend, with whom I had my first intense sexual relationship, decided to split.

supporter; they merely wanted the approval and attention of an older man. Unfortunately, I had already been down that path. I was about to return to Vermont empty handed, so to speak.

Then I met Carlos. He answered my advertisement on GayNet Japan, so of course, I assumed he was in Japan and that I would be able to meet him. This proved impossible, since he lived in Brazil, although he was of Japanese descent. In lieu of a date, we began a long correspondence. He met all of my expectations; he was intelligent, sensitive, interested in the arts, well educated, and willing to relocate to Vermont. The one problem was his age; he was thirty-two. Now thirty-two isn't twenty-two, but I worried about many of the same issues I've already mentioned.

Until we met at Christmas. We decided to live together rather quickly, and since it has only been nine months since we met, I do not know how some of my concerns will play out. I still have some immediate concerns. I will never be able to match his sexual energy, and my minor health concerns will only accelerate in the future. Although I am lively at sixty, how lively will I be at seventy and beyond? And if one believes in long term commitments, is it fair to take these years of his life when death must do us part in twenty or more years? ▼

Jon Appleton was born in Hollywood, California in 1939 and has lived in Vermont since 1967. He is a composer and teacher.

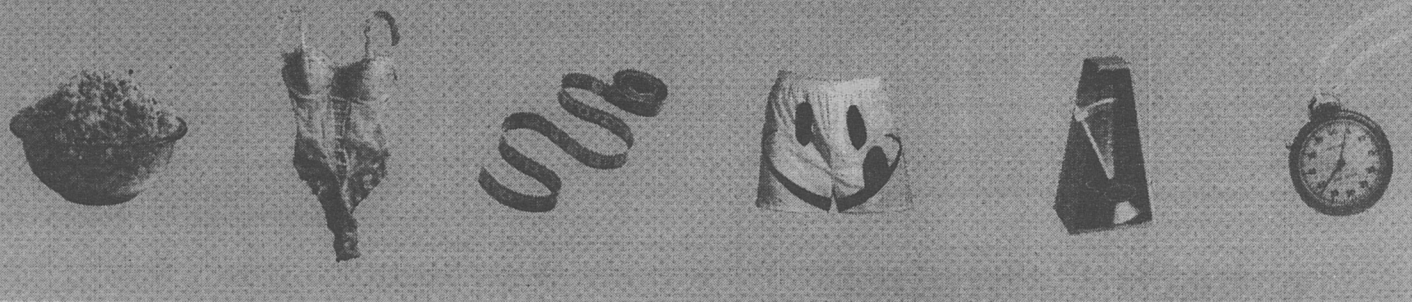
Carlos' story will appear as part two of "Love Across the Generations" in the January, 2000 Voices From the Mountains column.

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