

Of Foley, Old Fags and Chicken

By Buzz Bense

The media feeding frenzy of the last weeks over the Mark Foley sex scandal has confirmed what everybody knows—not about politicians, but about older gay men. Everyone knows that every gray-haired gay man is lusting—overtly or covertly—over boy flesh. Everyone knows that geezer fags are always checking out a young man's pants to determine if he is well-hung. Everyone knows that the inevitable arc of a gay man's life is to grow into a dirty old predator. Everyone knows that older gay men can't be trusted with younger men, gay or straight. Everyone knows that anyone who tries to bring together gay generations is playing with fire.

And I'm not just talking about everyone in heterosexual-land. I'm talking about here in Gay Mecca San Francisco USA.

Our community is stratified by age like layers of rock. 60-some-things don't talk to 40-some-things who don't interact with 20-somethings who never speak to 50-somethings who go out of their way to avoid 30-somethings, and we all avoid recognizing men in their 70s or 80s who are rude enough to be present on Castro Street. Never mind our gay youth under 20.

Certainly, there are very legitimate reasons for hanging with your own crowd. Our needs and experiences are very different. What I am dealing with, as a 57-year-old man with HIV, is very different from a 27-year-old man who has just moved to the city or a 34-year-old man who is working hard on a

new career.

But what is really underneath this separation is, in my mind, fear and judgment. We, young and older, have to some degree bought into the sexual predator myth, and we're protecting ourselves from being on the receiving end of attitude, verbal abuse or violation.

I would NEVER approach a younger man in a public setting—coffee house, bar, bus stop—because I'm afraid of being seen as an old leech. And I am sure that our younger gay men have plenty of concerns about making contact with old guys, who they fear may only view them as sexual objects and fresh, young chicken.

But my God, what are we missing? What are we giving up when we live in this climate of fear and mistrust of others in our community, just because of age difference?

We're missing opportunities to learn, to see the world through another person's point of view. We're losing the advice of those who have been through life, and the freshness of those who have not. We're losing the chance to pass on our history, our values, and what we have learned as men who have lived through oppression and political changes, and who have survived.

Personally, I would love to have an on-going friendship with a young man, where we could talk about dating, living in San Francisco, career and when we came out. I'd love to be able to sit with a group of younger men and listen, just listen, without feeling that I'm be-

ing judged as the old fag. I'd love to be able to mentor promising young men who can develop into the leaders of tomorrow, as the old cliché goes.

With my gay liberation idealism—now there's an old fag term!—I would be intoxicated by us working together, learning about each other, appreciating our differences and our common experiences

But I don't see that happening. 'Cause we're afraid, and we don't trust each other. How sad. How really sad.

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