

By H. Edward Taylor

I began running personal ads in the BAR and Bay Times in 1999, after I turned 50. My partner of seven years had died the year before and I had moved to Marin. There aren't any gay bars in Marin and I didn't care to drive into the City all the time to find men. While I met a number of nice men and had a few short-term relationships, my hope was that some day my next long-term partner would come through the door. As the number of my years increased, the number of responses to my ads decreased logarithmically. Meanwhile, personal ads in gay papers were dwindling down to nothing.

I began running Craigslist ads about three years ago. My ads were fairly simple and straight to the point. I listed my age, although I did tend to shave a year off. I said that I was HIV-positive and that I was interested in men over 40. Looking back, I realize that I was being much too incautious about having strange men in my home, as I naively trust people in sexual situations

One afternoon in July 2005, I got a response from an 18-year-old. I don't know where my head was at that day, but I made the worst decision in my life. When Junior appeared at the door, five feet eleven inches tall and 200 pounds, he certainly looked 18 to me. To tell the truth, I didn't know what teenagers looked like. I always hated the myth that all gay men are after young guys and I never even look at teenagers. I

grew up to taunts from teenagers when I was one and still find them intimidating. I prefer men closer to my age, preferably a couple of years older.

I put on some porno because he said he was a bit uncomfortable. Things transpired fairly quickly. Moments later he was did, done and gone. I must have had my head up my butt that day, because looking back there were all kinds of warning signs.

In December Junior called several times wanting to talk. I was always busy when he called, and I had come to suspect that he was under-age. Finally, we spoke in early January. He wanted to get together again. I told him his age was a problem (being under forty) and I didn't want to. He said he couldn't understand why not. He offered to come over and do me. I explained to him I was now in a monogamous relationship and wasn't interested in anyone else. When he told me he was fifteen, I just about had a heart attack.

Several days later, at 7 a.m., two investigators came to my door and took me to the police station for an "interview." They had a warrant to search my apartment and confiscated the computer, some porno, and some empty popper bottles. I was asked about Junior and I discussed our encounter. I had to admit what I had done, but only after I had received assurances from Junior that he was of

age. I'm not an idiot, just a fool, and certainly not a pedophile. The only threat I could ever be to any child would be to steal the affections of his grandfather.

Next thing I knew I was put under arrest and taken to the county jail. I was charged with committing oral sex with a minor and showing pornography, with an additional charge because I was HIV-positive. These charges would get me six years and eight months in jail, plus sex offender status.

No one I knew had ever been arrested so I had no idea what the process was. With the help of friends, I was able to make bail. The bond was for \$50,000 and I had to pay 10% to the bail bondsman after my best friend put up his house for my bond. I certainly couldn't afford a lawyer and the bail bondsman was trying to push one on me because I was in a "life and death" situation.

I figured that if I had to rely on a Public Defender, one in Marin was more likely to be more competent than most, and I did get a good Defender. Given the current climate, I did not want to risk a trial, so I opted to plea bargain. I pled guilty to a misdemeanor oral sex with a minor, with no sex offender status.

It came out in my preliminary hearing that Junior had visited three men that day "to experiment to see if he was gay." He decided he wasn't. At some point

last year, he decided to tell his father about his experiments. Dad, a local law enforcement officer, was not about to have a gay son and used his position to have his son's three victims pay for his son's crimes. When asked if he knew that he was putting men at risk for prosecution, he simply responded that he "didn't care."

I later found out that Junior had refused to cooperate with the police and make the entrapment call, so the police used some other teenager. Given the nature of the call, I'm surprised that the police would corrupt some other youth to serve their own misguided purposes. Shame on them!

I had gotten letters of support from friends and folks in the AIDS services community. My sentence: 30 hours of community service and court costs of \$147! After fearing prison and imminent murder for six months, I was required to do community service. I'm on disability and that's what I do, public service. What a tragic waste of county funds, people's time and my t-cells.

Incredibly, I was treated with a great deal of compassion and understanding. People were aware of the situation and its unfairness. I even had a bailiff introduce himself to me and told me to "hang in there."

The costs to me were numerous. It set me back physically, and I was so stressed out I lost my appetite. It put a great strain on my new relationship. I had to charge my bail money to my credit card and who knows when that will be paid off. I'm sure that there are some folks out there who believe I am guilty. My friends and family have stood

by me, I'm still seeing my friend, and my appetite is back.

Many older gay men feel they need to find other ways of meeting men outside the competitive bar and bath scene. I think that sometimes when I wanted sex, what I really wanted was company, someone to talk to. Computer dating and hookups may meet some of our needs for community, but we owe it to ourselves to be cautious with strangers. A lot of my needs for community and companionship are now met by the men of Thriving in SF, a unique group of HIV-positive men who have come together to share their experiences as gay men with HIV and to create new opportunities for fun and learning.

Of course, I've learned my lesson. If you're hooking up with younger men, be sure to check their IDs. Of course, IDs can be fake. So if you have any question about someone's age, please spare yourself and send him or her away. Personally I don't see the attraction. I'll take Grandpa any day.



H. Edward Taylor moved to San Francisco in the early 70s. After working at the University of California, he went on disability retirement and now spends his time doing community service as well as arts and crafts.