

# Waking Up to Gay Adulthood

By Terry Rosson

I've been doing a lot of waking up lately. Three months after attending the "Gay Men and Midlife Awakening: Rites of Passage into the Second Half of Life" workshop in Oakland, the eye-opening journey I went on is still percolating.

The major thrust of the weekend was a focus on "gay adulthood." As gay men, most of us think of ourselves as either young or old (at least that's my experience). Adulthood--that in-between stage--is like a mysterious missing link. In fact, a lot of gay men have never even heard of the concept of "gay adult" and, like me, sometimes live in a prolonged adolescence.

Although this prolonged adolescence is evident everywhere in our culture, most straight men are more or less required to become adults through raising kids. For most of us gay men, this same force isn't there pushing us along.

## Our communities need us to be adults

Delaying or bypassing adulthood robs us, our community and the larger culture of so much. And as gay men, we have special perspectives and talents that are needed in a big way. In fact, as we face things like global warming, the

erosion of our democracy and a lot more, our culture needs us to step up and become real adults as never before.

I feel as if I've been wrenched into gay adulthood in some ways. It's meant that I've had to give up looking back at a difficult childhood and thinking an extended adolescence is a justified trade-off. It's also meant that I have to believe in myself a lot more--and believe in something bigger than myself--and really know I am capable of helping to take care of the communities I'm a part of.

## People in every phase of life

To build an alive gay community, we need people in every phase of life.

Youth is about possibility and fun, the time for developing a healthy ego. And elders connect us to powerful worlds beyond everyday reality. There's lots of overlap between these phases. No one is saying you can't still have lots of fun and be creative as an adult. It just means the "mix" of "me" focus shifts to more of an "us" focus a lot more often.

So where do adults--especially gay adults--fit into our community? First, they're essential for the "material well-being of the

tribe," providing practical support. Second, they help others realize their passions and full potential.

A few examples: As a gay adult, you're needed to bless the gifts of someone younger by seeing his potential and achievement--especially where it's not recognized. You can share practical knowledge--how to balance a checkbook, say, or how to maintain a good relationship. And you can take care of our village by starting, joining and cultivating strong political, economic and environmental organizations.

## Moving beyond resistance

Sometimes I feel overwhelmed by the "gay adult" role. My younger, insecure self pops up and says, "Who are you to mentor others? What do you know? What can you offer the community?"

Usually, my solution is to listen to these voices and then just do what I need to anyway. I used to try to club these voices into silence, but that only produced more resistance. A new approach for me is to realize I don't have to be a Lone Ranger, doing this all on my own. I can get support from my partner, friends and like-minded groups.

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I know that for me moving from youth to adulthood takes real honesty and lots of hard work. It's also meant moving beyond just talking about the things that matter most to me to doing them. For example, I've joined a group that does great work on sustainability, spirituality and social justice issues.

The kicker is that this group requires me to speak in public (yikes!) to connect with communities I care about. So I'm taking a few public speaking classes to help get past my fears and to realize it's not really about me anyway.

The time I spent with the fifteen other men at the Midlife workshop was inspiring. The best news is that we'll be getting together every few months to support each other in staying awake and being alive, passionate adults. Like the support I'm finding at the SF Gay Men's Community Initiative, this new community will sustain me as I continue on my gay adult journey.



Terry Rosson is a veteran advertising art director and designer who is committed to ongoing personal and community growth. During the past 15 years, he has participated in and facilitated in-depth gay men's groups, including Father Hunger. He lives in Berkeley with his partner Chris and daughters Lacey and Mitzi (OK, they're dogs!).