

LIKE FINE WINE – THE EXPANSIVE EROTIC LIFE OF THOSE IN THEIR PRIME

(This talk was given in February 2009 at a dinner event with a group of senior level executives and their spouses)

In preparation for this talk today I'd thought I'd do a little social experiment. With the use of YouTube I went searching for video clips about menopause and man-o-pause. As you might expect there were countless little comedic vignettes showing women as crazy hormonal Rambo's maiming anything and anyone in their path and men as wilting compliant lemmings – following the female Rambo – all his mojo drained dry. Perhaps you have witnessed these messages too. Women who have been typecast as "Susie Homemaker" are now seen as explosive, unpredictable and aggressive. Men who have been typecast as "the Marlborough Man" - tough, irreverent, indifferent, accomplished are now seen as powerless, controlled, and directionless.

Add insult to injury is to notice what is not seen in media. According to media the only people having sex, fun and adventure are those under 30, who have the money and bodies of the young and the restless. And it all comes easy – jobs, money, romance *and* sex ... sex, sex and more sex! It all naturally happens and falls into place. It is as if life is NO ART FORM requiring wisdom, savvy, finesse, patience and practice ... it just is – thoughtless and easy.

Though these messages can make for some funny jokes and interesting new products and procedures to try ... when that is the majority of what we hear, it can be a bit discouraging and discounting. The life we are **actually** living is nowhere to be found in the public eye.

Now granted I know there are changes ... I deal with my own every day ... but I am here to tell you that those messages don't even begin to describe the cork on the luscious complex wine that you have become! And hopefully you have come to know that!

Think for a minute with me, how many of you would like to trade in all your hard earned wisdom and confidence - and go back to your 20's? What are some of the lessons you have learned in the last 30 or more years that you wouldn't trade for the world? What priorities, beliefs, perspectives are crystal clear to you now, that were not available to you in your 20's?

I have counseled hundreds of couples in their 40's, 50's, 60's and older. Together we have looked at how to deepen their love-life in spite of aging, illness, or disability. And in many ways because of it. These couples have let life crystallize what is most important to them. They **now** know life is at times unjust, at times cruel, at times sacred, and at times lovely. They have had countless experiences that they thought would satisfy them only to find out they did not. And they have had experiences that they thought would take more effort, time and pain than they wanted to give, only to find a lasting satisfaction and joy they could not have imagined. Life for the person in their prime is filled with surprise and paradox – but they are clear and unwavering on what is most precious.

When men and women wise-up to culture ... take matters into their own hands, they can discover in mid-life a mind-blowing increase in intimacy, sexuality, fun, and freedom! At mid-life they are finally ready ... finally equipped ... to live life to the fullest and savor each dripping moment.

So let's talk about 'the truth of the matter' ... The following 4 realities have always been true for people. It is what family therapists and sex therapists know that Hollywood screen writers and marketers either don't know, don't think will sell or don't want you to know:

Here's the first reality :

Haven't we all heard the idea that men reach "their prime" at 17 but women don't reach their prime until their mid 30's? These are actually 2 different primes,

genital and sexual, and both men and women reach their genital primes and sexual primes at roughly the same times. **Genital prime** is when the circulation in your body is at its best and thus if you are a guy you have a fast and hard erection and your refractory period is short (hard/soft/hard). When you are a woman, you lubricate well and you orgasm easily. (Personally, I think this is God's little gift to us in our youth – since we don't have much depth of self yet to offer – at least our bodies respond well). **Sexual prime** on the other hand, has to do with your maturity – your ability to accept yourself, accept your partner, accept life in the gray zone, and you have grieved the cultural mythology of your youth. For example in your 20's and 30's you might believe cultural ideas such as “My life will be fulfilled if I can be a wife and mother”, or “If I take care of my body I won't get sick, or “If I have enough money, I will be happy.” But by the time we are 40 we have begun to experience times of injustice, watched people get sick and die, realized others cannot make us happy, or we've experienced something very difficult that we 'didn't sign up for'. We understand that there are no guarantees, that life can be short, and love is a precious gift. We become less judgmental, more compassionate, more forgiving and more willing to let go of old wounds and angers, and open our hearts. **Life is simply too short.** It is these experiences that expose the myths of culture and grow you up from the inside out. Through this, your feet become firmly planted on the ground and you become rooted in your own hard earned wisdom and strength. You are strong in who you are and take responsibility for your own happiness. Because of this you enter your sexual prime where you can fully inhabit your body during lovemaking,

be fully present to yourself, your partner and your environment and you can open your eyes and heart and look within. By now you know the purpose of sex is heart to heart connection and that becomes your goal. Sex is no longer reduced to penis size or staying power, ejaculation or counting orgasms. It is LOVE – MAKING - seeking to fill your partner with your love and seeking to absorb all the love being given to you. You can handle your vulnerability and your partner's vulnerability and you embody your eroticism without fear. **Life is simply too precious to live it superficially.** Believe me no 20 year old wants you to look into his eyes and figure him out before he does!! This is why the most erotic love making is happening with those in their 5th decade and older – those mature enough to handle it. Real erotic love making is not for the feign of heart ... **but neither is living a life that is truly worth living.**

Here's the 2nd reality:

In many ancient eastern spiritual beliefs, it is understood that men naturally lead their lives with their 2nd chakra (their penis) – their accomplishment, purpose and voice for their wants and desires. We see this when boys are little and it becomes very pronounced in adolescents. No pun intended. For example – give two 4 year old boys sticks to play with and what do they become? Swords, right? They are all about conquering, accomplishing, winning. Imagine two high school boys in the locker room discussing the dates they had over the weekend and you are likely to hear words of conquest over words of love. For boys and men, work, their accomplishment, their purpose and their penis are the default fulcrum in life.

We also know from research that men in their 20's and 30's are more apt to suffer major depression after the loss of a career job than after the loss of a relationship. The growing edge for men – their lifelong challenge is to connect their penis to their heart and this is where women are of great help. Only when men connect their drive for accomplishment and purpose in life to their need for relational intimacy and belonging, can they experience the cycle of perpetual renewal both within and in the world. Renewable energy for a man comes when his purpose and accomplishment nourishes his most valued relationships, and when his relationships ground his purpose and accomplishments. It is also in mid-life when we begin to see men thinking about their legacy. What is the story of who I am as a man, father, lover, friend, contributor to the world? Who do people say I am? How will I be remembered? This exercise of legacy is an act of connecting life purpose to the heart. If men don't do this work, they have a hard time dealing with changes of aging and will often continue to seek youth through their penis. This is why Viagra, porn, gimmicks and the acquisition of more toys, have always had eager consumers. Now while these drugs have purpose, when men seek satisfaction in life without connecting their mojo to their heart they are left wanting, frustrated, dissatisfied and disengaged. Just being able to get it up and keep it up, is not enough to satisfy the soul's longing. Think for a minute with me of a man you know who has aged well – with grace and joy. Now think of a man who has not aged gracefully. What are the qualities you see in these two lives? What is the connection or lack of connection or integration these men have made between their accomplishments and their valued relationships?

Women on the other hand lead with their hearts – their 4th chakra. We see this from the time girls are little in how they play with each other and how they imagine. Their hearts are all over, and relationships are the focus. Imagine giving two four year old girls each a stick and before long the sticks are a ‘mommy stick’ and a ‘daddy stick’. This becomes its own pronounced version in adolescents. You want to witness complex relational drama, hang out with a bunch of 13 year old girls! Those of you who have raised daughters have undoubtedly seen this. A woman’s lifelong challenge is to connect her heart to her passion, purpose, accomplishment and voice in order to experience her own version of perpetual renewal. Let me give you an example, by and large, men have no problems expressing their wants or imposing their voice. A woman on the other hand will often be vague, covert, or beat around the bush when she wants something that might impose or significantly inconvenience others. Guilt or the fear of ‘being selfish’ often stops her because her tendency and her culture has taught her to put the relationship first. When women don’t ground their heart – their role in relationships - to their passion and purpose **in the world**, to their sexuality, to their wants and desires, two things often happen. One, they live as a passive player in their own lives by expecting others to meet their needs or they focus on changing others in order to get their needs met. They don’t overtly identify what they want or need, verbalize it clearly and pursue it. Partners are left to try and guess. Trust me, after 20 years of doing therapy I have yet to see partners mind-read well!! And second, they often begin to feel lost as

relationships move toward more independence. In mid-life this is often felt after a woman has launched her children. Women need *their* voice, *their* calling, *their* passion – they need to know what *they* want, think and desire. They need to be willing to impose *their pursuits* to some degree on the relationships in their lives. They need to be actively crafting *their own* legacy at home, in the bedroom, in boardroom, in their world. When women begin to embody this boldness – take a lesson from the men in their lives – *while remaining connected to their heart*, they experience perpetual renewal. Her voice and purpose begins to nourish her heart and her heart nourishes her voice and purpose. Think for a minute with me of a woman you know who has aged well – with grace and joy. Now think of a woman who has not aged gracefully. What are the qualities you see in these two lives? What is the connection or lack of connection or integration these women have made between their valued relationships and their separate voice?

This heart/purpose connection requires maturity, courage and bold love. Both partners understand the value of being whole, strong, passionate people AND the need to serve, listen and love the other – even when the other is not being so easy to love. This reciprocity of heart and passion, of maturity and compassion and of giving fully and receiving fully is the heartbeat of deeply erotic and intimate ways of relating. It is **this** kind of **maturity of perspective**, and **courage of heart** that the mid-life person is more apt to possess. And when both individuals of a couple don this bold voice and subtle love, erotic expression grows.

Here is a third reality:

No matter what our current culture says, good sex was never meant to be measured by counting frequency of intercourse or orgasms. I see couples all the time who say, “Something is wrong we aren’t having as much sex as we should be.” Men often blame and women often feel responsible. The church and culture have long had us focused on genitals and arousal cycles which would have both of you reduce sexuality to intercourse, ejaculation and orgasms. But as long as it is possible to have intercourse or an orgasm and **not feel** connected to your partner, this measurement will never work. While there is value for heterosexual couples to understand that your paths to each other might be different, (i.e. a woman may access a man’s heart easier through his sexuality and a man may access a woman’s sexuality easier through her heart), the goal in sexuality is not intercourse ... it is connection. The couples in my practice have taught me that no one is satisfied if sexual relating is obligatory. Though the bodies may do the wam-bam thing, if the thoughts and emotions are nowhere to be found, sex can be deeply unsatisfying. Another limitation in this reductionistic idea of sex is how it doesn’t allow enough diversity to accommodate all the different stages and demands of life. Perhaps you remember times in your marriage when sexuality looked different – times of ‘no energy’, or small children, or illness, or a wild vacation. Real sex, erotic sex is any sexual touch that involves the heart, soul, body, and relationship – and increases connection and love ... it is **love-making**. Ask yourself, was love created, made, manifested, felt? Was your heart soft and open to your lover? It is a wide continuum of sexual

and sensual touch that is going to sustain and entertain you through all the phases of life. With imagination and a desire to love, come exciting ways of building a sensual and sexual repertoire of giving and receiving that fits any situation.

The fourth veiled reality is like a Beverly Doolittle painting. Our lives are finely woven into the backdrop of a consumer based economy that depends on us feeling only momentarily satisfied ... but never content. Contentment would reduce our desire for the products we “need” to make us “happy”, like a longer erection or new breasts, a new face or a new car. The sneaky sting of a market driven economy is that at the end of the day deep in our souls we can tend to feel reduced, objectified, unsatisfied, wanting, inadequate, that somehow we are not enough or there’s not enough. We may be the first generation most in need of critical thinking and what I call ‘**priority discipline**’. What I mean is – our most precious relationships and our most nourishing stillness require uninterrupted time and attention. We know that to build a good relationship with our kids, our lover, our friends or family we need focused time, intention to listen and love, and time to create moments of fun, adventure and connection. In order to nourish our soul we often need space, maybe silence, maybe a walk along the ocean or in the woods. We need the discipline to unplug in order to nourish what is most precious to us. Yet, we no longer have natural time breaks. Sidewalks no longer roll up at 8pm or on Sundays. Technology is perpetually ‘on’ and demanding our attention. Advertisers are everywhere – on our websites, at our gas pumps, and

in nearly all forms of media. Life now requires more consciousness and discipline to match our daily choices to our priorities. Take a second here and scan over your priorities ... your legacy. What brings you the deepest joy, satisfaction in your life and in your relationship? Now examine what pulls you away, distracts you, demands your attention? Where can you claim back more space, time for intentional loving, listening, holding, sharing?

Before I close, I want to give you a few pointers you can begin using today. These ideas are old - excavated from 2000 year old spiritual texts where love making was considered a practiced art form. To implement these elements into your lovemaking you have to call on your wisdom, courage and core desires. The level of eroticism produced with these elements is a far cry from the wam-bam self and orgasm focused sexuality most of us learned in our teens and twenties. Believe it or not, prior to 500BC all writings and cave drawings we have about sexuality from several early civilizations reveal an awareness and celebration of the body and soul art-form in the sexual encounter. These 5 ingredients show up in stories of love making over and over again:

1. Sensual delight – eyes, ears, nose, touch, taste all involved. While each of your senses is taking in data as you touch and love your beloved – are you paying attention? Can you expand your experience using each of your senses more intentionally? There is a lot of erotic poetry from the ancients that is absolutely beautiful and part of what makes it beautiful is the all the sensual detail.

2. Eyes – the eyes were believed to be the window of the soul and communication was more through the eyes than through words. It is not that words were not used, it was that the eyes were always used. The eyes of the beloved were engaged throughout love making and through the eyes a river of love flowed.

3. Breath – Breath is believed to be the spirit of life. It is deep, slow, intentional filling all corners of the body. There is no shallow breathing, no tightening of the body, no trying to make anything happen, it is breathing deeply all sensations – emotional, spiritual and physical, into all corners of the body. Couples who have spent years practicing these skills describe full body orgasms that are facilitated by this kind of open deep heart-body breath.

4. Intention – An intention is spoken in each encounter. This is part of bringing yourself, your hopes and your open heart to your lover. Example, “I want you to know something more about my love for you through the way my hands touch you.”

5. Attention/presence – The spiritual practice of presence – “I am here with you now, because our love is at the heart of life’s deepest joy and deepest learning”.

If you want to linger for days in a state of deep love, gratitude and contentment ushered in by your sexuality and your heart, you will want to practice these elements. You can do this with any behavior from a hug in the kitchen, to gazing in each other’s eyes, to intercourse ... and all points in between. One of the exciting differences of this kind of love making is that what you do and how you

do what you do, may look different each time you make love. Stop for a minute and imagine a hug where all your senses are 'on' – you are aware of what you are seeing, smelling, hearing, every inch of where your body is touching of what you are tasting; your eyes are gazing deeply into the eyes of your lover and communicating love; your intentional in giving love and receiving their love; you are breathing together, slowly and deeply, and you are bringing all your presence and attention to this loving space. Mmmmm ... drink it in, melt into it, let your body release into this delicious moment. This too ... is love making!

Know that unless you have been incorporating these 5 elements into your loving touch all along, it might take a lot of practice – patience and more practice. There have been several times I have sent a couple home to do a task like this, only to have them return and say, “Yes, we tried it ... once. It was awkward.” A master painter does not one day of painting make ... the same is true for becoming masterful lovers. It will be awkward at first. It will also turn up the intensity and vulnerability in your relationship. Loving like this is kind of like taking your relationship and putting it into a kiln for firing. It can work to purify it. But I say why settle ... life is too short ... you have come too far ... you are in your prime.

Of all the things we put time and attention to in our lives ... erotic lovemaking will give you the biggest pay-off in your soul and relationship. It takes courage and boldness – but this kind of sexuality is deeply satisfying ... lingering ... soulful ... luscious. Enjoy!