

INTRODUCTION BY FILM DIRECTOR STEVEN LORING – JUNE, 2019

I'm thrilled to be screening *The Age of Love* at the LeadingAge PA 2019 Annual Conference + EXPO and to spread the conversation statewide!



Since I'm unable to discuss the film with you in person, I'd like to share a bit about how it came to be. Because I'm not a trained gerontologist and knew little of the hearts and desires of older adults before beginning this film. The inspiration came from something that occurred in my own life – two events, really – that set me on what turned into a very personal creative journey.

The first was that my dad died, rather suddenly, and left my mom, who was in her early 70s, without her most intimate emotional partner – and soulmate of a half-century – for the first time in her life. I remember one night we sat in the kitchen having tea. I was filling out insurance forms as she read condolence cards, when she suddenly looked up and asked, “Who’s ever going to hug me again in all the years I have left? Who’s going to touch me or hold me or share a meal?” She paused. “All my life, I was part of a team. Now I’m just another old lady in the world, alone.”

That was startling. As her son, I thought I was taking care of her, looking after finances, security, food, shelter. But she was thinking about something else entirely, and I had no idea how to answer.

That same spring, my 78-year-old uncle, who’d never married or had children – or even been on a date, as far as we knew – moved into a senior community. Within weeks, he met Evelyn, who was 80, and they essentially locked the bedroom door and were like teenagers again – physically, emotionally, experiencing a true love affair in every sense of the word. And the idea that, after eight decades alone, he was still capable and interested and ready to plunge in, to create a profound new connection he’d never experienced before in life, was stunning, and wonderful. I watched him start to express himself for the first time, at 78, as an intimate, loving partner.

As all of this swirled in my mind – my mom and uncle redefining their emotional lives at a time in life when society says ‘you’re beyond that’ and that finding new love is ‘cute’ but not ‘real’ – I thought how other families, other single seniors must feel isolated and be facing this, too.

So I searched the media but found little. Most serious stories about aging focused on finances and Social Security, digestive health, arthritis, cognitive decline. Almost nothing about emotional growth or finding new connections or love.

So I taped a question over my desk, “Does love, and our need for love, change as we grow older – and, if so, how?” And I went searching for a story to answer that question in a creative way. →

My goal was to seek out the true voices of elders, not to interview social workers or doctors, but to let older people speak for themselves, so I could make sure their words and feelings were not misunderstood. I wanted to bring audiences face-to-face with the emotions I saw in my mom and uncle – older adults who find themselves alone, who feel invisible, but are not beyond wanting connection or intimacy, even as they find themselves with few options and struggling against ageist stereotypes. Because I could see the general assumption was that, as our bodies age, who we are and what we need inside must change, as well.

A few months later, I read about a speed dating event for people 65 and over at a senior center in Colorado. And when I told my friends, they all laughed. “You mean a film about my grandmother going speed dating? Sure, I’d see that!”

And I realized it was the perfect hook, a way to draw attention by looking at aging in an unexpected way that would attract all generations and social groups – young and old, parents and children, straight and gay, professionals, students. Here was a story about older adults and loneliness that was also an entertaining tale about the search for new connection, for happy-ever-after. We may not all rush to see a film about growing old, but we’re all looking for a good love story.

So, after an intensive search, I found another senior speed dating event in Rochester, NY, specifically for 70 and older, and I received permission – once all the speed daters agreed – to film it. To be clear, these are all real people who signed up for a real event without knowing in advance about a film being made. But I felt it would be the perfect way in, a story of 30 men and women brought up with traditional values of ‘one home, one family, one career’ – yet willing to take a chance on a trendy dating event in the new millennium. I knew these were the older voices we rarely hear from or pay attention to, the people who’d face the biggest obstacles when putting themselves out there in our youth-oriented society.

One note – speed dating is just the hook; the film isn’t about replacing a lost spouse or starting a wild affair. The message I hope you take away is that, whatever your age, loneliness is not a great option. The desire to reach out, to connect, to be held, to be understood by another human being is a fundamental need in all our lives, and it can be a key, at any age, to a healthy and fulfilling life.

That’s the story, I hope you enjoy. Please see more info on the film at: theAgeofLoveMovie.com, and feel free reach out to me with questions!

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