



Seasons of the Heart: Men and Women Talk About Love Sex and Romance After 60

Zenith H. Gross

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Elderly people in today's society are generally seen as either frail individuals who need to be taken care of, or as super elders, climbing mountains or running marathons. The idea of elderly people having romantic and sexual relationships isn't part of a picture people care to see. Gross, a journalist and author, interviewed over three hundred women and men over a five-year period to find out what elders wanted in a relationship. What she discovered was that loving, caring connections know no age boundaries, regardless of what society deems appropriate.

Gross had been widowed after a forty-three year marriage, and when she emerged from her disbelief and depression was astonished to find she was still alive. She was even more surprised that she could love another man, a former summer neighbor who had also lost his spouse. Their re-aquaintance grew into a friendship in which they both understood what the other had been through, and grew into love, which continues today as a "commuting unmarried romance." Realizing that not all couples approach matters the way she did, Gross reports on the many ways elders love in their later years.

Filled with anecdotes, both positive and negative experiences are shared. When eighty-three year old Gertrude was meeting her soon-to-be stepson for the first time, she had a case of nerves. Normally a good cook, she burned the steak. Gertrude said that if she had been thirty-five, she probably would have burst into tears. But at eighty-one, the humor is easier to see. David, her eighty-five year old fiancée remarked that love is more pleasant now, and that the little slights that can throw a younger person into a funk are just not as important now. Quotes about love and life are sprinkled throughout the text, such as I. F. Stone's quote, "I hope to die young—as late as possible."

Each chapter concludes with a section called "trailblazer," profiles of public people who have contributed to breaking down the stereotype of the elderly person. The tone of the book is upbeat. Useful and practical information about dealing with illness, financial matters and managing happy relationships is given. In a study done by Dr. Donald D. Kautz for his doctoral thesis, he surveyed men and women between the ages of sixty-five and eighty-five. He was seeking to find what strategies these couples used in dealing with physical problems. Dr. Kautz found couples showed emotional commitment, acceptance of aging, adaptability and protectiveness as ways of dealing with new physical problems and realities. There is a chapter about gay and lesbian lovers. Seasons of the Heart closes with a list of works cited and resources, including Further Reading, Senior Web Resources, Virtual Resources and Non-Profit and Service Organizations for Seniors. Web addresses, postal addresses and phone numbers are included.

This is a personal look at loving relationships, filled with good information, but more importantly, filled with hope for the future.

TRACY FITZWATER (May / June 2000)

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