

MIDLIFE, AND FIGURING IT ALL OUT... MAYBE

By Megan Hutton

From our twenties, when we thought we had forever, there is the realization that the clock is ticking. This might have been a time in our lives when we now look back at some of our choices and ask ourselves, “What was I thinking?”

Move forward a few years to when our hormones settle down and we aren't thinking about sex all the time, and we can now evolve into a beautiful state of friend-love. This begins the midlife stage in our lives where we realize our connections often come from a deeper level, where our mental and spiritual attractions are just as important as our physical ones. If we are fortunate enough to

find all of this in one partner, that is a gift. If not, the wonderful aspect of this is that we never have to break up!

These deep bonds involve emotional intimacy that is often referred to as pseudo-romantic friendships, moving from liking to loving someone, without having all the baggage and expectations that can destroy relationships. These varied partnerships are more common today than in the past, when we were programmed to believe that intimacy could only be possible if it involved sex.

Moving into midlife we have experiences to look back on. It can be a time to evaluate some of our former decisions and choices. We can't change them because, that song has already been sung. Finding a partner who is compatible, with commonality, isn't easy, even in midlife. We are so inundated with societal expectations that focus on the physical, but as we age we all change. It's at this stage where we become aware that a strong spiritual connection will outlast the physical body we once thought so important.



Sue & Leslie

I am fortunate to know several happy individuals who have successfully migrated into that midlife stage of their lives. Two of these are beautiful women who have found that special connection, and are happy together after thirty-two years. Sue Hartman grew up in Wyoming in the middle of the Wind River reserve where the Arapaho tribe resided. She was the only girl in the school not part of the Arapaho tribe. Along the way she immigrated to Canada and got two Masters degrees, and worked in management and administration for Ontario's Ministry of Health. She was active in early feminist politics in Toronto, including The Hassle Free Clinic, and Henry Morgentaler's (abortion) clinic. She was also instrumental in organizing the first women's housing co-op in Toronto.

Once married to a former Anglican priest, she had one son, before she met her life partner while standing in a line-up at OISE to hear Henry Morgentaler speak. They were both with other women at the time, but sometimes fate intervenes. Leslie Nanos grew up in Toronto as an only child. She has a wit and a sense of humor equal to few,

and is one of the most brilliant women I know. Leslie laughs at being on the "Not So Amazon" ball team. "Sue was the jock, and pitched for her team." "I was the one who was in the field, and if the ball came near me, I just yelled, "yours!", she laughs.

I asked both of them what it is that has kept them together and genuinely still in love after all these years. "We are calm and chaotic", Leslie was quick to reply. "We balance one another out." They said they share some common interests, but also have separate ones. Sue is a gifted stained glass artist, while Leslie enjoys woodwork, and is a musician. My observation from my friendship with them is the incredible balance these two have with one another. Although they did legally marry, there is no sense of ownership or obligation.

Leslie worked as an administrator and was the Director of Finance in various government ministries in Ontario. She is very candid about her struggle with being bi-polar. As she puts it into context with her ever present humour, "Sue meditates, and I medicate."

The pair say they knew they were just meant to be together. When asked about their anniversary Sue says, "Our first date was in the line-up, I took Leslie home and she never left. We have unconditional love, loyalty, trust and respect for one another." That's something we could all aspire to, and if we ever find that connection we are truly blessed.

Samantha

I also interviewed my friend Samantha Lauzon. I first met Samantha when I was looking to cast a transgender woman for my play. We met and I had an immediate affection for this woman who had lived through so much. Samantha is strong, beautiful and has an air of confidence with a very sensitive interior.

Her early life involved struggling with a single mother, foster homes and poverty. In spite of the chaos, Samantha had a close and loving relationship with her mom until she passed away a couple of years ago." My mom was very proud of me, and accepted my choice to live as a woman", she confides.



Samantha is very candid about her life, which is only part of her charm. It doesn't get much better than honesty and putting it all out there. There is no judging our truths. "I began to take hormones when I was thirteen, when I got my first ones from a prostitute in Hamilton", she explains.

Samantha said her drug use began early. It was a way to cope with her emotional pain, the sense that she didn't think she mattered, and her constant suicidal thoughts. The drug use landed her in jail a few times, and she was often homeless. Eventually she realized that the life she was living was going to destroy her, and she decided to change.

"Where we came from doesn't matter, it's how we came out of it", she says. Samantha lives in a condo now in Toronto with her two little dogs. One of them her constant companion for about fourteen years. She has a supportive family, a sister and two nieces who adore her. Her nieces have only known her as Samantha, and are close to, and proud of their aunt.

Our early experiences still have an emotional impact. If we don't feel loved or worthy as children, then that feeling can often still lurk in the back of our minds. It can be difficult to accept love and caring, because on the other side there can be rejection and mistrust.

Samantha, like many of us who are honest, still struggles with that. My choice of a coping mechanism today is alcohol. I still struggle with depression and thoughts of suicide, and it scares me that I could actually end my life", she confides.

We might be surrounded by friends and people who love us, but loneliness lives everywhere. Samantha's story is one of strength, and overcoming adversity that many might not have survived. Today, she has a successful career on Social Media and I am proud to call her my friend. You can see her in my upcoming play in the fall for GayPlayDay.

Antoine & Vicente

Antoine Houdeville and Vicente Gannam are a gay couple who have been in a 19-year relationship. Although they arrived here with a common goal, they didn't meet until much later. They were both Brothers in a religious community with the Roman Catholic Church. Vicente said he heard about a community outside Toronto, and he wanted to be part of it. He moved here in 1987 from Brazil. Antoine arrived in Ontario, from France in 1978 to work in the religious community as well.

Eventually they both decided to leave their religious communities and live openly. They met in 1997. Vicente said he put a personal ad in "Extra" advertising for a partner who was interested in a long-term relationship, and it worked out well for both of them. They said their relationship has endured because they are genuinely in love, and are also always willing to forgive. They describe their communication as open and honest.

Vicente and Antoine also believe that the privacy and space they give one another has been a factor in the strength of their long term relationship. "We have vacations together, as well as apart."



“We don’t have specific roles in our relationship, we just do what needs to be done.” We wanted to share a monogamous life, and we are both clear that we maintained our individuality within that. Antoine has his own painting business, and Vincente has worked with the Ontario Government for over a decade. At the moment he is involved in implementing a mental health and wellness strategy for members who work in corrections.

I asked them what challenges they have found as a couple or personally in midlife. Antoine said one of his biggest challenges was leaving the religious community. “I’d been in the closet all my life. I had to unlearn everything I had been taught to believe. Being gay was a horrible secret and not something to be acted upon. Finding a way to reconcile my true feelings was difficult”, he explains.

For Vicente, it is impermanence and reflecting on the next stage of life, which is aging. He has concerns that aging can be a loss of power, and reverting back to being dependent. I reminded him that I am 70 and have just finished a film, and have begun rehearsals for my next play. I also remember having those same thoughts in my midlife years.

As we move forward to the next stage we realize that genuine connections are so important. Simplicity is key as we strive to stay in harmony with the paths we have chosen. This is the stage where we need to keep our hearts open and to honour our intuition. Hopefully we have moved beyond the importance of the physical, and more into the spiritual. In the end, if a soul connection finds you, you will certainly know it.

In the early 1960’s Megan spent five of her teenage years on her own. Through the solitude of those years she found life to be a great teacher. Today she is a Poet/Playwright/Short Story writer, and has published numerous articles on relationships. She read from the Anthology “Dykeywords” at Toronto’s first “Word on the Street”, and she’s currently working on a poetry collection and a short film.

