

people Let's Stay Together

Film documents range of male couples

by Patricia L. MacAodha

The *Man You Had in Mind*, a homemade documentary that was selected for the 2006 Portland Lesbian & Gay Film Festival, profiles five same-sex couples from a variety of ages, life experiences and relationship styles. Vignettes featuring each couple represent a continuum, an appealing view of relationships between these five Portland couples. Director Jim Tuschmidt and producer Aaron Kirk Douglas, themselves gay men, explore each subject's coming out: levels of conflict from family, friends and community; that magical moment of each encountering the other (Eric Marcoux says, "It was just bang!"); and the subsequent bonding process.

The couples in this film experience many challenges. A former Mormon, with his lover of about a year, is raising his young son. His partner realizes, "Wow, now I'm a dad." Responses by family members—mothers, fathers, siblings, an aunt, etc.—range from some refusing to communicate with the self-accepting gay man to parents thanking God for their son's partner.

There's also an interracial couple who have been together off and on for seven years, one of whom is HIV-positive.

A September-May relationship is classically portrayed, with the older partner chided for having a much younger lover (he has grown children near the partner's age), while the younger man gets some flak, too. In fact, those family members taken aback by this relationship appear to be more disturbed by the age difference than the same-sex aspect.

The question of age disparity is a good one to examine. Many such relationships have happened in the gay community, especially among men, and frequently have a mentoring capacity in them that goes all the way back, at least, to Plato. What happens when the wrinkles deepen on one and not the other? When generational differences—combined with unspoken, but understood, standards of physical attraction—cause questions in the mind of the younger partner? This was not addressed in

the film, but their 10-year relationship shows staying power, having survived the "seven-year itch."

In the case of Bill and Todd, it all comes together. Fifteen years a couple, they marry during the 2004 legal marriage window, and their celebration unites family and friends in joyful acknowledgment of this relationship, marred only by one relative who accepts them as a couple but just can't handle the marriage step.

These men present a face of solidity that leads them through encountering family tragedy and not only surviving it, but also succeeding. They have the look of bedrock material for their community: responsible, attractive, professionally successful—men everyone can admire and respect.

Finally, the film segues to Eric Marcoux and Eugene Woodworth, who graciously invited me to interview them in their magical home, hidden tantalizingly behind a wooded area. The couple have created and re-created this house during their years in Portland, sharing it with a stunning blue and gold macaw that trades kisses with Marcoux and is terrified by hats. (I left mine in the hallway upon entering.)

The room in which we talk, and the one adjoining it, are filled with Marcoux's paintings. The

atmosphere reminds me just a bit of the photos one sees of the Paris apartment of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, with art as the focus and an ambiance through which one becomes acquainted with this couple.

The men met in Chicago in 1953, with Marcoux coming out of a sequestered life in a Trappist monastery and leaving the order just before taking final vows. A devoutly Catholic man, he was struggling with what he would no longer deny about himself while, with great fortune, meeting the love of his life. Marcoux was 23, Woodworth a slightly older 25. They met through a friend who was dating Woodworth.

Woodworth was—and remains, by nature—a dancer, having developed his own company through an artistic center in Chicago before Marcoux entered his life. He made the choice to give up dance as a career and take on better-paying employment, opening the door for Marcoux to become a practicing artist. Woodworth says, however, that for him, "Life is always a dance."

There is never a time when he is not "putting things together as choreography and art." He still moves and appears with a dancer's grace, evidencing years of disciplined practice and participation. Even though he no longer actively dances professionally, he says he will always be a dancer.

It is, in fact, the self-discipline each man has developed through his own walk in life—Woodworth through dance and Marcoux through the Trappist experience and his current practice as a Buddhist—that has

maintained this 54-year relationship. That and, as Marcoux says, "Sometimes inertia is a blessing."

They made a choice, as AIDS unfolded, to limit their sexual relationship to each other, but Marcoux insists, "It was not a noble gesture." They met at a time when relationships like theirs had "soft edges"—and could be that way when jealousy or AIDS didn't threaten what was between them. Times change, but the relationship, as with many of their friendships, included more factors, more elements for building an increasingly stable life together—stable, but hardly boring.

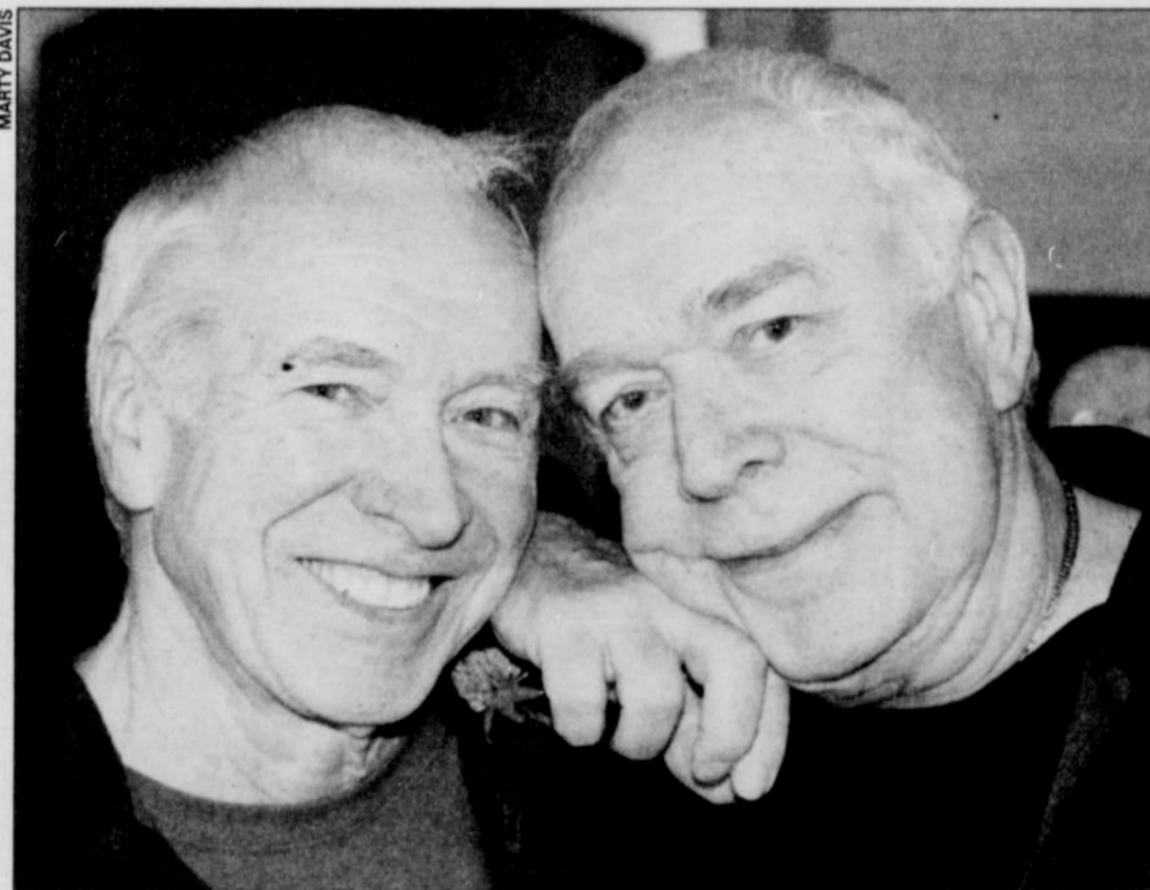
Moving to Portland two years after they met, they first lived in an apartment but began looking for something with a country feel to it. The home they have built around their relationship is the perfect indicator of the symbiosis that characterizes the unity between them. The fact that they began with no role models, no family support for becoming spouses, no perception that there was ever anyone else to guide them in defining who they are to each other can be a comfort to those who struggle today to seek legitimization of same-sex relationships. In Marcoux and Woodworth's case, legitimacy is built through the action of two people who love each other. Forget what the rest of the world thinks! **10**

THE MAN YOU HAD IN MIND opens June 22 at Living Room Theaters.

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The couple moved from Chicago to Portland two years after their first meeting in 1953.



Eugene Woodworth (left) and Eric Marcoux celebrate their 54th anniversary June 13 at a benefit screening for Elder Resource Alliance.

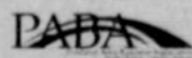
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