A Penny for Her Thoughts

In an e-conversation with the publisher of this newspaper, I made a comment about my excitement over young people being front and center in many things political these days. I wrote that, but at the same time I was longing for conversation with others of my generation. The Democratic convention brought all this to my mind as I watched daughters and sons of the leadership of my generation taking center stage. How energetic they are. How hopeful and powerful they are. How fortunate we are in having them as our leaders.

Further reflection of the old giving way to the young was my familiarity with their parents. My comfort with those of the generation before them led to me thinking the proverbial: "Oh my goodness! They were but young children, seemingly but a few short years ago." I remembered their parents at the same age they are now. How did this happen? Surely it is more than a mere passage of time, isn't it? Did their parents direct them to replace them? Were the parents willing to step aside for their offspring? In the case of Carolyn Kennedy, she inherited the mantle of a spokesperson for her political clan. Do the old prepare the young or do the young prepare themselves for their role as leaders? Can one hand over power or is power taken? As an old leader I care about these things. P.S. None of my five children are political activists. I wonder why?

In these ruminations as an old, lesbian, feminist, LGBT activist, don't let it be said that I am out of touch with young people! I am. I am fortunate to be teaching at Michigan State University, learning from my students where our ideas differ and where they are in agreement and so much more. Their thinking is unencumbered by a past and it is at the same time encumbered by not having a long history to enrich their understanding. And visa versa...

As a community organizer for Coalition for Adoption Rights Equality, I work with young parents who are fighting for the protection of their children by changing the adoption laws to allow their kids two legal parents. Their expertise as parents, many same-sex, is invaluable to me as I interact with legislators and prospective advocates of a second-parent adoption bill here in Michigan. My children are older than the parents with whom I work right now in this quest for adoption equality. Their children are the age of my young grandchildren, for goodness' sake. Our realities both coincide and veer away, bringing strength to our common goals.

As president of Lansing Association for Human Rights and known about campus as an LGBT feminist organizer, I am often asked to speak by campus organizations as an advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights. In fact, I taught the LGBT class last semester, which helps keep me up-to-date on the latest thinking about these things among young people, for which I am grateful.

Still, while e-conversing with the publisher, remembering the generation from which we both broadly hale (I am 67, she is 55), I recognized my comfort with our conversation. I noted how hungry I was to
share with her who I was and what I was thinking. I knew instinctively that we shared common experiences and that I didn't need to play catch-up with her in sharing ideas, thoughts and passions. We could relate in more ways than if we were of different generations.

In this conversation about the generations, I want you to know my partner of 11 years is 17 years younger than I. Our beings, our thinking and our experiences are different from each other and who we are together is so much larger than who we are as individuals. She is only two years older than my oldest child. And you wonder why I am interested in cross-generation relations.

In attending the LGBT Summits this year, hosted by the former Peninsula Group, and now the Launch Team of the Alliance of LGBT Organizations in our great state of Michigan, multi-generational conversations, creativity and understanding is the norm. Leadership is taken on by both the young and the old. It is productive and valuable to all participating. I hope this interaction and intra-dependence in our LGBT communities can be maintained. Where it occurs with give-and-take from all generations, I see such promise. I see accomplishment and progress. And yet, the ol' separatist in me still longs for those conversations among us old folk as well. We are still around to be reckoned with.

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