

Latitude

2024

EXCERPT FROM INTERVIEW:

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I'm an old man, but I don't feel like an old man. It's sort of a weird space to be in. And, you know, there's nothing worse than an old guy who's trying to be, like, a young guy. I mean, to me, it's like, come on, it's stupid. It's childish. I think that it's really important to be age appropriate in my behavior and all that stuff, because I have kids. The impression I have on them is very important to me. I don't want to embarrass them, I want them to be proud of me.

My kids are super cool. They're very free thinking and wonderful people. But, I don't want to be an embarrassment, so I have that on my mind. I've been a good father. That's always been so important to me. And I want to continue to be a good father.

Age 72

Assigned Sex Male

Gender Identity Male

Pronouns He/Him

Race or ethnicity White/Anglo Saxon

What is your gender identity and could you please describe that?

Well, I would say my gender identity is straight, although I'm like, really open at this time in my life. But, I have to say, whenever I go into a room, if there was one woman

and ten men, I only see the woman. So, I'm pretty straight; heterosexual. I don't even notice the men. But, I'm a little envious of people that have had more sexual experiences than just straight sexual experiences. Now that I'm older, it's more of a desire of mine, you know?

Do you know what might have triggered this interest in opening yourself up to other experiences? Or has that always sort of been at the back of your mind?

Well, I think it's been at the back of my mind, but it's never been a strong enough influence to really make me act on it. And you know, when I was younger, sex was much more available. I had opportunities if I'd wanted to act on them, but I think I was too busy being straight. I really was, I was just too busy with women to really sort of detour.

But now that I'm older, I'm in a really weird crossing point, because I'm 72, but the women I'm interested in are not 72. I am not attracted to women my age. I almost feel guilty saying that, because it's not very nice to say that about them, but maybe they're not interested in me, either. And it's weird, because I look at women my own age, and of course a lot of my friends are my own age, but the idea of sleeping with them - it's like they're like my mother. It's, like, weird.

You know, I remember my mother, she was an older woman when she died, and it's like I can't get there in my head. So, I'm attracted to younger women, and I'm just not that appealing to younger women, so I'm in a really weird sort of space. I'm sort of in a neutered space, you know?

How much younger?

Well, I would say, my last girlfriend that I broke up with, say six months ago, was 48. So, that's 25 years younger than me. So I would say somewhere between 25 and 15 years younger than me would be sort of where my head's at. I mean, I don't want to go out with teenagers either, do you know what I'm saying? I have to be able to have some kind of emotional connection. We have to be living in the same world

intellectually for me to get there. That requires someone who's had some life experience.

It's a really funny thing and it's a source of real frustration for me, it really is. Because, you know, I have two daughters and I have two granddaughters and I worry about creepy guys in their life. I don't want to be a creepy guy.

So, I'm like this sort of neutered person in my sex life. But, you know - it sounds so stupid - there's not that much that's available to me. I was thinking the other day, maybe it's just like this, this is going to be the rest of my life. Maybe those opportunities are just not going to be there and I have to, like, really square my head up with becoming a different kind of person. I don't want to leave that behind, because it's been so important to me in my life. It's been such a pleasure and connection. You know, people are so different. Everyone connects in a different way, I think, but physical connection for me has always been super meaningful. And yeah, I hate to lose that in my life.

So, I've really struggled; I've just struggled with growing old, period, not just sexually, but just in life at large. And 72 is a funny age, because when I was 65, I never thought about getting old. Never. I mean, I still thought I was a young man. But now that I'm 72, I think a lot about, 'Wow, in 10 years I will be 82, if I'm alive'. I mean, time is short, you know, and if I'm not attracted to women [my age] now, I'm certainly not gonna be attracted to them when they're 82. But maybe I won't give a shit at 82, I don't know, but all these things are going through my mind.

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My kids are super cool. They're very free thinking and wonderful people. But, I don't want to be an embarrassment, so I have that on my mind. I've been a good father.

That's always been so important to me. And I want to continue to be a good father. Just because I'm getting older, I don't want to become some, like, weirdo guy.

But, it's depressing to me, in a way, to grow old. I miss the physical part of it. You know, I was also thinking sort of in anticipation of this interview - I had this love affair with this woman who's 48. We went out for, like, six or seven years and it was wonderful. It's, like, the best sex of my life. It was fantastic. But now that that's over, it's almost like, God, maybe that wasn't so good, because now I feel really old. You know what I mean? I remember when I saw her, I remember thinking to myself, I wish I was 25 years younger, because I really just fell - I was like, wow. And I had this feeling like, dammit, I wish I was younger, because I would really like to ask her out. My really good fortune was that she really liked me. But now that that's over, she's 48, and I'm 72. She's in a different part of her life entirely.

Part of the reason we broke up was that she's still young enough to really have a life and get married again and all that stuff and I'm just, like, a dead end for her. You know, she'll be like, pushing me around in a wheelchair or something.

I don't want to be old. 72 isn't that old, but 82 is too close for comfort. I read in the paper every day that someone's died, they were 76. I'm like, Holy fuck, 76! You know?

So, aging is really interesting, but it's frustrating for me. Some people look forward to being old and they figure, well, you know, I can take it easy. I can just slow down. But I'm just too edgy a person to do that. I can't slow down. I can't feel comfortable slowing down. And I feel so grateful for everything I have, there's so many people in this world that don't have anything, like they're living on a dirt floor, you know what I mean? And so, who am I to sit around and retire and just do nothing the rest of my life? It's almost like survivor's guilt or something.

So, I don't know, you can tell I haven't resolved any of these issues. I keep waiting just to sort of be comfortable with it and then I keep thinking, 'Okay, I'm 72 I don't want to be alone the rest of my life'. So I keep thinking, well, maybe I could find someone who would just be a companion, like a buddy, who was alone, too. But then I would have to make this deal though, like look, we can be buddies and take trips together,

whatever it is, but I'm going to have things going on on the side, because I need that. But then I think to myself, 'I'm crazy. Who would find that appealing?' You know what I mean? You know, there's something for everyone, and there's someone for everyone - that's what I believe - but that's not always easy to find.

Getting to the body image thing, I'm not as attractive to women as I used to be, and maybe that's why the idea of branching out sexually is coming across the threshold a little maybe, because I have to use all the opportunities I can find. I think that everyone - not everyone my age - but a lot of people my age are thinking the same things. But, I don't know how to solve a lot of my problems. That's the problem.

Do you feel like that connection on a higher level is important for you?

Yeah, absolutely. When I'm with another woman, or let's say it was with another man, their pleasure is as important to me as my own pleasure. I mean, otherwise I really feel unsatisfied. I'm, like, very emotionally involved that way and that's why it's so important to me, that's why it's such a strong connection. Physically I don't perform the way I used to either, but there are ways around that. There's a lot of ways to be intimate, so that doesn't bother me as much. It's just, you know, my body image. I don't feel attractive.

Let me put it this way. Among my peer group, I feel attractive. I look at some of my friends and I'm like, 'holy shit'. You know? But, if I'm not attracted to anyone in my peer group and I'm attracted to younger women, I don't for one minute think *they* think I'm attractive. I think they think I'm old. With some exceptions, probably, but it's like finding a needle in a haystack.

Thank God for my photography, because it really gives me self-confidence. It gives me a sense of worth and accomplishment. It really satisfies a lot of things in my life and I'm always grateful for that. It fills those really intangible, but important things to me. My self-esteem, sense of accomplishment, doing something good. You know, it's just important.

Talking a bit more about your self-image and your identity in terms of gender: what does femininity mean to you? And masculinity? How do you relate to those terms?

That's a great question. You know, my youngest daughter said to me once, maybe when she's in high school, 'You know, Dad, your feminine side is really well-developed'. And I thought, that is such a compliment! I was so happy to hear that, because it is. If you're going to talk in cultural terms, I'm much more feminine in my interests and emotional life than a lot of men. Relationships with people, whether it's friendships, or professional relationships, or romantic relationships, are really important to me. My relationships with my kids are the most important to me. I think culturally - not personally, but culturally - that's not typical. I think that's the femininity.

And I like talking to women more than I do men. You know, men are like cement heads. They are! If they weren't talking about golf, they want to talk about cars. I mean, you know, I'm like, stereotyping them, but honestly. If, let's say I go out to lunch with you, or another woman, you know, they sit down, they go, 'How are you doing?' I can say to a woman, 'I'm, like, really shitty, I'm really lonely and blah, blah, blah'. And they're right there. If I go out, meet some guy, and he says, 'How are you doing?', 'I'm really lonely'. They don't like that. They're fucking out of there. They're like, 'Whoa, I can't deal with that'. I am exaggerating to make a point.

But, of course, I have [male] friends in my life that I can talk to on a very personal basis, but generally, I've always liked talking to women more. And I'm glad that my daughter thinks my feminine side is well-developed. I don't want to be macho. I don't, it's just not my nature.

Were there ever times when you were growing up that you felt like you were pressured to be more masculine from family or from your peers?

No, never. When I was young, I was a really handsome guy. And I'll tell you, the only reason I know that is because everyone told me that when I was like, in fifth grade, and when I was 15, and when I was 25. And women would respond to me physically.

So, I didn't always feel that good about myself, but it was almost like my calling card, in a way. I could get by on a lot just on looks. You know, where a lot of people had to work hard at getting something done, I could just, like, bullshit people and look good about it. They would open the doors and say, 'Come on in'. You know, when you have that kind of empowerment, you use it. Honestly, I wasn't a very well-developed person in a lot of ways, but I knew I had that going for me, so I would get by on that for a lot.

No one ever said, 'You should be more of a man' or whatever. I had a girl, back in the 90s. We had been having an affair for a while. And, she goes, "You know, one of my friends said, 'I think that [interviewee] is gay'. And she goes, 'Believe me, he's not'." But when she told me that, I thought, 'that's so cool!' It's not threatening to me at all. I was like, 'Well, I'm not gay, but go ahead, go with it. I don't care'.

Working in art and music, I can't imagine that there was much pressure to be hyper masculine in those spaces, right?

Yeah, no. I've always attached myself to people who have sort of the same sensibility as me. You know, the masculine/feminine thing, it's something I don't think about to understand who I am. And had my daughter never told me I had a well-developed feminine nature, I don't know whether I ever would have actually figured it out on my own. I am who I am. But she thought that was a real plus.

I think especially someone of her generation seeing that in someone of your generation, that was sort of rare, right?

You know, nowadays, I'm sort of envious of people who are born now because, you know, things are much easier as far as sexual identity and experimentation and all those things. Back when I was a kid in the 50s and 60s, if I had been gay, I would have been fucking ostracized. I mean, I would have been sent out of town. I mean, it was really, really not okay. And certainly in the environment I was brought up. So, you know, now it's like, honestly, if one of my grandchildren was gay, I wouldn't give a shit. In fact, I wouldn't even think twice about it. But, you go back a couple of generations to when I was a kid, it was not okay.

I never had to cross that bridge, because I never felt like I was gay. And I'm fine with it, but just culture-wise, it wasn't cool. So, that's how it morphed over the years into what it's like now and I am sort of envious of that. Had I grown up in an environment like things are now, maybe I would have been more experimental younger. I probably would have, because I've always been very sexual. Who knows?

10 years ago, I never thought about growing old. I never thought about any of this shit. You know, this is a recent occurrence.

And do you feel like it was brought on by that relationship ending?

Well, yeah, I think that really put me into a different time frame because all of a sudden, she's leading the life of a 48-year-old. I'm living the life of the 72-year-old. When we were together it was like we were the same age. It's made me feel old, and it's made me sort of wistful, like, that'll never happen to me again. You know?

I feel like people can feel like that at all different ages, though, right? You have this great love, this very fiery relationship, and it ends and you're like, that'll never happen again. Even when you're a teenager.

You're right. How many times in my life have I thought, 'well, that's the end of that. I'll never feel that way again'. That gives me some hope.

In terms of your friendships and the people that you spend a lot of time with, is it mostly people around your age group? Or do you have friends across the spectrum?

Across the spectrum. I was a drug addict and an alcoholic. Now, I've been sober 37 years, and I'm very, very involved in recovery. In that work that I do, I'm working with all ages. Mostly men, because when people come into recovery, they're very vulnerable. And, you know, there's a saying, the men stay with the men, the women stay with the women, because, you know, if you cross-pollinate, there's just too much confusion going on, whether it's sexual or emotional, whatever. But so, I know a lot of

people right across the spectrum, and I'm grateful for that, because it makes me feel like I'm plugged into a lot of parts of the world. If it wasn't for that, I think I'd probably be really cornered into my own age group.

What is your racial identity?

White

Have there been times in your life when you feel like your race has influenced how others have treated you?

I think yes, in the way that I'm a privileged white man. I think walking through North America in this Century as a privileged white man has given me advantages that other people have not had. So yes, I think it's affected me that way. And I can say that's a positive, but I don't look at it necessarily as a positive, because my good fortune at the expense of someone else does not make me feel good. So yes, it's helped me in the same way that being an attractive person, I have been able to get a step up sometimes. Being a white male in the latter half of the 20th Century and now has opened doors for me that wouldn't have been open if I had a different racial profile. So, yeah, it's helping me, but at what expense? I don't take any pleasure in that, you know?

Have you felt pressured in your life to change your appearance by people that you know, people you're friends with?

No. And you know, I don't like having attention drawn to myself, so I like to just sort of blend in.

So, you've never done things to change your appearance, like piercings, tattoos, makeup, anything like that?

No. And at my age, I would look ridiculous with piercings. I mean, I just would. My daughter used to live in Southern California, and we would go to the beach all the time and I would see these men that were, like, my age wearing these little bikinis

and they had, like, ponytails and an earring, and I thought, 'Give it up!' And that's 50 years ago. It's like trying to hold onto an image this guy may have had of himself when he was 25, but he's, like, 65 and it's not happening now. But maybe that's my cultural predisposition. I'm willing to go there, you know. But I would feel like such an idiot if I had a ponytail and an earring.

And God forbid a tattoo. I don't understand tattoos. Now, I can appreciate it - I mean, I have friends that have tattoos, but as an artist, when I photograph people, I photograph people that are really very beautiful and they mess their bodies up with this. I'm like, why would you do that to yourself? You have this exquisite, perfect, God-given fortune. I don't get it, I really don't.

That's not to say I don't like *all* tattoos. I know a woman who has this incredible tattoo. It's this little line - like a little pencil line almost - and there are two birds on it and then there's one bird flying away. And I said to her, 'I just love that, what is it?' And she goes, 'Well, it is my two daughters on the branch and then I had a son that died, he's the one flying'. It was so beautiful to look at and the story was so moving. I remember thinking that that was really a good tattoo.

But I photograph people, they come and they have, like, big blotches on their thighs, and maybe I'm just an old man, but I don't know. I mean, I think it's a personal thing.

Do you feel like media and culture has had an influence on how you perceive aging or how you perceive yourself now versus when you were younger?

I would say the culture - even when I was a kid - the culture appreciates youth and it really discounts old age. Yes, the culture promotes and admires youth, but I don't take it that seriously. I'm not that black and white in the way I look at people. For me, aging is more of a personal struggle instead of just appreciation of the culture, because I know people that are older than me, whether they're public figures, or people I know, that I really admire for their accomplishments, or the way they carry themselves in their old age or whatever in a way that I may not admire in someone who's much younger. So, I don't really have a limit on that kind of thing, but yeah, the culture does.

What makes you feel empowered?

Well, my photography does, definitely. My family. I'm very proud of my family. I'm proud of who I am. For all my frustration and thinking I'm never gonna fall in love again and all this stuff I'm whining about to you, I'm really proud of who I am. I've been sober 37 years. It's incredible that I hadn't died. I mean, I literally was on death's door.

I've been a really good father. I'm a good friend to a lot of people. I've been a great boyfriend, whoever was in the picture at the time, and I'm super attentive and very loving. I'm not afraid to express my affection. You know, it's not like, you know, 'He can't talk, he's all shut down'. I'm definitely not that guy. So, I'm proud of who I am.

At the same time, that should be expected. All those things should be expected of anyone. Being a good father, being emotionally available. It's not like it's anything special, I would hope most people would be. You know, it's just being a good person I think, ideally. But, not everyone has stuck to that.

But also, a lot of people have a lot of trauma and trouble in their background, and they can't get there. You know, they may be shut down, but that's because the wounds are too severe. I've been close to a lot of people like that, that have had real trauma in their lives and they can't outrun it. You know, it's like they're constantly trying to outrun it. Even with tons of therapy and reassurance.

I've had a couple of girlfriends that I was desperately in love with, who are wonderful people, but no matter how much I would tell them, they couldn't feel it inside. I could tell them 1,000 times, 'You're beautiful. You're wonderful. I love you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you'. But I mean, it doesn't sink in. They hear it, but it doesn't emotionally get in there. So some people, I just don't think can - you know, they're damaged. A lot of bad stuff goes on.

I see that in recovery, too. A lot of people that have trouble with drugs and alcohol are escaping a lot of trauma. So, I was really lucky. I never had any of that, that I'm aware of.

What got you started using drugs? If you don't mind me asking.

I don't know. You know, I was brought up in the 60's, which was like drugs, drugs, drugs. And all my friends were all doing drugs. But because I'm an alcoholic or a drug addict, I couldn't stop. I didn't drink or drug because I was trying to run away from some trauma, it was like it just embedded itself inside of me. It was like an obsessive thing in my brain. I couldn't stop thinking about it. I couldn't stop doing it. So it was almost like a virus that I couldn't get rid of. So, I drank and drug because I was a drug addict and an alcoholic. I mean, that's really the reason.

But you know, people that go through a trauma, a lot of them will look for an escape through, say alcohol or drugs, or they'll express it differently. They'll become violent. They'll reenact the trauma that was inflicted on them. It's all they know, it's their template in life. You know, there's a million ways they can act out. They can be sexually abusive. I mean, I was a drinker and a druggie, but a lot of people express it differently. I've been lucky, I'm really happy, for all my whining to you. You know, I've really been a very lucky guy.

Can you talk about your recovery a little bit? Or what prompted you to get sober?

I was married, miserably married - very unhappy. But, I had started drinking and drugging when I was a teenager and I loved it. I mean, I felt really good, it made me feel better than everyone else. And like I was talking before about my looks opening doors for me, I could misbehave and talk my way out of almost anything, because I had good social skills and I looked the right way. I can schmooze my way pretty much out of everything. And I got in a lot of jams, but you know, people would be like, 'He's an asshole, but he's such a nice guy.' That kind of thing. I did that up until I was, like, 30 years old. I would constantly be misbehaving and then apologizing or recovering from that event.

But then I got married when I was 30, and all of a sudden - well, the marriage was really an unhappy marriage - but all of a sudden, the drugging and the drinking got more sinister. All of a sudden, I lost the skill to get one over on people and it was affecting my life. I could sort of shake it off before, but it was starting to really affect my life in ways that I couldn't control.

And I had to do it. I was, like, heavily addicted. I wasn't even getting high, it was just like a maintenance thing. You know, I would start to fall apart and hallucinate and shake. I would have to get high just to straighten out. I mean, it's really gruesome. And, you know, eventually, my marriage was falling apart. I was, like, totally strung out. I went to rehab for 28 days, and I hallucinated the entire time. Auditory and visual hallucinations.

28 days, that's terrifying.

It was terrifying. It was really terrifying. 1986, I got out of there and that was, like, the moment in my life where everything just went in a whole different direction. Because once I got my head cleared up a little bit, I was so terrified about what had happened to me, I was like, holy shit, you know? I was 35, so I was young, and I realized, I don't want my life to fall apart.

I had these two beautiful kids, but I also realized I couldn't stay sober in the marriage I was in. It was too contentious. And I couldn't be a good father in that marriage, either. I was always fighting with my wife, so my kids were in the middle. And I just like, it's got to end. I feel like sometimes people are like, 'We have to stay together because of our kids'. Not always. That's more often than not what happens, but I decided I'm too young. I have these beautiful kids. I just don't want this to be the way the rest of my life. I'm staring down the rest of my life, and I thought, 'No way'. I don't think I could have stayed sober in that marriage. So much drama.

So, it was almost like a self-preservation thing, and I've been really fortunate because I was scared to death about what happened to me. I got into recovery right away and I've been active in it ever since. And I got divorced. You know, it ruined me financially, but honestly, that was the least of my worries.

Is there anything final you'd like to add?

Well, listen. If you had asked me to do this when I was 50 or 45, I probably would have said no, because I would have been too vain. I would have been too concerned about how my body looked. But I will say, now that I'm 72, it doesn't matter to me so much anymore. I mean, it's not like I'm trying to pretend I'm something I'm not, so there's a freedom there. As a younger man, I probably would have been more worried. I would want you to make me look this way or that way, because I'd want to show off to the world. I would have wanted to project that image back then. I want you to show whatever you see in me, that makes it seem authentic to you.