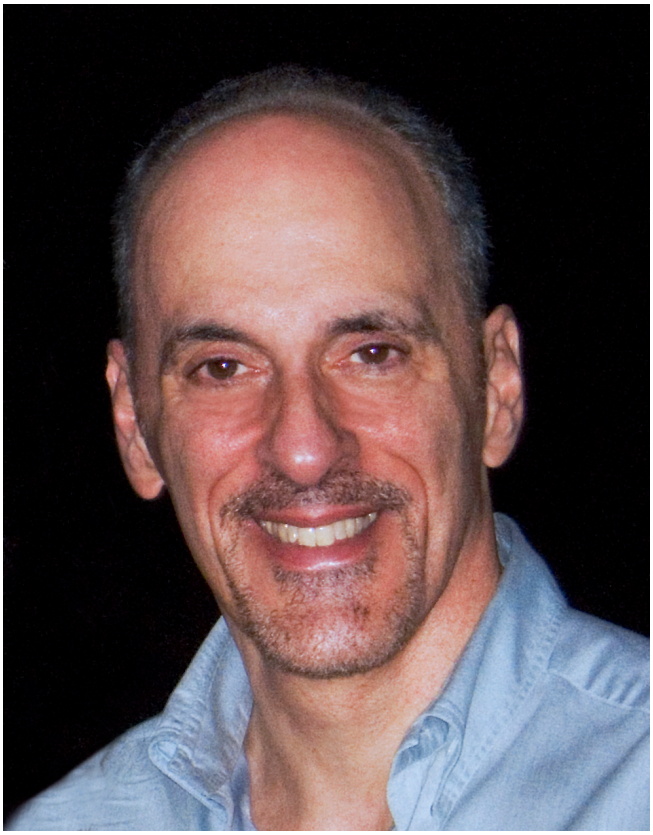
Five Questions with ‘The Age of Love’ Director Steven Loring

On Aug. 24 from 4:30 to 7 p.m., the Costa Mesa Senior Center will offer a free screening of the movie “The Age of Love,” which was produced and directed by Steven Loring. The film, which aired at the Newport Beach Film Festival in 2014, follows 30 seniors in Rochester New York who sign up for a first-of-its-kind speed dating event exclusively for 70- to 90-year-olds. Loring, who will answer questions from the Senior Center crowd afterward, via satellite, answered some questions we had about the film.



Director Steven Loring

Where did you get the idea for The Age of Love?

This project was actually a personal journey for me. Just

before I began, my dad suddenly passed away, and my mom, who was nearing 70, was left without the partner and the emotional intimacy she'd counted on during a half-century of marriage.

That same year, my 78-year-old uncle met an 80-year-old woman, and they fell madly in love. They basically locked the bedroom door—as if they were in high school again. Trying to understand the hearts of people so close to me, I was surprised to find almost nothing in popular media that looked honestly into the emotional lives and needs of that generation. TV and movies were filled with dated stereotypes and jokes about older adults' desires. So when I heard about speed dating for people over 70—and especially when I heard everyone's laughter at the idea—I thought, wow, what a perfect hook for a film into the hearts of that generation. Who knows what I might find?

What do you hope to accomplish with the film?
To break old stereotypes and attitudes about aging, and to bring new opportunity and growth to our booming older population worldwide. The film, being about our lifelong search for love, seems to speak to all generations. Older people find the film empowering and validating, in that it brings their true, overlooked voices and feelings to the screen for the first time. Baby Boomers tell me they watch and think about talks they should have with aging, single parents, who are rarely asked about their hearts and emotional needs.

Also, with people living so much longer, Boomers wonder what the future holds for them in terms of love, with perhaps 40 or more years to look forward to. And younger people, suddenly realizing that the 70 plus generation can feel the same hopes and fears when it comes to seeking companionship, tell me, 'I'll never look at my grandparents the same way again!'

Tell us a little bit about the directing process and how you decided who and what you were going to film?

The speed dating event I followed in the film was a real event for people 70 and older, and everyone had signed up without imagining they'd be part of a documentary. No one was 'cast', they were all real people from the World War II generation who decided to take a chance and enter the trendy dating scene of the new millennium.

I actually came to the project with my own preconceptions and assumed the speed daters would probably be embarrassed and not want to be in a film. After all, they might not have told their friends or children, and they certainly wouldn't want their faces on movie screens all over the world.

But, when I called the first woman on the list and explained I was filming a doc on older people's search for love, she stopped me and said, "Let me tell you something: I'm 74 and my children love me; they take care of me; we celebrate birthdays; we talk every day. But even my own children never ask me what's in my heart at this stage in my life. It's like I've become invisible to the world. So I'd be happy to talk with you." I was really amazed that all 30 people gave me permission to film.

So then I plunged in and filmed all 30 participants during the preparation period, at the speed dating event, when they received their results and then on several real-world dates that resulted. I ended up with over 168 hours of footage that were edited down into a 78-minute film.

Do you think these people were looking for the same kind of love as they had when they were younger?
A big question on my mind throughout filming was: Does love change as we age? And, if so, how? There's a general assumption, when we talk about older people, that they're only looking for 'companionship', as if that's some sort of diminished form of true, youthful love.

But, over the course of filming, it became clear to me that

the need to connect with another person, to be truly ‘seen’ and appreciated, and to have someone who ‘sees’ and appreciates you, is the essence of love regardless of age. When we’re young, we’re thinking about building a home and career and family and how the kids will be brought up and physical beauty and cars and money and whatever else goes into selecting a partner. But, if you take all that away, isn’t what’s left essentially companionship? Having someone who will look at you and listen to you and understand you so that you’re not alone? I think love when you’re older is the same, just with the youthful concerns of creating a family and career stripped away.

What was the outcome for the seniors who attended the event?
Every speed dater who marked “Interested” on their card for at least one other person got a date – there were 48 follow-up dates that resulted from the event – and it was fun to see how open and excited everyone was. There wasn’t anyone involved who didn’t come up to the organizers afterward and ask, “When can we do this again?”

Even better, everyone who came left empowered to see themselves as someone with the potential to find new love. One character says near the end, “I haven’t found the love of my life yet, but I haven’t stopped looking – and I feel more aggressive now.” These people gave themselves permission to see themselves as potential lovers in a way that they hadn’t before. That’s a big message of the film: Regardless of age, given the opportunity, people still have the desire to be wanted and to connect in a deep emotional way.