

To You Sweetheart, Aloha

Study Guide



"To see To You Sweetheart, Aloha is to enter the world of a new age...where age is just a mindset and passion for life and vitality resides in your soul and not in your body. A must see for all aging people, who are all of us."

*- Doris Bersing, Executive Director
Pacific Institute, San Francisco*

Introduction

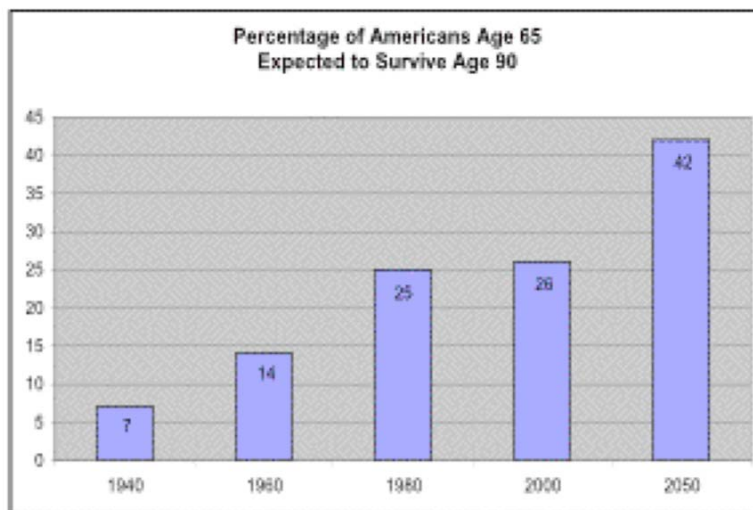
To You Sweetheart, Aloha is a 57-minute documentary by S. Leo Chiang and Mercedes Coats. 94-year-old Hawai'i-born 'ukulele pioneer Bill Tapia is a sharp dresser, a naughty jokester, and an irresistible charmer. After the recent death of his wife and only daughter, Bill gave up on music, his vocation and passion for over 80 years.

Unexpectedly, he finds a new soul mate in his 26-year-old manager, Alyssa. With Alyssa by his side, Bill rediscovers not only his musical zeal but also his youthful spirit. Understandably, he falls for her. What follows is a painful heartbreak, a resurrected music career, and Bill's inspired realization to live life to the fullest, even at age 94.

This intimate film addresses the taboos of cross-generational relationships and challenges the traditional notion of "graceful aging" with an entertaining yet poignant portrayal of a passionate elderly artist who continues to love, to grieve, and to live a complete life that is well beyond the society's expectations.

Background on Aging

Demographics of Aging in the United States



Source: National Center for Health Statistics Bureau

- *Average life expectancy at birth rose from 47.3 in 1900 to 76.9 in 2000*
- *The number of centenarians (age 100 and older) has increased in the past several years, from about 37,000 in 1990 to more than 50,000 in 2000. About 80 percent of centenarians are women*
- *The over-65 population is projected to be twice as large by 2030 as in 2000, growing from 35 million to 72 million, or nearly 20 percent of the total population*
- *The over-85 population is projected to increase from 4.7 million in 2003 to 9.6 million in 2030*

Productive Aging

Leaders in the aging field use the term “productive aging” (other terms include vital, creative, successful, optimal, active, or healthy aging) to celebrate older adults’ capabilities, potential, social and economic contributions. At age 20, 40, 80, we want to:

- *Achieve a sense of control and feel empowered through mastery of a technique or topic*
- *Be socially engaged*
- *Exercise our bodies and brains to ensure high physical and mental function*
- *Be healthy by reducing the risk factors for disease and disability*
- *Have a positive attitude and zest for life*
- *Express ourselves creatively*

In a 2006 study, of 205 adults over age 60 and living in the community, 92 percent rated themselves as aging productively despite having chronic illnesses and some disability. Findings showed that productive aging is not related to age, ethnicity, level of education, marital status, or income, but rather to: greater participation in activities, having more close friends, visiting with family, and spending time reading and listening

to the radio. The study also documents that productive aging is no less relevant for frail people and people with dementia.

- Source: *Creativity Matters: The Arts and Aging Toolkit*, www.artsandaging.org

Isolation and Intergenerational Socializing

Researchers at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago found that social isolation from intergenerational civil life and from families increased the risks of older adults to develop dementia by 51%.

- Source: Robert S. Wilson and others, "Loneliness and Risk of Alzheimer Disease," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 64 (2007): 234-40

The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on Older Adults

An NEA-sponsored groundbreaking research study, led by Dr. Gene Cohen documents the positive impact that creativity can have on the health and well being of older people. The intervention group, compared with the control group, experienced:

- Significantly better overall health
- Significantly fewer falls and less hip damage
- Significantly fewer doctor visits
- Diminished use of medications and vision problems
- Significantly better scores on the Geriatric Depression Scale and the Loneliness Scale
- Increased involvement in activities

- Source: <http://www.creativeaging.org/research.htm>

The Role of Art



Art contributes to true health promotion and disease prevention; it also helps older adults maintain independence. For instance, a breakthrough study, led by Dr. Frederick Tims, Chair of Music Therapy at Michigan State University, found that playing music affects the brain positively: increasing levels of human growth hormone (hGH). hGH is implicated in such aging phenomena as energy levels, wrinkling, sexual function, muscle mass. Researchers assessed the health of 61 older adults enrolled in group keyboard lessons, and found that anxiety, depression, and perception of loneliness decreased, compared to before they took the lessons.

- Source: Music Making and Wellness Project, American Music Conference, <http://amc-music.org/musicmaking/wellness/hormone.htm>



"The wonderful lesson to be learned from this delightful film is that if Hawaiian musician Bill Tapia can create a new life for himself at age 94, we should all be inspired to live our lives as meaningfully as possible, despite our losses."

*- Sheila Malkind, Director
Legacy Film Series*

Discussion Questions

Before viewing the Film

1. What does aging mean to you? How do you see yourself age?
2. How do you think one could maintain motivation and spirit at an old age?
3. What are your thoughts and assumptions about intergenerational couples?
4. Do you believe that platonic, close relationship between an older man and a young woman is possible?

After Viewing the Film

1. How does Bill feel about his age? Throughout the film, does he always feel the same way about his age?
2. Why is 94-year-old Bill drawn to 26-year-old Alyssa? Why does he feel better after he's met her? What changes in Bill's life after he's met Alyssa?
3. Why is Alyssa drawn to Bill? What does their relationship mean to her?
4. What kind of support does Bill receive from Alyssa that he may not receive from his family?
5. What does music mean to Bill? How is playing music again helping Bill in revitalizing his life, after he's lost his wife and daughter?
6. Why does Bill's family think Alyssa is taking advantage of Bill? If this is true, what kinds of advantages might she be taking?
7. What is Bill's perspective on his relationship with Alyssa?
8. In the film, Bill says he is waiting for the Forever Pill - a pill that one can swallow, and one doesn't get younger or older, "everything stays the same." Is this a view that is shared by all cultures? If the pill existed, would you take it?
9. How does society view intergenerational relationships - such as one between Bill and Alyssa's?
10. How might this film inspire others - old and young - to keep going in life? What is Bill's "secret" for staying young at heart?

Resources and Useful Links

New Day Films

Visit our distributor, New Day Films, to purchase *To You Sweetheart, Aloha* for educational use and to download the study guide.

<http://www.newday.com/films/ToYouSweetheartAloha.html>

New Day Digital site

Go to this site to pay per view *To You Sweetheart, Aloha*.

<http://www.newdaydigital.com>

To You Sweetheart, Aloha website

Visit our website for news and screenings, reviews, and home video copies of the film.

<http://www.walking-iris.com/sweetheartaloha>

Trends in Health and Aging

Trends in Health and Aging, part of the National Center for Health Statistics web data tool, provides visitors with up-to-date information on trends in the health of older U.S. population, such as tables on health insurance, functional status and disability, health care expenditures, living arrangements, and perceived health status. The data come from a variety of sources in the Federal Government.

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/agingact.htm>

Healthy Aging for Older Adults, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

This site provides state of aging and health reports and health information for older adults, health statistics/research, CDC-Funded projects, and more.

<http://www.cdc.gov/aging/index.htm>

National Center for Creative Aging (NCCA)

NCCA is dedicated to fostering an understanding of the vital relationship between creative expression and the quality of life of older people.

www.creativeaging.org

Creativity Matters: The Arts and Aging Toolkit Website

Why and how older adults benefit from participating in professionally conducted community arts programs and offers detailed advice and examples on program design, implementation, and evaluation.

www.artsandaging.org

Civic Ventures

Civic Ventures engages million of baby boomers as a vital workforce for change. Through an inventive program portfolio, original research, strategic alliances, and the power of people's own life stories, Civic Ventures demonstrates the value of experience in solving serious social problems - from education to the environment and health care to homelessness.

www.civicventures.org