

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Searching for the keys to long, healthy relationships

Oconomowoc native explores long-term same-sex couples in new book

By Ryan Billingham
Enterprise Staff

OCONOMOWOC — Tim Clausen is a 1978 graduate of Oconomowoc High School. He recently published his first book, a collection of interviews that explores the challenges and issues of long-term gay relationships. He has one son and lives in Milwaukee, where he enjoys playing jazz piano and studying jazz history. He spoke with the Enterprise about his new book and its potentially controversial subject matter.

ENTERPRISE You recently released a book titled "Love Together: Longtime Male Couples on Healthy Intimacy and Communication." Describe the book.

CLAUSEN: Here's the synopsis: Longtime couples share candidly how they navigate issues of monogamy, intimacy, affection, communication, money, spirituality, marriage and parenting. Included here are the first same-sex military couple in America to wed, a Catholic theologian, a pioneering Texas pair featured in a 1996 Life Magazine article, a practicing Buddhist couple who recently celebrated their 60th anniversary, two Paris-trained chefs turned international vintners, a Canadian couple who produce a line of gay erotic comics, a Christian pop-singing duo who became parents through surrogacy,

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—Time Clausen
Author of "Love Together: Longtime Male Couples on Healthy Intimacy and Communication."

a movie industry couple who met the day World War II ended, and more. With hundreds of years of collective experience, these couples share their life wisdom and offer practical advice for singles who want to find a lasting love relationship.

ENTERPRISE: How has your life story informed the book? If it hasn't, what inspired you to interview longtime gay couples?

CLAUSEN: After splitting up with my son's mother some years ago, I moved to Milwaukee, came out of the closet and founded the Milwaukee Gay Fathers Group for its 10 year run, from 1995 to 2004, a terrific experience. I've had some important love relationships lasting from several months to a year, but an ongoing longterm relationship has as yet remained elusive, probably due to the fact that I haven't yet met the right guy for me. I've met some really great longtime couples over time and decided to do these interviews to discover exactly how they get along in a healthy and generally harmonious way for decades on end. The three-year process of doing this book has been a great

education, and I'm extremely pleased with the high quality of the material. There's a lot of real substance and depth in the book and some terrific role models, and I think the book will be inspiring and enlightening and helpful for many readers.

ENTERPRISE: There's an ongoing debate about marriage equality in the U.S., with many political and social conservatives firmly holding their ground in the face of court rulings striking down gay-marriage bans in several states, including Wisconsin. One of the primary reasons for this seems to be based on religious beliefs. Does the book explore the spiritual and religious aspects of being in a gay relationship or marriage?

CLAUSEN: It does. Spirituality is a favorite topic of mine, and every interviewee was asked, "What is your spiritual path or religion, if any, and how does that impact your relationship?" The responses were all across the board and typically very thoughtful. Many gay men and women are deeply spiritual people.

ENTERPRISE: What themes spanned the age range of your interviewees? What did younger gay couples struggle with more versus older couples?

CLAUSEN: Themes such as communication, intimacy, not taking your partner for granted, allowing your partner and yourself to grow as individuals, finances, working through times of conflict, cultivating love, parenting, marriage. I would say that in general younger gay men and couples have not been marginalized to the extent that older men and couples have. Older gay men did not have openly gay role models on TV and in the media and grew up in an era where being gay simply wasn't spoken of or was considered to be an aberration to be "cured." Things are, thankfully, changing these days, though there is still much progress to be made.

ENTERPRISE: Is being gay and in a longtime relationship easier today than, say, just 20 years ago?

CLAUSEN: Absolutely, yes. Huge, sweeping social



Submitted photo

Tim Clausen, a 1978 Oconomowoc High School grad, has published a book about longtime same-sex relationships.

progress has been made in recent years, which is most encouraging to see.

ENTERPRISE: What value do the experiences of your subjects have for a straight reader?

CLAUSEN: There are so many excellent, universal healthy relationship practices shared in the book which any person, gay or straight, could benefit from. Eric, who recently celebrated his 60th anniversary with his partner, said, "We renew our vows together once a month. On occasion we forget. We forgot this month. But remembering to renew our vows has really been an important piece in our training of loving one another, because we might be having an argument about something and I'll say, 'Well it's time to go to the shrine room and do our wedding vows.' There we

sit across from one another, reciting words that bind us together and remind us of our commitment. I have tried to persuade many people — I don't know how many successfully — that after they write their vows to at least repeat them to each other, if not every month, at least every six months."

ENTERPRISE: Is there a particularly affecting passage in the book that you're proud of?

CLAUSEN: One of the interviewees said, "Being with Paul, I feel a lot of freedom to be who I am and I feel a lot of respect from him for who I am, and also support for all my shortcomings and frailties and insecurities. He knows them all and loves me anyway. And that's what any human being needs, that total acceptance, so that I can then just explore what-

ever I need to explore inside of me and not be afraid, like when I was younger. 'Oh my God, what if somebody found out that I was thinking this or that or did this or that?' I don't have to worry about that. I just get to share what's going on, and he gives me feedback or joins me in it or whatever and he's always encouraging me to expand or go further. Sometimes he has ideas about my career that are fun to listen to. Just generally speaking, it's been quite amazing that I ended up in this relationship. It's as good as I could have imagined."

For more information on Clausen's book, visit lovetogetherbook.com.

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