50TH BIRTHDAY SPEECH

FOR

ALAN GONICK

Hi everyone, and **HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME**!!! I can’t believe I have hit this milestone in life and I **really** cannot imagine being anywhere in the world except right here, right now, to share this celebration with each one of you. It’s hard to believe that 50 years have passed since I entered this world kicking and screaming on that fateful day in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, 1963. A lot happened that year to all of us who were alive at the time, and to the world, and every moment of the past 50 years has molded and shaped me and given me the wisdom and courage to finally be exactly who I am today. That’s the ultimate gift and really the best reason to celebrate!

I was curious to find out what else came into existence along with me in 1963, so just for all of us closet trivia buffs, did you know, that besides welcoming **me** into this world, the Lava lamp was also introduced? Can you imagine that in the same year, the US Postal service made sure to initiate the zip code system so that as I grew up there would be more certainty that my mail…and my parents’ bills, would arrive in the most timely manner possible? Of course, the British invasion inspired the squeals of the young girls in my neighborhood for the “Fab 4”…yes, the Beatles, and those girls gave me some stiff competition as I learned to scream and teethe as a baby! On another note, I’m sure they didn’t really plan to upstage my arrival, but 1963 was also the year that “Cleopatra” gained a great deal of scandalous buzz thanks to Liz and Dick and the romance of the century…ah-let’s say the decade…. Without the innovations of 1963, we would not have touch tone phones-Thanks, AT & T!! And my birth year was also the same year in which we learned that Martin Luther King “had a dream.”

I suppose, like all of us, I had a dream too. And although it took half a lifetime of learning and living to realize it, here we are, and may I kindly ask none of you to pinch me, because I know it’s real and I know I am the luckiest and most blessed person I know, thanks to all of you. As I think back on my “first 50,” I think of calling it, “Alan Gonick-the Wonder Years” because sometimes I wonder what I was doing! I know now that I was living and doing the best that I could with what I had. I followed the path that I thought was the right road for me at the time, and I made choices in life, love and career that taught me so much. The stops along the way on that path really opened my eyes and heart and showed me everything I had to learn… and it led me right here. In some way, we all follow our own yellow brick road. Ironically enough, L. Frank Baum, the man who wrote “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz,” said in that book, “A baby has brains, but it doesn’t know much. Experience is the only thing that brings knowledge, and the longer you are on earth the more experience you are sure to get.” You know what? He was right! And experience got me right here.

Experience also brought me a wonderful, loving and supportive family and friends like each one of you, that I wouldn’t trade for anything…especially friends with time-shares in Provincetown! (**If James is there, say this. If James is not there, then you can say, “James, wherever you are right now, who knew….**) James, who knew when you so generously offered me the chance to stay at your time share in Provincetown that it would change the course of my life forever?  Who knew they had such great amenities at that time-share? I went for a brief stay and found the love of my life!!  Way to go, James!!!  Yes, after traveling down one path for so many years, I received the gift of life and love when I met John, and a whole new world of authenticity, love, freedom and acceptance filled my world and my soul.

Coming out was like breathing fresh air for the first time-if you can imagine! But even though the world is coming around, slowly but surely, not everyone has the freedom to be who he or she is. The Russian comedian Yakov Smirnov had this to say on the subject: “Homosexuality in Russia is a crime and the punishment is seven years in prison, locked up with other men. (**Say this very deadpan**) I heard there’s a three year waiting list.” (**Wait for the laugh**).

And here we are today, celebrating this milestone, and I have the people that mean the most to me here with me today, especially, you, John. (**Turn to John and say**). What can I say? Henry Wadsworth Longfellow said, “It is difficult to know at what moment love begins; it is less difficult to know that it has begun.” Thank you for being my partner, for all of your love and support, and for all the happiness you bring me each day. Thank you for sharing this moment with me, and thank you for giving me the gift of **YOU**. I honestly don’t need anything else. I’m a very happy and complete man, and being with you makes every single day special. I savor all that we share and I am proud to be your partner. I want to thank all of the other “priceless gifts” in my life too. I want to thank my family for loving me unconditionally and supporting 100%. (**If there are any family members attending, mention them**). To \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, your love and respect and acceptance mean more to me than you’ll ever know.

Lucille Ball said, “It’s a helluva start, being able to recognize what makes you happy.” I am so excited to have embarked on my “2nd life,” and I already know it is better, richer, and so much more fulfilling because all of you give me so many reasons to be happy and to continue to open my heart and soul and mind. The first 50-yes, those “Wonder Years,” have really gone by so quickly, but the lessons I’ve learned will stay with me for the rest of my life. The greatest thing I’ve learned is to appreciate true and unconditional love and acceptance, and to finally have a free, open, and happy life. I can’t wait to share the next fifty plus years with John as we travel and discover what it truly means to live a full, meaningful, and rich life. And I can’t wait to share memories and experiences with all of you too!

Here’s to equality, freedom and happiness for all of us, and may we all celebrate many, many, many birthdays and occasions with each other for a long, long time. I love you all! Thank you!