

HOST LEDE:

Older LGBT adults are more likely to be single and childless than straight seniors. California advocates are pushing for supportive options for this group, including more LGBT-friendly housing complexes to help stave off loneliness.

Capital Public Radio's Sammy Caiola [kay-OH-luh] checks in with someone who's yearning for connection

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Cliff Shockney takes the stage in a turtleneck sweater. He breaks out in a humble smile as the audience chants his name.

AMBI people chanting, "Clifford! Clifford!"

CLIFF: The next three songs are pieces I've written myself.

AMBI music

At 72, Cliff is entering old age without Tony — the man who was by his side for 29 years. He wrote this piece early in their courtship.

CLIFF: I wanted him to move in with me, so I was using everything I could think of. I wanted him to feel that I loved him.

Cliff is on the shy side. He takes life slowly — he barely uses his cell phone. He says Tony was the social butterfly.

CLIFF: He'd always talk to anybody who was around, and just talk to him like they'd been friends forever.

Both men came to California from other states, hoping to live an out life. Cliff successfully serenaded Tony into cohabitating, and they settled in a welcoming Sacramento neighborhood.

They never married or had kids, but their living room was a hub for holiday potlucks and home concerts. When Tony was diagnosed with liver cancer eight years ago - after decades of living with HIV - it's where they set up his sick bed.

CLIFF: He came home in a coma and never recovered. Two days later he died; that was just devastating. It was so unreal.

Like many LGBT seniors, Cliff is figuring out what old-age will look like without close relatives. He still lives in the home he and Tony owned, surrounded by art and furniture they picked out together. He shows me an ornate Venetian carnival mask in the bedroom.

AMBI House tour

A few years after Tony died, Cliff started thinking about dating again.

CLIFF: I would like to share my life with someone really special.

He joined an LGBT social group - that concert where he performed was their fundraiser.

But he says prospects have been slim.

CLIFF: In general in the gay community, there traditionally has been an emphasis on being young and attractive and sexually active, and older people were kind of invisible. And so you find yourself older and kind of marginalized and if you don't get out there and do something, it's real easy to just stay in your own little world.

Cliff is starting to worry about who will care for him if his health fails. He says he might be interested in a gay-friendly housing facility, but only if the rooms are big enough for a piano.

AMBI music

His current plan is to stay in his home.

CLIFF: After losing a partner and being this age, I don't have to be afraid of anything.

For now, he'll keep leaning on the friends he's been able to hold onto.

In Sacramento, I'm Sammy Caiola.