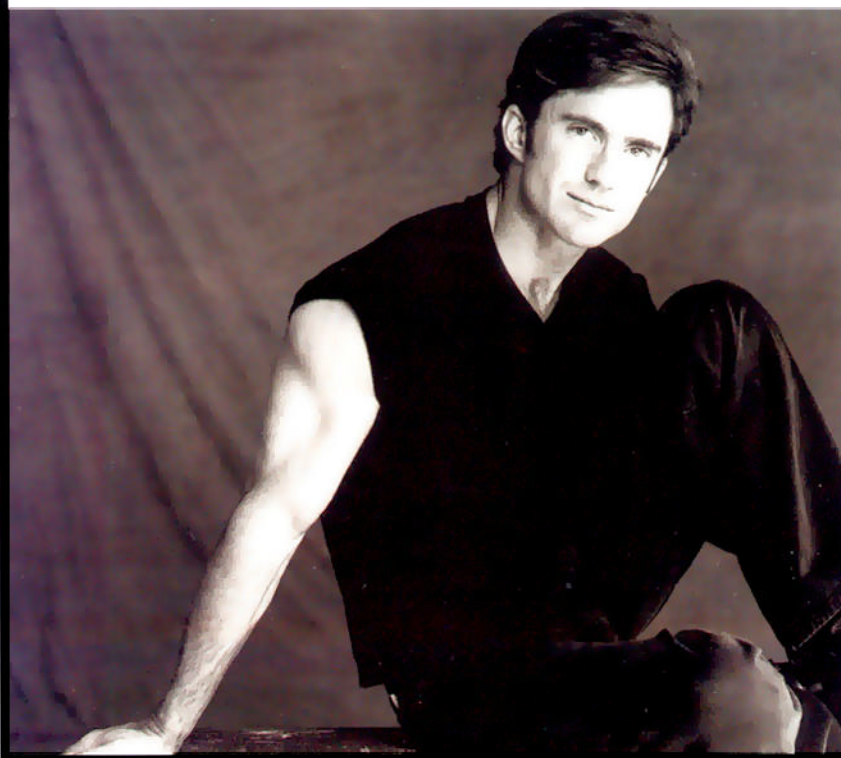


warning: cranky man turning forty ahead

While visiting the big island of Hawaii in December, prior to my 40th birthday (which actually occurs this Valentine month of February... gifts highly appreciated), pondering the all-too-familiar love-hate, okay-not-okay, ideas of aging with wrinkle-causing furrowed brow (geez, I've got to *stop* that!), it occurred to me: "Gosh, this dried lava looks *really* good for its age." I was totally okay with that concept until someone informed me that I was actually standing on dried lava that was really only a few *months* old, and that the whole area was the ever-evolving result of a series of eruptions that began in 1983. "That's it," I erupted, slightly tweaking my back, "There are land masses that are younger than I am, and that have never known disco." I definitely considered the day a setback.

Actually, there is not a lot of sympathy in Palm Springs for people turning 40. In fact, people just look at me, laugh, and say things like, "Wait till 80," then jog away, or proceed with their next bungee jump. No kidding, this town is full of people who defy the aging process as most Americans know it. Marion Lederer, my very active 81-year-old friend, Palm Springs resident and wife of the late actor/director, Francis Lederer (who passed away last year at the age of 100 and was still actively teaching theater in Los Angeles) laughs about her early aging education: "Early in our marriage, Francis was trying to convince me to start taking these special vitamins. I never did. Then about 10 years into our marriage, I was visiting him in his dressing room, and as I looked into those brutal backstage lights, I saw my face, panicked, and said, 'Give me those vitamins!'"



Retired retail executive and part-time Palm Springs resident, Al Flogge, simply states, "Each day we live we have more opportunity for beautiful experiences." Bravo! Am I blessed or what? Between Marion and Al, I am able to simultaneously laugh and cry with joy as I prepare to blow out my 40 candles. But wait a minute, not so fast: This is supposed to be a vain semi-pompous fitness column. "Do I *look* 40?" I ask. Not according to Bob Greenbaum, president of Uprising Rock Climbing Center on Gene Autry. "Scott, you don't look a day over 32," quips Greenbaum (good answer Bob), masterfully stroking my ego and equally masterfully instructing me to pretend I am Spiderman as I scale the wall like a virile testosterone-laced 22-year-old (indulge me a little please, just this once). Cool, great, I am breathing, feeling better now, knowing that at 39, I now have a very unique longevity-enhancing, semi-addictive fun new hobby... rock climbing. (I had to ditch beach volleyball when I moved to the desert.)

You know what? I'm fine, it's fine, it's all going to be just *fine*. And those of you who have issues with aging... well, get over it, get out there, be creative, spark up some new relationships, new hobbies, and keep

thank you all for allowing me to work through my issues, and as I blow out my candles on February 20th, I will envision all of you — friends and strangers — doing activities that you love, experiencing the rich full lives that we all deserve. And you know what else? In retrospect, that beautiful dried lava looks *a lot older* than three months. I really freaked out over nothing. **!**

Scott Cole is now a proud 40-year-old wellness expert whose work has appeared in more than 300 publications worldwide. His latest video series "Discover Tai Chi" will be in stores soon. Feel free to visit him at www.scottcole.com.