



April 22, 2009

## Ben Franklin Ruined my Life as a Cougar

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By Elaine Viets

Thanks a lot, Ben. I would have enjoyed meeting you, back in 1745. You didn't have the leading man looks of Thomas Jefferson, but you were smart and funny, and that counts for a lot with me.

But did you have to put your "Advice to a Friend on Choosing a Mistress" in writing? Because I've been getting the condensed version since I turned forty, and I'm tired of hearing it.

Ben wrote what should have been the ultimate cougar manifesto when he advised a younger man that an older mistress is a better choice. Older women don't get pregnant, he said. A decent man is not ruining the life or the reputation of a young, marriageable woman. (That used to be important). And if a man can overlook a few sags and wrinkles, "the Pleasure of corporal Enjoyment with an old Woman is at least equal, and frequently superior, every Knack being by Practice capable of Improvement."

Bartender, a fresh Cosmo for our Founding Father, who preached safe, rollicking sex without ageism.

All would have been well, if Ben's words had been left alone. But some wag reduced Ben's advice to a sign which hangs in hundreds of bars. It says, among other

things, that older women "don't swell, don't tell, don't yell and they're so grateful."

Those are the words that haunt me in my cougar years. Because the kind of younger man who tries to pick me up hasn't read the essays of Ben Franklin. He's read the bar sign. And he's dumb enough to think I'll be flattered by those words.

During Spring Break, Florida beaches are infested with drunken, hungover college men who see themselves as cougar hunters. Alas, Clive Owen look-alikes are not running loose in Lauderdale. The cougar hunters are more like Opie in *Mayberry RFD* - young, pale, callow, with muscles in their abs, chests and heads. Visions of beer and double cheeseburgers (paid for by me) are dancing in their sweet, empty heads. They have fantasies of being the next Ashton Kutcher, the man who married the much older, richer Demi Moore.

The Ashton Kutcher Wannabe is as suave as a fraternity beer bust. Here is a sadly typical conversation:

"Can I walk with you, ma'am?"

"No." That refusal would have discouraged most men. But a cougar hunter will endure almost any discomfort for the prospect of free food and beer.

The AKW ignores my wish to walk alone. He says, "I like a woman with experience."

Silence. I brace myself, knowing what's coming next.

"Ben Franklin had it right, you know, when he wrote that thing," the AKW says.

"You mean, 'Fart Proudly'?" I ask, sweetly.

The AKW looks scandalized. Cougars aren't supposed to know about that F-word. AKWs have no sense of humor.

"That's the popular name for Franklin's notorious essay, 'A Letter to a Royal Academy,' calling for a serious scientific investigation into flatulence," I say.

"No, that other thing he wrote." The AKW looks scared. Good.

"Oh, Ben Franklin's seven reasons for having an affair with an older woman."

AKW looks a little brighter, which isn't too difficult. I go in for the kill. "Which some idiot reduced to 'Don't tell, don't yell, don't swell and they're so grateful.' It now hangs in zillions of bars. "

"Uh, yeah. That one."

It is time to end this cruel game and quit toying with the AKW like a cougar with a fresh rabbit. I make sure I'm stationed in front of the lifeguard stand before I deliver the killing blow.

"I'm not interested," I say. "I'm not grateful. Your main advantage is that you are young, and I don't find young men all that interesting. Find yourself a nice college woman who will appreciate you. Have a good time with someone your own age."

"But - " The AKW is not ready to give up his dream.

"Beat it, kid," I snarl, "or I'll scream and that lifeguard over there will come running out and call the cops."

The young man lopes alone down the beach. I hope, on behalf of cougars everywhere, that he will hit on a wild bikini his own age.