

# Lavender Letters

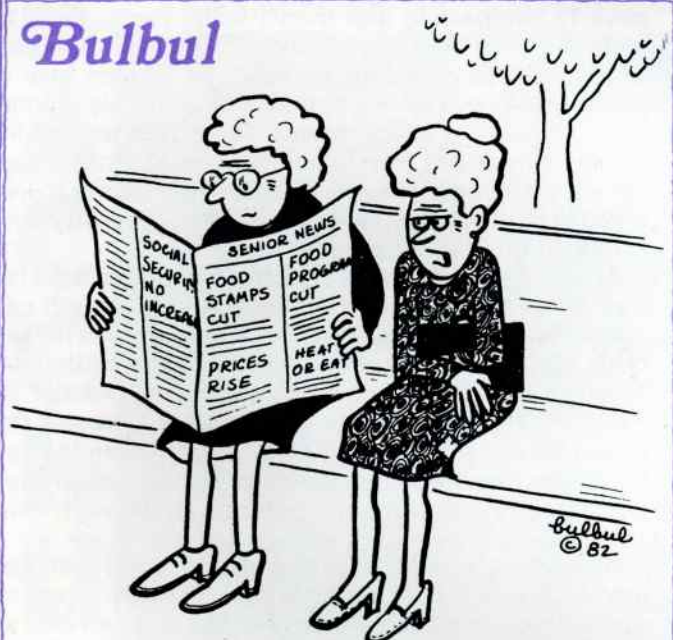
*a woman's affinity*

Volume 1, Number 8

September 1984

## Getting Old: Consider the Alternative

*Bulbul*



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By Maggie Goshen

Definition time: How old is old? I felt old the first time someone called me "ma'am." After a little independent research I discovered that a woman in Houston, dressed as a dyke, is never called "ma'am" unless she has gray hair. Lesbian women tend to get gray hair earlier than straight women. A woman in a skirt and heels can be "ma'am-ed" as early as age twenty-five.

Old is moving from the familial world of sister to that of aunt. Some grandmothers are ancient. In Western mythology many witches travel disguised as grandmothers and that is ageism. Rita Mae Brown once announced on a late night talk show that men don't even take a woman seriously until she's menopausal. Unfortunately, she also called God "She" on that show, so not everyone took her seriously.

Old is retirement plans, rocking chairs and knitting, cataracts, and arthritis. Research shows that a woman's sense of time may change with age because of her cycles. A woman quits talking about her body when she gets old because others hear it as complaining. Getting cataracts is different than getting a period or getting pregnant. Talking about developing arthritic calcium clumps in bones is

(Continued on Page 5)



# editorial

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For quite sometime, the media has represented old people, especially older women, as something to be feared. In order for Bette Davis to maintain her acting career she had to act in horror movies. However, older men are portrayed as sage and wise. This allowed John Wayne to maintain his acting career long after other women his age had to step down.

Presently, I am 30 years old. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for me to predict what my life will be like at age 65. In the year 2019 the political process may have changed everything we know and trust today.

Because things are so unsettled and difficult to predict, I choose to do nothing at the present time. Well, I do have a small life insurance policy that might be enough to take care of my body and a few loose ends I may have left undone. Other than that, I have not opened at IRA. The biggest reason may be because I am not yet ready to plan for my future in such long, far away terms.

I believe it is because I am afraid of getting old. I look around and notice how older women are treated. I just don't want to be treated that way. So, instead of doing something about it, I just sit back and watch the days go by.

Recently, I was watching a television program where there was a panel of older people on it. They indicated some facts that made me realize that I ought to do something in my life to prepare for my "retirement." One of these figures is the fact that in 1984 one out of every eight Americans is 65 or older. In the year 2000 one out of every 4 will be 65 or over. Additionally, I discovered that 2.8 million women over 65 live in poverty compare to less than 1 million men; that 12.2 million retirement age women have no access whatsoever to pensions; and 60% of women over 65 living alone have Social Security as their only income.

Unfortunately, all that adds up to lesbian women like myself who do not plan to get involved in a marriage of convenience have poverty and Social Security to look forward to in old age. However, if Social Security is not available that leaves poverty.

Another thing that is of concern to women is the fact that as we become older we have greater health care needs. We need to have health insurance plans that are fairly comprehensive and will last into our retirement. Thus far, I haven't heard of any provisions like that. We must rely on Medi-Care or Medic-Aid. Of course, that doesn't cover everything. And what compounds this is the everpresent fear that when we become older there won't be any government programs with enough funds to support us.

After doing research for this issue I found that there are some things in which I can get involved to make my life as an older woman better. Politically, I can cast my vote for those politicians I believe will look out for my best interests as a woman. I can also get involved with the National Organization for Women and the Older Women's League. How about you?

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# Letters to the editor

Dear Lavender Letters:

I am writing in response to a letter in the July issue. It was a vicious attack on the Gay Policial Caucus(GPC) and its women members. Considering the inaccuracies, misconceptions and ignorance displayed in the letter, I am not surprised that the author declined to identify herself.

There are five women who serve among the thirteen members of the Board of Directors of GPC, a much higher percentage of women than in the caucus at large. With women as Chair and Vice-President, we hold two of the top three positions in the organization. This hardly suggests discrimination, subtle or otherwise.

I'm not sure what "good ole gals" are, so I can't say whether we qualify. The five us range in age from 23 to 40. One of us is into "Whitmire Drag," one into punk, and another into muscle shirts and cowboy boots. We are all opinionated, assertive and active gay women.

I don't understand her desire to separate lesbian issues from gay issues. None of us are free until all of us are free. If the assertion is that GPC does not support women's rights, it is a lie. All candidates seeking our endorsement are screened on their support of the ERA and abortion rights. GPC has led boycotts of gay bars which refused to admit women. The caucus is a member of the Women's Lobby Alliance and has held events in conjunction with Houston Area Women's Center and NOW. We run ads in Hazelwitch flyers (when we can afford it) and promote their concerts at meetings. Ironically, I have

heard GPC attacked as a "dyke organization" and our male board members condemned for their feminism. . .

GPC is not everything I would want, but it is a damn fine organization. Women have earned their board seats and a voice in the decision-making process. We are proud to stuff envelopes and proud to sign our names. We are making a difference. Whining has never been politically correct.

—Annise D. Parker, Chair of the Board  
Sue Lovell, Vice-President

Leslie Larson, Debbie Squires, Cicely Wynne

Dear Editor:

In response to Lynn Herrick's letter and comments on GPC, it seems the serious problem of sexism is being pushed aside. I've seen enough pseudo-feminist men being "polite" to women at GPC meetings. Only later in a social situation be it in a bar or at a party, those same men call women "bitch," "fish," etc. Need I go on?

It's closet sexism that has kept me from joining GPC. While I appreciate the work GPC does, I have little appreciation of most of the men. I've seen even men trashed because they didn't dress a certain way, act a certain way, or even sleep with certain people.

To women in GPC, I suggest joining with the supportive men you do trust and educate others of the barriers of sexism, elitism and such.

I enjoy Lavender Letters.

—A Supportive Male

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# word in edgewise

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### By Hillary Baines

Getting old. I hate that phrase because it is used more often as a dig than an affirmation of growth and maturity. As a result of the negative attitudes towards older people, a large number of persons in the United States who happen to be younger feel they would rather forego the aging process.

I was born into a family of adults and old people. Seeing all those older people I believed that the aging process was something to be scared of. Also, the fact that I experienced burying someone I loved at an early age served to reinforce this fear.

Generally, graying hair and aging go hand in hand; though, it seems there are many out there who do not gray until they age more than I have, say 40 or so. I am gray to the point my lover tactfully calls it "salt and pepper." She loves it. Perhaps it is because she isn't graying. At times I love it too, usually when I am pitching for a job. I used to have the problem of being too young, or at least looking too young to have all the experience I needed for a given assignment.

But aging is better than I thought it would be. I envisioned I would one day awaken to find my body ruined, my sex drive gone, and my hair like straw. I am, however, broader than I was at 25, my sex drive is now steady and consistent, my hair is soft, much like my grandmother's wavy locks. Not bad at all.

I have been through twelve "meaningful" attempts at a relationship, a drug habit, had lots of money and then no money at all, credit problems, seven burglaries, two cats and three dogs. I am still here to tell about it. Aging has everything to do with commitment. Hard fact: life without commitments is a life without direction, goals or love.

All in all, things for the aging woman is better today than for our mothers. It seems that most of them look as though they have given up on living at age 60. They say they are tired. Understandably, who could dispute the wear and tear they have endured wearing high heeled shoes and suffering through fad diets for forty years. At least being children of the sixties gave us a start toward healthy foods and more humanistic clothing.

One good thing about aging, and there are many, is learning. It is fine to make mistakes, God knows I've burned many a bridge. But I have discovered that to learn to come back from a set back is the reason for going on.

Today the process of aging is taking on a new look. The straight community has finally gotten into health, running and jogging themselves into oblivion.

Youth is pretty to look at. But, give me my life now. I have never been so satisfied, no matter how hard I tried to convince myself I was, I am now.



# feminist issues

(continued from page 1)

designated less tasteful than talking about lumps of fatty tissue on our chests. Grandpa rocks and tells tales while Grandma bakes cookies silently in the kitchen with the grandchildren. Old men become wizened sages, according to society, but old women become hags. Rumor has it that lesbians are more prone to becoming witches than married women with grandchildren. "Ugly old women," acutely aware of gravity pulling on their bodies, still get raped.

Feminist legend has it that older lesbians are healthier, more physically active, more sexual and more child-like (not to be confused with childish) than straight women.

How difficult is it for an older woman to find a friend when it means looking for more than a "trick?" I often find this approach extremely difficult in or out of a bar. Yet most bars are owned by older lesbians—maybe because it takes women longer to raise the capital investment, but I've not been doing any research in straight bars lately. Perhaps all bar owners are just ancient.

In America, during the year of 1983 75% of the people over 65 who live in poverty are single or widowed women. That figure includes lesbians. Are there more or less living below the poverty line today? Do older women ask as many questions as I do?

So how old is old? I'm 35 and have no retirement plan or lover at this time. Sometimes that makes me feel very old; yet other times I feel like I haven't even begun to live. I've been thirty-five (sometimes 37) for the past two years, because I wanted to love an older woman. No one ever questioned my age except my mother who questions everything her lesbian daughter does. Recently she told me I have only five years left to make babies. What? She asked me if I had thought about grandchildren, and told me I should quit playing around and start taking my life seriously. (I did not quote Rita Mae Brown to my mother.)

I was born after World War II with the rest of the 35-year-olds, whether or not I'm a lesbian. I know about pot, flower-power, Viet Nam, and Feminism. I'm a television baby, a radical, and female. A woman who is 65 grew up in the Great Depression, and she was raised to be a Victorian lady. Her brother probably fought in World War II. She may have worked in a defense plant during the war effort. She watched the invention of 3-D movies and Television the way I've watched the growth (or shrinkage) of computers and electronics. She may have a son, or a lover's son who fought in Korea or Viet Nam. A woman who is 65 is bound to see the world differently than I do, whether she's lesbian or not.

When older women aren't babysitting, owning businesses, starving or defending their wills, they discuss age discrimination—ageism. A great many of

these women are probably lesbians, because community involvement has traditionally been a family alternative for us. The Houston community offers bars and various activities for older women. The greeting they get at these activities in the same as we younger women get; come on in, just don't be overt—don't be who you are—play it straight with us. How many years does it take a woman to get tired of this, or are there hallaluyah dykes coming out even in the older community?

We should have an old women's march on Houston, demanding a proper voice in society. We could proclaim that the use of the titles "ma'am" or "madam" (notice what happened to that word, dear matriarchs) are derogatory. We could march down Westheimer and further up to the Heights with placards saying: "Remember the Poverty Line" the way we Texans shout "Remember the Alamo." After the march all the straight and lesbian women could join hands and discover that sexual preference really isn't dangerous and doesn't have to add to separation and isolation. The sky would be the limit in the long run for this new powerful heterogenous community as they stormed the politicians single-handedly demanding the rights of kindly little old ladies to live like humans instead of below the poverty line.

When I turn sixty-five, I will have to make my own space in this world too. But as I look back on my life I see the anti-war strikes, and the new woman's movement with books, records classes, even research projects on women. This year there's a woman candidate for Vice-President, and nobody quite knows what to do about her either. Somehow at 65 I think I'll be able to make a space for myself, if I start planning now. I think I'll start by making friends with an older woman. So how old is old?



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# perspective

## Older Women: Outlook a

By Dee Smathers

Getting old isn't too bad if you consider the alternatives.

We all do it (if we're lucky) and though some of us do it more gracefully than others, none of us really like doing it.

In preparation for this article, I took another of my not so scientific saloon surveys (meaning, of course, that I talked to a bunch of people over beers in our local drinking establishments). I had expected to find a vast generational as well as individual differences. Such was not the case. After about 35 our styles may vary widely, but our concerns are very similar.

Future financial security appears to be at or near the top of everybody's list. Whether it is the business woman rearranging her investment portfolio or the waitress declaring and paying Social Security Tax on more tips than she makes, money takes on a new dimension. No longer is "enough" money that which is needed to cover the current bills; there must be some left for the IRA, the Payroll Savings Plan, the savings account or the property note. The incidence of new car

fever drops drastically as women who have traded up for years decide to drive the clunker a while longer to make the down payment on a house, condo, or country cabin. Frequently, the "every nighters" cut back to weekends and the "weekenders" make it to the bars once a month. The methods vary and the attempt may be continuous or sporadic, but everybody is trying to "put a little by."

The inevitable physical deterioration that accompanies aging is an almost universal concern. For some this takes the form of seemingly endless organ recitals ("Let me tell you about my gall bladder, kidneys, varicose veins, fallen uterus, etc."). Others fight the phenomenon with all the weapons at hand. Some choose paint, powder, creams and dyes. Others attempt to emulate the grand aging beauties of the past with esoteric diets. Some become fitness freaks jogging, jazzercising, swimming, sweating and steaming towards what they hope will be an eternally youthful body. A few resort to the knife for face lifts, tummy tucks, breast elevations and the like. More and more turn to the spiritual to project an ethereal glow through the wrinkles and bags. And a lot just sit on the bar stool and recall past glories.

These concerns are general to all women, not specific to Lesbians, but as Lesbians, we must deal with them in a different social and emotional milieu. The "lonely old dyke" shuffling through her twilight years in her twilight world is certainly no longer relevant if indeed it ever was. (I have always put that specter in the same category as "ol' raw hide and bloody bones" who was supposed to dash out of the woods, snatch me up and carry me off if I was too bad a child.)

Financial security is no longer a given for anybody, but as "single" women Lesbians face a more complex situation. It is true that most people no longer depend upon their grown children for support or care in their old age; however, for most of us this has never been an option because most of us have no children. The estate of a husband considerate enough to die first is an option for very few. As a matter of fact, without some very careful planning and expert legal assistance, the death of a long term lover can be devastating financially as well as emotionally.

The "single" status of the Lesbian also complicates the very real health problems that become more frequent as we get older. Who is allowed in the hospital room if visitors are restricted? Where does the Lesbian recuperate from an illness or accident? How is the

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# nd Attitudes

decision for long term care made? Who picks up the financial slack when the Lesbian is off work? Unfortunately, even the most careful planning cannot always prevent lover and family battling it out should the Lesbian become incapacitated. Many of the solutions to these kinds of problems lie somewhere down the road in the legislative and judicial process.

The emotional milieu of the older Lesbian covers a wide range, but it is almost always different from that of her straight agemates. Some of these differences have to do with the very fact that she is woman identified woman and, in all probability, most of her primary relationships as she gets older are with other women. She does not have to deal with the trauma involved in the significant other losing her hair or potency. She does have to deal with two menopause rather than one. Her social interests are likely to differ as well. Equal pay and pensions are likely to be more important to her and she is likely to be more politically aware and involved than her straight counterparts. As Rita Wanstrom, owner of the Double R Saloon, put it, "The older women today remember what it was like and they have invested their money, blood, sweat, and tears to change it. They are also aware that it could change back overnight." The stresses of years of hiding in the closet or fighting the establishment as an upfront Lesbian or whatever combination of the two has been, the lifestyle produces a very different woman.

Another factor in the emotional milieu of the older Lesbian is the circumstances of her coming out. An increasing number of psychotherapists are working from the assumption that Lesbians and Gay men simply do not extract from straight social situations all the experiences that they need to move toward emotional maturity, and those experiences must be gone through at some point. We are all familiar with the external signs of this process: the 40 year old Gay man who comes out buys new clothes, gets a new hair style, and tries to make as many men as he can in the shortest time or the 40 year old newly out Lesbian who spends vast amounts of time and energy dancing 'til dawn and developing mad crushes as frequently as possible. We do not see what is going on inside. The intensity of first love is not reserved for the young; it is as intense at 30, 40 or 50 as it was at 20. It still takes time to strike the balance between trust and discretion. Only with experience can one distinguish true attraction from plain old lust (and even with experience *that's* not always easy). Obviously, the world of a 50 year old Lesbian who has been out twenty-five years is quite

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## Watch for Our Next Issue on Staying Out

different from that of a 50 year old Lesbian who has been out one year.

Yet, *the* community in which we all live an amalgamation of all these individual worlds. It is the diversity of each of us as well as our own changing with age that gives the Lesbian community such wonderful contrasts of color and texture. You are going to get older (if you are lucky) so just relax and enjoy it.



# announcing . . .

The Houston Area Chapter of the Older Women's League meets on the Second Sunday of every month at 2:00 p.m. at the Houston Area Women's Center located at 4 Chelsea. National dues are \$5.00 annually and local dues are also \$5.00 per year. For more information call Lee Lannoo at 864-1772 or 524-4434. Also, there is a feature article on the Older Women's League on page 11.

The Texas National Organization for Women will be having their State Convention in Houston. The location is the Sheraton Crown Hotel, 15700 Drummet Blvd. The event begins September 14, 1984 with registration at 6:00 p.m. It will kick-off with a FREE open bar and snacks hosted by the NE Houston NOW Chapter starting at 8:00 p.m. The Texas NOW Convention continues with workshops and a luncheon on Saturday. The proposed guest speaker is the Democratic Presidential Candidate Walter Mondale. Rumor has it that Geraldine Ferraro may make an appearance at the convention also. Saturday evening there will be entertainment by Judy Eron who is a feminist singer and songwriter from Nashville, Tennessee. The Texas Now Convention closes on Sunday, September 16 at around 1:00 p.m. For more information please contact Ms. Sue Devaney, NE Houston NOW, 1984 State Convention, 16619

Capewood Drive, Humble, Texas 77338 or call NE Houston NOW at (713) 454-5142.

The Gay Pride Week Committee recently voted to sponsor activities on a year round basis rather than be in effect for just six months out of the year. For their kick-off event of this new restructuring will be "Grand Marshall's Ball I". It will salute "Disco Grandma" and all the other past Grand Marshalls of Gay Pride Week. Additionally, it will serve to provide seed money for Gay Pride Week 1985 and donate a portion of the proceeds to "Buck the Referendum." The Ball will be held at Rich's at 2401 San Jacinto on September 14, 1984 from 9:00 p.m. 'til dawn and the presold tickets will cost \$5.00. For more information contact Stan Ford, Co-chair by writing to Houston Gay Pride Week Committee, P.O. Box 66821, Houston, TX 77266.

Bacchus (523 Lovett) will continue with their Sunday concerts for two more weeks. They will be featuring Gimmic on September 9 and Debra Dew and the Dial Tones on September 16. Both bands will play between the hours of 4 and 8 p.m. Starting on September 23 Bacchus will open at noon for Football Sundays showing either Cowboys or Oilers games. To go along with the football they will also have \$1.00 Bloody Marys and Screwdrivers from noon 'til 4:00.

## Thoughts on Aging . . .

By Virginia R. Harris

Aging is like looking into a mirror and seeing no image. A blank space, an emptiness that I try to fill with images from the past. I have looked for myself in mirrors before. Always looking for me in a reflection of what others said I was supposed to, should, be. Never, never what or who I was.

I go dancing and look into the faces of the young. Too tight, too much emptiness, looking, searching in a mirror that will show the reflection they have been told they want to see, should see. Looking for themselves in a haze of smoke and booze. I cannot look at those faces for too long, the task is completed, they are lost. The old women will have to take their children to raise.

As I age I know I must give form to the gray monster lurking in that haze. I sit on the floor and unblinkingly stare at my face by candle light. That face is not soft, not gentle. There is an animal hidden behind the eyes. Just below the surface, just about visible. I stare. It is a she-wolf, teeth bared, stalking, pacing, body taut, ready for danger. The face changes, it goes through stages I have ever seen before. It was never a face that was mirrored in the world around me. No silken hair and white skin in this reflection. Dark—called evil by the mirror because of that darkness. No mirror for the mind behind that face. But that mind can accept or reject the mirror. It rejects. Where are the old women who can give me an image? I search for them as I become one of them. Here I have a chance to find and

define myself. I begin to realize the power of aging. This is what I must live for the rest of my life.

I look into my eyes and see blood. I bled for more than 30 years before I knew it had a rhythm, before I felt the power of that. It took more than 30 years to realize the annoyance I felt each month denied myself, my womanhood. I look forward to the blood stopping, as I move to another place of power.

The she-wolf bares her teeth, ready to attack. The monster still lurks in the haze, still unclear. I stare into my eyes, fearful, trying to stay with that fear. I see a woman getting larger, growing from the size of an egg to a giant. She breaks the shackles of tradition and loses her chains. She accelerates until she bursts free and becomes the universe, from whence all things come. I see myself pulled at very high speed on a beam of light connected to my navel. I resist but can't stop the forward motion. I disappear and am immediately reformed into someone, something very different. I see an old woman sitting on the ground making what seems to be mud pies and placing them in stacks. "What are you doing?" I ask. "I am rebuilding the world."

The power, and the glory, a woman!

*The original article appeared in PLEXUS West Coast Women's Press in February 1984. This article has been edited due to space limitations.*



# viewpoints

By Grynd'I

Changes, changes.

I really don't know why dykes can't be as adaptable to change as we cats. We progress from cuddly kitten to sophisticated cat with none of those awkward transitional stages in which dykes seem to spend three-quarters of their time.

I didn't loose *my* cool even when Prrr almost ran over me with her delivery van on Westheimer; I simply climbed into the wheelwell of a beer truck, knowing no dyke could resist *that* combination, and awaited rescue.

At Trash Acres I endured two floods, a hurricane, burst pipes, cold, construction, the arrival of the demon goat, Hermonetta, Prrr moving out, Prrr moving back in, and finally Spft packing her books and papers into an armada of cars with four cats, a dog and the demon goat in the flagship and moving out—all without so much as the turn of a whisker.

By contrast, Spft, who fancies herself the original Ms. Jo Cool, comes unglued when the weather changes. As you can well imagine, she spends much of her time scattered about, as it were.

Spft's latest psychic disjunction has been the result of birthday trauma. One would certainly think that she had been over 40 long enough to have grown accustomed to it, but such is not the case. She has been agonizing over the latest milestone for over a month. Most of her spare time has been spent in the bathroom with the door locked. (Of course, she never notices me perched right by her elbow—*only* a cat, indeed!)

If she is not searching for "old lady whiskers," or cursing wrinkles, she is slathering her body with various unguents. I think she *has* tried everything but axle grease and cresote. The worst was olive oil; she was; leased with the results, but she smelled vaguely like the kitchen of a cheap cafe on the Spanish Waterfront for a week or so. She is still fuming because the druggist at Walmart could/would not order her Oil of Olay in a half-gallon container.

The weight loss campaign has been much more successful than the skin rejuvenation program. Even though her stomach growls as much as she does, she is inordinately pleased that she can squeeze her squatty body into a size 28. I do not think she realizes that those ancient 501s serve the same purpose as her great grandmother's whalebone corset; once they are buttoned, she could not possibly eat more than a lettuce leaf, no dressing.

As the day itself approaches, Spft gets more and more entangled in the threads of ambivalence that characterize her response to any "occasion." One minute she tells me she is going to spend the day quietly in the washateria and the next that she is going

to hit every F, D, and S bar in town. (In actuality, she is doing neither; she's spending the day with that cute little yellow tabby she has been seeing so much of lately.) To complicate matters even further, she has (once again) concluded that she absolutely *must* decide by B-day what she is going to be when she grows up.

Fortunately, this, too, shall pass. By September first, the top button of the size 28 501s will be undone to make room for Budweiser and Fudgecycles (yes, together), she will no longer smell-like a fruit, berry, succulent or salad, and she will once again be able to shop the entire grocery store. (Ssth once fed her Tuna Helper for her birthday, and during trauma time, she cannot pass the Betty Crocker Display without an acute attack of self-pity.)

As for what she's going to be when she grows up: growing older is inevitable but growing up is optional—and Spft always keeps her options open.

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# book reviews

By Ashley Redding

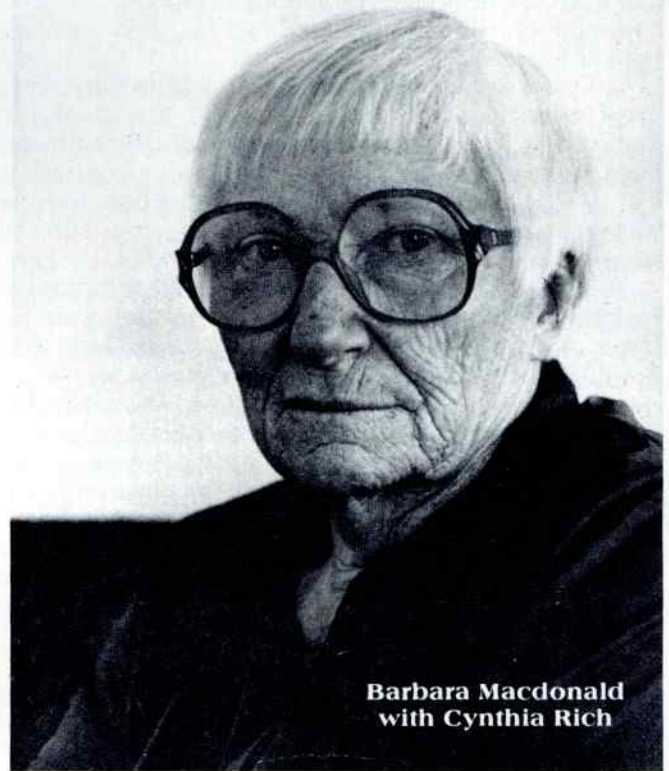
*Look Me in the Eye: Old Women, Aging, and Ageism*, Barbara MacDonald with Cynthia Rich; Spinsters, INK., San Francisco, 1983, 115 pps.

An essay is a brief nonfiction reflection in prose that tends to be relaxed and philosophic or witty, or poetic, or all of these at once. *Look Me in the Eye* is a collection of previously published essays written over a nine year period. The essayists are Barbara, age 71 at the time the book was published; and Cynthia, age 50. These two have been lovers for the past nine years. The theme of the book is age; its style is personal. None of the essays are witty, though a few are poetic. By comparison, this book makes *The Well of Loneliness* a comedy.

Yet some of the essays are clever and revealing. Most of the facts appear as implication—for those who read between the lines. For example, Cynthia accounts her decision to become lovers with a woman 20 years her senior. Barbara's version of the March to Take Back the Night in Boston offers tremendous insight on early feminist ideals. A discussion of security protection reveals a critical example of age, women and media. There are also several reviews of books that pertain to women and aging.

*Look Me in the Eye* takes the dilemma of age and isolation very seriously—too seriously. Many of the essays are full of blame and anger. The few facts presented are startling. The only solution Barbara offers is putting older women in the front row, giving them leadership and authority in the women's movement. Cynthia offers a cultural study of women and age. The book creates reader-awareness.

## Look Me in the Eye Old Women, Aging and Ageism



Barbara Macdonald  
with Cynthia Rich

The unity of the text is haunting because the two writers change style halfway through the text. Cynthia begins with a factual, detailed prose while Barbara is general and highly personal, almost story-telling. Marked by the essay "Aging, Ageism and Feminist Avoidance," the styles begin to change. By the end of the book "Barbara's Afterward" mirrors "Cynthia's Introduction" and visa versa (with a slight cataract discussion that's previously unpublished).

Anyone prone to emotionalism, blame, depression or fear of aging should not read this book. The essays are opinion more than fact. However, as an experiment (and women writers do need to experiment), this boldly honest collection is nothing short of fascinating.



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# spotlight

By Jerilyn Gallimore

In April 1983 an organization that has affiliation with larger national organization started a chapter in Houston. This organization is known as the Older Women's League (OWL). As an older woman it is an organization where you can meet others for companionship and work toward alleviating problems you may face on a daily basis. As a younger woman you can be involved to help make your life better when you become an older woman.

OWL was founded in 1980 with the purpose of taking the stigma out of aging. It is the first organization where the membership exclusively focuses on the concerns of midlife and older women. In the mid 1970s Tish Sommers and Laurie Shields started organizing "displaced homemakers"—women who had lost their "jobs" through death or divorce. In 1979, their national organizing effort resulted in state and federal legislation that addressed the needs of "displaced homemakers."

The White House Mini-Conference on Older Women in Des Moines, Iowa in 1980 was the springboard for OWL which started the day after the conference ended. Sommers and Shields felt that time had come to organize directly in the interests of *all* older women. Today, OWL has more than 7000 members in numerous chapters in all 50 states. It publishes "Gray Papers" and a monthly newsletter called *The OWL Observer*. It has targeted six areas on their national agenda which include Social Security, Pension Rights, Health Insurance, Caregiver Support Services, Jobs for Older Women and Budget Cuts.

The "Gray Papers" are available from the national office and cover topics such as employment discrimination, welfare, pensions, and health care. There is a fee for these rather lengthy research papers. When you become a member of the national organization you will also receive a copy of *The OWL Observer* which is published ten times a year. *The OWL Observer* has articles on Local Chapter news, Tax Information, information on Social Security and has a column called Ruffled Feathers which has information and comments that has made someone mad.

The chapters have a special role in the investment OWL has to make changes for older women in the United States. The local chapters can work to effect change in public policy through education of OWL members and policymakers at all levels to benefit midlife and older women. These chapters can develop creative new forms of mutual self-help. They can work together in good company and help each other to plan better for the last half of their adult lives. They can work to change the image of older women from poor, pitiable and powerless to proud, self-directed and strong. Through a new perception of themselves, older

women become role models for their peers as well as for younger women.

Texas now has four local chapters in four cities which include El Paso, Houston, Austin and San Antonio. The organization is growing by leaps and bounds. They are presently lobbying for a bill to be presented in the state legislature which will provide for dependents who were previously covered on health insurance plans, but, because of divorce, are no longer covered. If this bill passes the dependent will be able to have continuous coverage by paying the employer and employee's share of the premiums.

Nationally OWL was, in part, responsible for the portion of the Economic Equity Act that dealt with pensions. Geraldine Ferraro was a prime sponsor of the bill which passed overwhelmingly in July 1984. It is slated for the president's signature later this year.

OWL has also developed a curriculum for workshops to be done at a chapter meeting or as a workshop where anyone is welcome. The topics covered in this curriculum are retirement, employment, health care, housing, self image and legal issues. The Houston Area Chapter of OWL may be having a open workshop on one of these topics in the near future.

The Houston Area Chapter of OWL has its regular monthly meetings on the second Sunday at 2:00 p.m. at the Houston Area Women's Center located at 4 Chelsea. For more information on their meetings or how to get involved in this organization please contact Lucy Granger, president, at 461-6234 or Lee Lannoo, vice president, at 864-1772. The main number for the Houston Area Chapter of OWL is 524-4434.

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**Hannah. I love you more** than anyone in my life. Lets keep it rolling!. Sharon.

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**Toughette** - Happy full moon. T.H.

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