

# OSU Fiftieth Reunion Talk – June, 2005 written and delivered by Patty Montgomery, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR

## I. GETTING TOGETHER AGAIN AFTER 50 YEARS.

Lucille Ball said “The secret of staying young is to live honestly, eat slowly, and lie about your age.” We can’t do that this weekend – we’re all in our early to mid-70s.

We’ve had a great time reminiscing this weekend, with – amazingly-- 50 years gone by. It doesn’t matter that we didn’t remember someone after 50 years, and couldn’t read the name time. We’re all in the same boat. As Madeleine L/Engle said: The great thing about getting older is that you don’t lose all the other ages you’ve been.

You may regret that you didn’t stay in touch with some old friends, or find out interesting things from each of us. It’s wonderful that our lives have touched again.

Here we are, stepping back to the days where our biggest worry was how to survive finals week, or play well in the next game, or wonder if you’ll have a date next weekend, or if you get your tuition check in time.

Many personalities have frozen in time...so you may have been expecting a serious talk from me, since that’s how I think I was in college. After all, I am twice genetically endowed with a father of German descent, and my Mother’s Swedish parents with strong sense of responsibility and the work ethic. Put that together with a husband from Scotch Irish descent and you can guess the drama of the past 50 years.

How do you define yourself in our seventies? We were considered Middle-age at 35; now, midlife encompasses the years 38-55. I refuse to call myself an “old woman”, preferring psychologist Erikson’s term “Late adulthood.

There’s a spirit about our generation that is hard to describe. Here’s a view of how we have transformed ourselves:

The 30’s: Born in the depression, we followed the “Greatest Generation” as described by Tom Brokaw, bridged the generation of our parents: (Jazz, light opera, silent movies, flappers) and the generation that preceded us: the post-war boom and the birth of the Baby-boomers – 1947-1964.

We hit adolescence dancing the Break and Swing, loved the Big Band, and the Crooners. We learned to accept the next generation’s music -- the Beatles, and all that followed, but many now prefer the Golden Oldies radio stations. WWII was the age of patriotism, self-denial, rationing – my older sisters were dismayed not to be able to buy silk stockings. I watched an older sister go off to the Oregon shipyards with my father, with hard hat and metal lunchbox - “Rosie the Riveter.”

WE followed the voice of parents, church, culture to inform and shape us, tell us what was right and wrong, sacred and taboo. Authority moved into our life from the outside in. (Don’t go to movies or play cards on Sunday).

We girls were grounded, cautious, respectful, told to be good, be patient, have fun but not too much fun, don’t be wild, don’t be too smart or the boys won’t like you, if you go to college, get an Mrs. But a career you can fall back on – secretary, teacher, nurse, maybe social worker; get married, be a good wife and mother, and put your needs and innermost dreams aside. WE sacrificed to make sure our children had better lives than we had, just as our parents had done.

## 50’s AGE OF THE GOOD LIFE

Graduation after the postwar boom. Many of us were pressured to earn an MRS degree, in many cases not for self-fulfillment, but to support ourselves if something happened to our marriage (an addendum of my father – “The thing is, kiddo, you need to meet lots of men who might be clients for your father.) Thus, we were encouraged to become mothers, nurses, teachers and secretaries.

The model for marriage in those “good years” of the 50s was June Cleaver: good and loving mother and wife who put others’ needs before her own.

Women became stay-at-home mothers birth of suburbs, having babies, suburban homes.

LYRICS TO “Wives and Lovers”

Others, more courageous it would seem now, opted for an immediate career, deferring marriage and/or children – or choosing neither.

Even so, she saw career options limited, paychecks smaller in comparison to male employees, but didn’t think to object.

60’s (PUT ON “JACKIE Kennedy’s pillbox hat. BOOMERS ERA

I played the game and had five children in 9 years, too busy to pay much attention to: JFK, LBJ & GREAT SOCIETY  
Vietnam war

Women’s movement

Hippies, drugs

The women's movement of the 60s and 70s passed some of us by – we were comfortable with our lives, or struggling with teenagers or difficult marriages. But many women grew restless with the restraining roles, and many of those mid-lifers were put on tranquilizers to quiet them.

Hello Dolly arrived on the stage in 1964, with reactionary to women's changing lives – such as: IT TAKES A WOMAN”  
LYRICS

Perhaps for a lot of you, it went well for a few – maybe quite a few years. Our children fulfilled some of us – for others, it was an immediate job, or travel that filled those first ten years.

Something happened during the 60s to some of us – the first ripple of discontent and asking the question:

Is there more than this?

The uncertainties of the late 60s and 70s raised questions for everyone. Some of us moved slowly and carefully beyond the full-time demands of our families; we took care of house and children just before, but once out of the home where we experienced ourselves in new ways, with untapped abilities and new energy.

Some ignored the issues, some were too absorbed in survival to respond, and others heard the whispering and felt an internal dissatisfaction.

The results of all of the societal changes certainly affected many families, and particularly marriages. Some women went to work, criticized for leaving their children with parents or using daycare.

### **70's AGE OF CONFUSION -**

Social change was dramatic for women. Hair became teased, bouffant (Put on beehive hat).

Women began to wake up.

Most people don't know there are angels whose only job is to be made sure you don't get too comfortable and fall asleep and miss your life.

New roles

Divorce rate all-time high Double income families

Women more career oriented Affluence focuses on “me”

We began taking time alone, for lunch, an evening for bridge, finally daring to go away for weekends with close women friends. Women who stepped outside of the “rules” were labeled selfish.

Whether it was apparent at the time, we all changed – men and women both;, something filtered down, and even if you can't pinpoint it in your own history, it influenced the next two generations – our granddaughters.

At first, when women who chose to stay home were asked what they did, they said “I'm just a mother.” So here's a toast to all the mothers then and now:

INSERT: FOR ALL YOU MOTHERS OUT THERE Put on apron, hold wooden spoon.

When asked her occupation by the clerk at the DMV, she was told “WE don't list ‘mother’ as an occupation. ‘house-wife’ covers it.

A friend, in the same situation later, answered the question: I'm a Research Associate in the field of Child Development and Human Relations.”

“Just what do you do in your field?”

I have a continuing program of research (what mother doesn't) in the laboratory and in the field (indoors and out). Im working for my Masters (the whole darned family) and already have four credits (four daughters). Of course, the job is one of the most demanding in the humanities (can any mother care to disagree?) and I often work at least 14 hours a day (24 is more like it). But the job is more challenging than most run-of-the-mill careers and the rewards are in satisfaction rather than just money.”

I arrived at home, buoyed by my glamorous new career and was greeted by my lab assistants (age 13, 7, 3). And upstairs I could hear our new experimental model (6 months) in the child-development program testing out a new vocal pattern.

I felt triumphant. I had scored a beat on bureaucracy, and I had gone down on the official records as someone more distinguished and indispensable to mankind than “just another....”

Home, what a glorious career. Especially when there's a title on the door.

Our kids became teenagers. The ethos of the time was not to worry about their filthy rooms, just close the door. A friend who was a counselor advised: If the kids' room doesn't open onto the living room without a door, and it doesn't stink, leave it alone.” Tell Rick's story on 23rd.

We began to play: bridge, tennis, backpacking (VISOR, Neckerchief)

### **80's AGE OF THE GOOD AND THE BAD**

Cold war, military spending, Star Wars, instant gratification Instant gratification

Return to spirituality: New Age and community churches Awareness of the Glass Ceiling and sexual harassment.

PUT ON TIE:

Women who chose or went into professional careers later started wearing the famous "Power Suit" Some of us found us with an "empty nest" and grieved, or celebrated. But we all found something to do with time previously dedicated to family: Church or community volunteering; Many of us went back to college to get another degree, or just to learn something new. Some had grandchildren.

Some found their marriages ending as differences became too great, and they were forced to work...or chose to start a career..

Many had mid-life crises. I divorced in 1980, moving a few blocks away, but leaving our youngest sons, 14 and 16, with their father. By then I had earned a MS in special ed and put my energies into "saving" emotionally disturbed children. In 1981 later I moved to SF to embark in a graduate program....a new life.

"It's a good thing to have the props pulled out from u

Suddenly the backlash occurred. Whereas, before, working women were criticized as "abandoning the family", during the later 80s, to say you're a stay-at-home mom brought raised eyebrows and judgment.

In the 70s and 80s we began seeing the lives of our daughters, nieces and friends dramatically different from ours in the 50s and 60s.

The effects of Title 9 passed in 1972: women's athletics available. In 1972, when my daughter was 11, she played on a softball team with her 9-year old brother, because she was stubborn, and the coach needed a good player. The parents from the opposing team actually tried to boo her off the field.

We weren't soccer moms, but moms who chauffeured our kids to all their activities, anxious for our daughters to take advantage of Title IX What a payoff! Times are different! Many of us now have excellent female athletes in our families, and even all you former OSC football or basketball players are just as supportive of women's sports as men's. While my husband prefers men's football and basketball, he attends our granddaughters' soccer games though he doesn't understand any of it, except kicking in a goal.

90's – AGE OF TECHNOLOGY – Internet: instant communication.

Crisis in public education

MTV, cell phones

Women attempting to balance work and home....Do it all. WE turned 60 and some refused to retire at 65.

Many of us were working by then, and still facing discrimination and harassment in the workplace. Our ideas were downplayed or ignored. Our pay was less than our male colleagues. Rarely did we do more than speak out against it. I'm wondering if any in our midst were "whistleblowers."

TRAVEL: Put on hat from Buffalo jump-over cliff"

More retired and began real travel – Europe, Asia, New Zealand. Some took up birding, golf. Our schedules got surprisingly busy!

## **2000 – AGE OF THE MILENNIUM**

When we were younger, we thought that when we were grown up we would no longer be vulnerable. But to grow up is to accept vulnerability. To be a live is to be vulnerable." L'Engle.

What was different for younger women?

Before Title IX, many schools refused to admit women or enforced strict limits. Some statistics highlighting the advancements follow:

Technical fields – few entering because of lack of role models. Actually, the number has gone down because :women have concerns over time commitment required to the complete exclusion of other life activities.

Young women desire a career with camaraderie, support, professionalism, courtesies – not expected in technical fields. 1984 – 37% undergrad degrees in technical fields; Dropped to 20% in 1999.

1992 stats: # women PhD in the following fields comparable or nearly compared to men. All doctoral degrees: 55% men, 45% women )25% in '77

Expected

General education –

Secretarial & admins. Services = 2:1 Human resources mgt. – 2:1

Agricultural and natural resources – 1:4 ` Food sciences and technology 50%

City/urban community and regional planning Ethnic, cultural studies

Medical over 50% (9% in '72)

Law schools and seminary – over 50% (7% in /72) Botany

Misc. biological specializations

Communications and comm.. technologies – over 50%

Foreign languages and literatures – over 50% Master's in Health professions – 3:1

Mental health counseling – 5:1

Psychology – 60%

Visual and performing arts 60%

`Gen X/Y – Time magazine: 8% earning \$100,000 or more. Many marry for first time after 30; only 3% after 35.

III. What's needed as we move further into our seventies?

In our seventies, we can easily look back and make more sense of our lives than ever before. What my daughter asks her daughters is just apt for us at 70: "You need to make wise choices" and add "AND PLAN WELL."

PUT ON PURPLE HAT

READ: Viorst's "A Whole Other Stage" p. 26.

Growing old is inevitable; growing up is optional.

First: Accept change, both personal and societal. And don't take any of it personally. Every change is a challenge to become who we really are."

If nothing ever changed, there'd be no butterflies.

Couples living together before marriage.

Our children's divorce; concern about grandchildren Health issues; loss of spouse

Downsizing, moving to retirement or care centers. Shifting in our spiritual or religious philosophies Economic/financial changes

2. Deal with loss. Do your grieving, and then, focus on what's right in your life, not what's wrong.

Barn's burned down. Now I can see the moon.

3. Have a sense of humor – not taking ourselves too seriously

My goal is to say or do at least one outrageous thing a week. Maggie Kuhn, head of the Grey Panthers – at 80.

Laughter is the music of the soul. It's also good for your immune system. Being here this weekend is good for your health!

4. Be outrageous! Be creative! Keep the brain cells growing. Learn to speak another language. (Do some translations of current terms with Erin and present).

Grandmothers have changed!

READ POEM "Where have all the grammas gone?"

Play a lot. We are a very responsible generation who was not given permission to play unless our work was done!

When you can spend a perfectly useless afternoon in a perfectly useless manner, you have learned how to live.

## **5. THINK ABOUT YOUR GIFTS AND LEGACIES.**

Dream and you'll live forever; live as if you'll die today.

Even those of us who moved beyond the small circle of family and friends to do BIG things in the world – corporate, business – ultimately return back to that small intimate group. The place where truth and vulnerability are shared, where unconditional love is given and received.

Women are by nature relationship oriented. We pass traditions on, but it's usually the daughters who enact them for their families.

KEEP PASSING THE TORCH

I attended my 14-year old granddaughter's track meet last week, observing her run the relay. I realized that's a metaphor for where we are in our lives: giving things away, bit by bit, to the next couple of generations.

It might be something as tangible as an old piece of silver that was your grandmother's, or a bit of wisdom passed on to a grandchild, or unconditional love to a cranky friend or a rebellious child, or an impatient partner who can't hear or doesn't understand what you're trying to say.

It might be courage – supporting someone to take a stand for them, to leave a job, relationship that is not nurturing or does not help her fulfill her wondrous potential.

It might be humor – not humor with a bite or with sarcasm, just good laughter. One of my granddaughters was reading and acting out the comics a few weeks ago, and her goofiness and was tonic to my ailing immune system.

It might be the love of reading and conversation, as a deterrent to the powerful and sometimes negative effects of TV and the Internet.

It might be the passing of family stories, and history, and the love of nature.

It might be the fear you showed after you got your doctor's diagnosis...and the courage you showed as you faced that fear and moved towards recovery.

Being loved by others, and accepting that love is an humbling experience, because you receive that love, not by your ego, but in that deep place of the soul. And of course that works in reverse....every time you love someone.

And after this? We might want to join the Red Hat Organization. (for you techies, just look up red hats on Google. Hats on! PUT ON RED HAT.

You might be in a tea room somewhere and there's a group of high-spirited older women wearing red hats and purple dresses, you'll know they're taking advantage of one of the most effective and inexpensive antidotes for aging- acceptance laced with humor.

It's a bit of dis-organization, no rules. Just a dress code: red hats and purple dresses. After a lifetime of following the rules and pleasing others, they figured they've earned the right to dress gaudily if they want to.

One woman said, "You can tell someone is over 50 when they stop taking themselves for seriously."