

VANITY FAIR

OCTOBER 1993/\$3.00

Menendez Murder Trial
**DOMINICK DUNNE'S
COURTROOM NOTEBOOK**

Special Issue 10TH

ANNIVERSARY

**A 32-Page Gallery of
Extraordinary
Images**

ACT TWO

**Exceptional Women
Redefine Turning 50
by Gail Sheehy**

SARAJEVO'S SOUL
Annie Leibovitz
in the
Besieged City

**THE APARTMENT
THAT HAS
PARIS BURNING**
by Bob Colacello

TABLOID WARRIORS
Murdoch
and Zuckerman
Slug It Out
by Edward Klein

Julia in Love

**JULIA ROBERTS TALKS ABOUT HER MARRIAGE,
HER MOVIES, AND WHY SHE TOOK TIME OFF**
by Kevin Sessums



VANITY FAIR

Volume 56 Number 10

October 1993



*L.A., well Dunne,
page 252.*



*Sarajevo shots,
page 242.*



*The Eiffel truth,
page 260.*

Special Anniversary Portfolio

Vanity Fair Celebrates: 10 years of riot, revolution, and excess 197

Features

The Crown Julia: After a two-year silence, Julia Roberts talks it all out with Kevin Sessums. Photographs by Herb Ritts 234

Sarajevo the Besieged: Annie Leibovitz takes her camera to the epicenter of Bosnia's endless war. Text by David Rieff 242

Dominick Dunne's Courtroom Notebook: Los Angeles has been riveted by the murder trial of the Menendez brothers; Dominick Dunne is there. Photograph by Wayne Maser 252

Lend Me Two Tenors: Helmut Newton spotlights Luciano Pavarotti and Placido Domingo as they open the Metropolitan Opera's fall season 258

Oh So São! Is São Schlumberger's over-the-top Paris apartment a triumph of design, or has the art collector gone too far? Bob Colacello gets an eyeful. Photographs by Eric Boman 260

The Flaming Fifties: A new generation of women is making 50 fabulous. Gail Sheehy explores the transformation 270

Becoming a Legend: In an excerpt from their new biography, Dodie Kazanjian and Calvin Tomkins chart the rocky beginning of Alex Liberman's dazzling career. Portraits by Annie Leibovitz 274

Columns

Cultural Elite: Christopher Hitchens is awed—and terrified—by Martha Stewart's multimedia empire 80

Paper Lions: Edward Klein watches the ink run red as press lords Mort Zuckerman and Rupert Murdoch go tabloid to tabloid 90

China's Red Princes: A privileged cadre is taking control of the world's fastest-growing economy; Andrew and Leslie Cockburn investigate 108

He'll Always Have Elaine's: In 1971, literary wunderkind Willie Morris was forced into exile. Michael Shnayerson reports on Morris's comeback 130

Shadow of the Sevso Treasure: As the trial opens, David D'Arcy traces an international scheme to sell a multimillion-dollar cache of Roman silver 150

Hollywood's Last Angry Man: From *M*A*S*H* and *Nashville* to *The Player*, Robert Altman has been filmmaking's top iconoclast. Zoë Heller finds out what else Altman has in store 170

Vanities

Montana matrimony; Hype & Glory; Robert Burke plays cops and robots; George Wayne Czechs out Ivana; 80s versus 90s; and much more 183

Et Cetera

Editor's Letter: Party of the decade 8

Contributors 26

Letters: In the line of fire 40

Credits 315

Planetarium: Libra, scaling the heights 318

Social Study: After directing *The Age of Innocence*, Martin Scorsese gets wise . . 320

Editor's Letter

Party of the Decade

Ten years of *Vanity Fair*. Ten years of riot, revolution, and excess. Think of the magazine in your hands as a dinner party—a raucous, all-night affair, with companions who have just returned from faraway places with wonderful stories to tell. And they've brought pictures!

This month Annie Leibovitz presents a remarkable portfolio of the heroes and heroines of Sarajevo, the unarmed soldiers who maintain the soul of the city while its body dies. . . Dominick Dunne reports on the Los Angeles trial of the Menendez brothers, accused of murdering their parents for their inheritance (a story Dunne first covered for *V.F.* three years ago, when the boys were arrested). . . Bob Colacello has just come back from Paris with an inside look at the apartment everyone in Europe has been talking about but few have actually seen—the brilliantly outrageous home of art hostess São Schlumberger. . . **And Gail Sheehy breaks new ground in her ongoing examination of the stages of life, this time in a report on how a new generation of women is redefining what it means to be 50.**

There is much more—above all, beginning on page 197, a scrapbook of just a few of the greatest hits from the past 10 extraordinary years. As you leaf through this flashback you should know that getting the impossible-to-get stories re-



ANNIE LEIBOVITZ

quires not only the most stellar group of writers and photographers ever assembled under one roof, and the omnipresent eye of Alex Liberman (see page 274 for the tale of Liberman's early years at Condé Nast), but a hugely talented and devoted staff working furiously behind the scenes. Some, like executive literary editor Wayne Lawson and art and design director Charles Churchward, have been here since the magazine's first year. Excellence is about the ability to make the extremely difficult appear effortless. This, Lawson, Churchward, and their colleagues do every month. They are the chefs and sous-chefs of the dinner party. They snare and dress the movie star, hunt ideas and images, edit the often last-minute stories, design the stunning layouts, polish the prose, and double-check the facts. In short, they bring these pages as near to perfection as possible, with flair, flexibility, and dedication. And they stand ready as we prepare to cover the world's next 10 years—their riot, revolution, and excess—in the way that only *Vanity Fair* can.

Graydon Carter

Editor in chief

Cover

Julia, Take Two

ON THE COVER
Julia Roberts
wears a knit-and-
lace dress by
Gianni Versace.
Hair by
Serge Normant.
Makeup by
François Nars.
Styled by
Marina Schiano.
Photographed
exclusively for *V.F.*
by Herb Ritts.



Julia's gotta love it, *left*, standing barefoot in a steel-magnolia pose on the back porch of the Home Place plantation in Hahnville, Louisiana. Roberts, with Herb Ritts in the upstairs parlor, *below*, wears a dress by Fernando Sanchez.



Contributors



© 2001 Schieffelin & Somerset Co., NY, Cognac Hennessy 40% Alc. Vol. (80°)

IT'S TIME TO SHAKE UP YOUR IDEA OF A MARTINI.

The Hennessy Martini. Combine 2oz of Hennessy V.S and a squeeze of lemon over ice. Stir gently, don't shake. Strain into a martini glass. Or ask your bartender.



TIMOTHY GREENFIELD-SANDERS

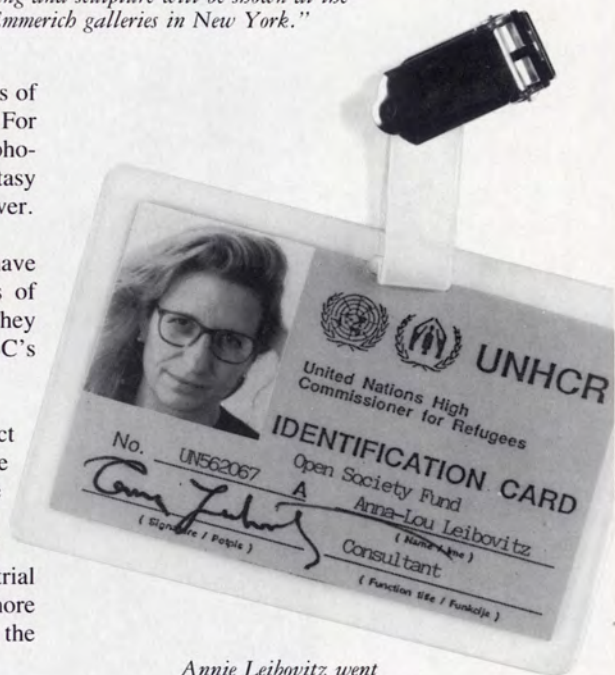
Calvin Tomkins and Dodie Kazanjian collaborated on Alex: The Life of Alexander Liberman, just out from Knopf and excerpted in this issue (page 274). Tomkins, a staff writer for The New Yorker, is at work on a biography of Marcel Duchamp for Henry Holt. Kazanjian writes about artists for Vogue. Of Liberman they say, "Alex is the only person we know who has managed to perform at the highest levels as an artist and in the world of big-time publishing. After half a century, he's still running the show at Condé Nast; this season his painting and sculpture will be shown at the Gagosian and Emmerich galleries in New York."

Eric Boman is at work on a series of still lifes for a book and a show. For this issue, he traveled to Paris to photograph São Schlumberger's fantasy world at the foot of the Eiffel Tower.

Andrew and Leslie Cockburn have reported for *V.F.* on the worlds of war, intelligence, and drugs. They also collaborate on stories for ABC's *Day One*.

David D'Arcy says of the subject of his article this month, the Sevso Treasure, "If it had gone through, the Sevso sale would have been the greatest triumph of the 80s art boom. Now the Sevso trial is likely to make people even more skeptical about any antiquities on the market."

Dominick Dunne, whose latest novel is the best-selling *A Season in Purgatory* (Crown), (Continued on page 30)



Annie Leibovitz went to Sarajevo to document life in wartime for an extraordinary portfolio, page 242.

Contributors

(Continued from page 26)



MARINA SCHIANO

Bob Colacello started writing for V.F. under Leo Lerman, and has been a contributing editor, a senior editor, and a special correspondent for the magazine. This month he visits São Schlumberger's Paris dream house, page 260.

returned to L.A. to cover the murder trial of the Menendez brothers. His first report on the story, "Nightmare on Elm Drive," appeared in the October 1990 issue of V.F.

Zoë Heller lives in London and is a feature writer for *The Independent on Sunday*.



JESSE FROHMAN

Kevin Sessums, who does commentary for Fox TV's Front Page, caught up with Julia Roberts in D.C. to ask her a few pertinent questions, starting on page 234. In January, he will appear in Armistead Maupin's Tales of the City on PBS.

Christopher Hitchens's latest book, *For the Sake of Argument: Essays and Minority Reports*, is just out from Verso.

Edward Klein, who writes this month on New York's tabloid wars, began his career as a copyboy for the *New York Daily News*. He has also worked for the old *World Telegram and the Sun*, *Newsday*, and *The New York Times*. "The only New York paper I haven't worked for," Klein says, "is the *Post*, and former publisher Dolly Schiff once tried to hire me there."

Wayne Maser, the photographer, is based in New York and L.A. His work has also appeared in *American Vogue*, *Allure*, and *Interview*.



SARA BARRETT

Gail Sheeby's groundbreaking reports on female and male menopause both appeared first in V.F. She is currently exploring middle life for a book in progress. This month, beginning on page 270, she focuses on "a phenomenon that everyone is noticing but no one has articulated—the rise to rule of women in their Flaming Fifties."

David Rieff has been traveling back and forth between Bosnia and the U.S. for the past year, and is writing a book about the war in the former Yugoslavia.

Michael Shnayerson is at work on a book for Random House about the unprecedented efforts of Detroit's Big Three car companies to create the first mass-produced electric vehicle.

Donald J. Trump
Presents
The Landmark.
The Legend.

The Plaza
NEW YORK

The Plaza Hotel, Fifth Avenue & Central Park South
New York, New York 10019
For reservations, call 1-212-546-5493.
Outside New York, call 1-800-759-3000.

When you know
your worth

Omega Constellation
18K gold and stainless steel
ladies' watch with diamond bezel.
Scratch-resistant sapphire crystal.
Water resistant.
Swiss made since 1848.



Ω
OMEGA®
The sign of excellence

©1993 Omega, a division of SMH (US) Inc.

SAKS FIFTH AVENUE

VANITY FAIR®

Editor in Chief **E. GRAYDON CARTER**

Managing Editor **CHRIS GARRETT** Art and Design Director **CHARLES CHURCHWARD**
Executive Literary Editor **WAYNE LAWSON** Executive Editor **ELISE O'SHAUGHNESSY**
Features Editor **JANE SARKIN**
Senior Articles Editor **MICHAEL CARUSO**
Senior Editors **GEORGE HODGMAN, MICHAEL SHNAYERSON, ROBERT WALSH**
Creative Style Director **MARINA SCHIANO**
Special Correspondents **DOMINICK DUNNE, BOB COLACELLO, MAUREEN ORTH**
European Editor **SARAH GILES** Editor-at-Large **HAMILTON SOUTH**
Special Projects Editor **REINALDO HERRERA** Writer-at-Large **NORMAN MAILER**
Assistant Managing Editor **ANN POWELL**
Photo Editor **SUSAN WHITE** Associate Art Director **DAVID HARRIS**
Vanities Editors **AIMÉE BELL, MATTHEW TYRNAUER**
Copy Editor **PETER DEVINE** Associate Copy Editor **JAMES CHOLAKIS**
Research Editor **PATRICIA J. SINGER** Research Associates **JOHN BANTA, SIMON BRENNAN, K. PETER HERMANN, SUSAN KITTENPLAN, SEAN MURPHY, THOMAS ROSTON**
Executive Assistant to the Editor in Chief **PAT KINDER**
Editorial Business Manager **SUSAN GOODALL** Production Director **ELLEN KIELL**
Features Assistant **TINA SKOURAS** Assistant Editors **LISA GAREY, MARIA AVADNA RICAPITO**
Style Associate **KIM MEEHAN** Assistant Style Editor **ALYSSA M. LEAL**
Editorial Assistants **FELICE BARASH, RIZA CRUZ, EMILY EAKIN, AMY B. HARRIS, ROMY POKORNY**
Assistant Photo Editor **LISA BERMAN** Photo Associate **SUNHEE CHOI**
Assistant Art Director **JANENE HIGGINS** Senior Designer **GREGORY MASTRIANNI**
Art Assistant **BETH P. ALTSCHULL**
Production Associate **MARY TOOLEY**
Copy Production Manager **DEDE DEMOSS** Copy Production Associate **LINDA M. SOTNYCHUK**
Foreign Correspondent **T. D. ALLMAN**
Contributing Editors **LYNN BARBER, ANN LOUISE BARDACH, LESLIE BENNETTS, JOAN JULIET BUCK, BRYAN BURROUGH, MILES CHAPMAN, ANDREW COCKBURN, LESLIE COCKBURN, AMY FINE COLLINS, NANCY COLLINS, GRAEF CRYSTAL, FRANK DEFORD, SHARON DELANO, SUSAN FALUDI, MARTIN FILLER, EDWARD W. HAYES, ZOË HELLER, LYNN HIRSCHBERG, CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS, GEORGE KALOGERAKIS, EDWARD KLEIN, WENDY LUERS, RICHARD MERKIN, DEBORAH MITCHELL, ANNE REINGOLD, JOHN RICHARDSON, ROGER ROSENBLATT, JOHN RYMAN, KEVIN SESSUMS, GAIL SHEEHY, MARK STEVENS, LUISITA LOPEZ TORREGROSA, DIANE VON FURSTENBERG, MARJORIE WILLIAMS**
Contributing Photographers **ANNIE LEIBOVITZ, HELMUT NEWTON, HERB RITTS, SNOWDON, JONATHAN BECKER, HARRY BENSON, MICHEL COMTE, DAFYDD JONES, FIROOZ ZAHEDI**
Contributing Artists **TIM SHEAFFER, ROBERT RISKO**
London Editor **HENRY PORTER** U.K. Editorial Coordinator **TANYA LENKOW**
West Coast Editor **KRISTA MARGOT SMITH** Los Angeles Editor **WENDY STARK MORRISSEY**
Paris Associate **VÉRONIQUE PLAZOLLES**
Director of Special Projects **SARA MARKS** Special Projects Assistant **THOMAS PIECHURA**
Director of Public Relations **BETH KSENIK** Public Relations Associate **ANINA C. MAHONEY**

Publisher **KATHY NEISLOSS LEVENTHAL**

Advertising Director **ELIZABETH W. HENRIQUES**
Director, Marketing and Business Development **STEPHEN JACOBY** Director, Marketing Services **JEAN KARLSON**
Business Manager **KAREN D. LEVINE** Marketing Manager **CAROL SANFORD SWIRSKY**
Merchandising Director **JANINE SILVERA** Promotion Manager **ELIZABETH MORLEY**
New York Account Managers **PATRICIA FOSTER, JULIE KRUMHOLZ, JOHN J. LIPUMA, PETER NAYLOR, GAY B. PRIZIO, JANE SCHOENHOLTZ**
Los Angeles Manager **NICHOLAS W. FREEDMAN** Account Manager **KAREN ARGOW**
San Francisco Manager **MARTHA PERZ NORA** Midwest Manager **PAMELA DOLBY**
Southeast Manager **DENNIS DOUGHERTY, 115 Perimeter Center Pl., Suite 1035, Atlanta, Ga. 30346**
New England **JAMES DINGEE, 8 Faneuil Hall Marketplace, Boston, Mass. 02109**
Detroit **ALBAUM, MAIORANA & ASSOCIATES, INC., 418 W. Fifth Street, Suite C, Royal Oak, Mich. 48067**
France **SYLVIE MCKENZIE, S & R Media, 127 Rue du Ranelagh, 75016 Paris, France**
Italy **MIRELLA DONINI, Mia S.P.R., Piazza Duca d'Aosta 8, 20124 Milan, Italy**

VANITY FAIR is published by The Condé Nast Publications Inc.,
Condé Nast Building, 350 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017
Chairman **S. I. NEWHOUSE JR.** President **BERNARD H. LESER**
Executive Vice Presidents **JOHN B. BRUNELLE, JOSEPH L. FUCHS, PAMELA M. VAN ZANDT**
Executive Vice President-Treasurer **ERIC C. ANDERSON** Vice President-Circulation **PETER A. ARMOUR**
Vice Presidents-Manufacturing and Distribution **IRVING HERSCHBEIN, KEVIN G. HICKEY**
Vice President-Corporate Advertising Svcs. **NEIL J. JACOBS** Vice President-Corporate Research **ECKART L. GÜTHE**
Vice President-Creative Marketing **ROCHELLE UDELL** Director of Advertising Production **PHILIP V. LENTINI**
Chairman Emeritus of Foreign Operations **DANIEL SALEM** Editorial Adviser **LEO LERMAN**

Editorial Director **ALEXANDER LIBERMAN**

THE FLAMING FIFTIES

Does life begin at 50? In the 17 years since her groundbreaking best-seller, *Passages*, GAIL SHEEHY has discovered a new generation of women redefining the concept of midlife. From Attorney General Janet Reno to Gloria Steinem to Barbra Streisand, the Woman of the 90s is in her 50s—enjoying power, glory, and life

A friend once confided that at 50 she felt like one of those park statues that turn green, weather-streaked, and crumbly, the kind that no one, not even the people on the benches right in front of it, notices anymore. Not long ago, women lived in fear that at 50 they would be finished. I was one of them, once.

I wasn't ready to be 50 until I was 52. It was not a passage that I looked forward to, and for the first six months I did indeed look older, paler, plumper, more wrinkled than ever. By the time I was 52, having incorporated a positive sense of my older self, I found I actually looked younger than two years before. I was

more productive and felt certain that the best stages of life were yet to be.

For the past three years I have been exploring the passage to the 50s and beyond. I vividly remember one of the first conversations I had on the subject. One of the most powerful women in Hollywood, a beautiful producer, had turned up at a summer dinner party on Long Island. She had already run a studio and seen several of her movies nominated for Academy Awards, and she looked like a woman with nothing in life to fear. After dessert, we fell into quiet conversation.

I asked her if she was at all worried about turning 50.

"Terrified," she said candidly. I was startled. "By the time I got to it, 40 was a snap because it was no longer 40," she went on. "But 45 is a totally different story. It means

you're on your way to 50." Career was not an issue. She was confident that she could always think up good films. But at 45 she had "freaked out" and was furious—at herself. She had intended to be one of those women who just glide through, accepting aging as a natural process. She would go on controlling her life, just as she always had, right? But there she was, a conventionally raised mid-western girl, who could scarcely remember once being married and who had never come to a decision about having children. Suddenly, ambivalence wasn't cute anymore. She was scared—about losing her looks before someone discovered something inside her worth cherishing.

"At 50 you have to say, 'What am I missing?' " she said, wincing. "By that time you can't blame it on circumstance or other people. Whatever is incomplete, it's *you* who has left it out."

Her words stayed with me. I began to wonder if the search for one's missing pieces is something that concerns only fortunate 50-year-olds accustomed to considerable control over life. Or do all women have the same yearnings? To distance myself from the Norma Desmonds of Hollywood and the Ivanas of New York, I made a research trip to Oregon and came to know a dozen feisty women in their 50s for whom vanity and status were the least of concerns. I will never forget the story of Justine Heavilon, the daughter of a cleaning lady, who spent her early years living in other people's back rooms.

Picture Justine at 19: face dented by a battering husband, body bagged out from four births. A high-school dropout, she spent nights standing the swing shift, candling eggs in a cold sulfur-smelling factory, speechless against the din of machinery. She had no models beyond other uneducated women with bad teeth and beaten-up wombs, women who were old at 25. But she felt things, powerful things. She knew she had creativity inside her. (Almost all the women I've interviewed recall a wilder, creative spirit from their pre-adolescence.)

At 26, Justine discovered that she had uterine cancer and required a hysterectomy. Two years later, her third husband left her with no job, no car, five children, and a ninth-grade education. She was crushed. But this close encounter with death, coming so early, made it starkly clear to her that she needed to make every day count.

Justine spent the next 12 years squirreling away money from child support, school loans, food stamps, fellowships, and "garbaging" in dumpsters to put herself through high school, college, and graduate school. Why didn't the constant struggle wear her down, as it does so many working-

In June, at the end of her research, Gail Sheehy gathered a group of women from many areas of the country and all walks of life in a celebration of "the Flaming Fifties."

Some of the participants were, *from left*: Barbara Reynolds, writer and future minister; Lynn Nesbit, literary agent; singer Judy Collins; businesswoman Ginny Ford; Linda Ellerbee, TV producer and former anchor; and Gail Sheehy.



Mrs. Clinton's vague, vulnerable references to a "politics of meaning" over the last year are a sign that she is actively engaged in the transformative work of this passage.

class women? "I had a dream and I loved to learn," she said, adding that it also depends on how much of your life you spend drunk or stoned. (A study of women suffering from alcoholism found their life expectancy was diminished by an average of 15 years.)

At 34, she was a grandmother. By 40, she had earned a Ph.D. in psychology. By 44, she had sent her last child off to college and started her own psychotherapy practice in Eugene. "You can do a lot when you're not spending your energy being a wife!" she quipped. But, for all her accomplishments, Justine still had not found her voice. For 30 years, her own desires had remained unsatisfied. Like most

members of the Silent Generation, she had forfeited her own identity to conform to the traditional role of caregiver, and was left feeling empty in her 40s.

"Not me!" Justine had vowed. "I'm not going to have empty-nest syndrome—I've already launched a new life." But she found herself thinking about how female animals, like trout, drop their eggs, grow flabby, and die. Remembering her mid-40s, she grimaced. "I felt a lot like a flabby trout."

You might assume that from here on Justine would be a prisoner of the personality and perspective of her First Adulthood, the period roughly between the ages of 25 and 45. "People never change," goes the shibboleth. But the old notion that our personalities develop in an orderly, linear way and are pretty well fixed by adolescence is plainly wrong.

At 48, Justine knew what she had to do. The secret lay in shedding outgrown roles. She had already dropped the wife role and shaken off the mantle of matriarch. Still, she wasn't free to find her own voice. Why? She had filled her "office house" with other therapists, to whom she was on call as "mother," the one who fixed everything. She had exchanged her kids for a "family" of colleagues. Many traditional women have adapted similarly to life after 50, never really seeking autonomy or developing an identity beyond the derivative one of grandmother. They simply take over the baby-sitting and potty training of a new generation while daughter or daughter-in-law goes off to corporate battle.

Justine was more daring. She knew she had to let go of the caregiver-matriarch identity if she was to return to that girl whose creativity was suppressed. "If you've clung to the creative spirit somewhere in the soul," she believes, "you can still regain it, even after a long period of servitude."

Escaping to the rugged Oregon coast, Justine built a house with a view of her own where she could write and explore her inner life. There are no bedrooms for children; that is key. The woman I found there, at 50, with huge fig-colored eyes and a froth of gray hair, looked prettier and far more energetic than the tired, stooped workhorse she had been at 19. Whom did she feel she had to please now?

"Nobody!" she exclaimed. "It's so wonderful. I have no lover. My kids write me notes saying, 'You're my hero.'" She is fiercely committed to making an impact by writing.

Since those early interviews, for a book in progress, I have conducted a questionnaire survey and made case studies of well over 100 women in their 50s, often interviewing them several times over the three-year course of research. When I went back to talk to my producer friend, for example, I found a woman no longer afraid. She had incorporated the intimacy missing in her life. It sounded like a romantic movie: girl sees boy across a crowded room and discovers he's in the movies, too. Instantly they fall in love, elope, and marry. To top it off, she fulfills her maternal needs by playing part-time stepmom to a child of 10 and takes a bow for yet another hit movie. But it was deeper than this scenario might imply.

Having reached a stage of self-acceptance where she no

longer needed to please or pretend, the producer could drop the "false self" of young-adulthood. She had found a peer who would accept her as she was. Now she could face getting older in alliance with her more authentic self. At 49, feeling nourished for the first time in her life, she is not dreading menopause. "I would have if I was alone," she admits. "But now I wake up every morning to a man who thinks I'm the most beautiful thing in the world, who wouldn't know it if I gained 10 pounds. The only reason he'd divorce me is if I had my face done."

Both the movie producer and Justine had lost contact with their fathers at a very early age. By their mid-40s, they had each given up the fantasy of being rescued by a male father figure. "If I had continued to be married," said Justine, "I'd be bitter by now, just like my mother was. At least for me, that role of wife limited how far I could go in developing as a person." Similarly, the producer said that "at 45 I stopped looking for my father. I was no longer looking for someone to rescue me." Both women had moved on to a different passage and engaged its major task of finding and fleshing out the pieces of themselves they had left behind.

The leitmotif in the stories I've heard is surprise in discovering that entering the middle years today does not have to mean descent. On the contrary, this is a passage to the heights of well-being in most women's lives.

Call it the Flaming Fifties. Women at this stage in life find themselves blazing with energy and accomplishment as never before in history. The passage to the 50s has been radically altered since the early 1970s, when I began the research on *Passages*. I barely touched on life beyond 50 in that book; being only in my mid-30s at the time, I couldn't imagine myself at that age. Most people I interviewed then thought of 50 as "over the hill," and the narrowing of their lives reflected that attitude. But contemporary women now moving into the Flaming Fifties are redefining the passage, adding a new phase that expands and enriches their Second Adulthood. This is a major social change.

To test out this thesis beyond the anecdotal evidence from individual stories, I circulated an extensive life-history questionnaire at 11 large public conferences on women's health issues where I was a speaker. Of the 687 women who responded (average age, 50), the majority had followed a traditional path through First Adulthood, marrying on average at age 22 and having a first child at 25. Half had divorced, usually around the age of 33. While the survey did not draw from a strict random sample (the respondents all had a strong interest in women's health issues) and the numbers are admittedly small, the sample includes women from almost every state in the country and from the lower-middle as well as the upper-middle income brackets.

Ninety percent of these women say that 50 feels like "an optimistic, can-do stage of life." The majority agree that the struggles that once sapped so much of their emotional energy have subsided by now. The results strongly suggest that the dominant influence on a woman's well-being is not income level or marital status; the most decisive factor is age. Older is happier.

The Woman of the 90s will be in her 50s—or so it became apparent as I was pursuing my research. Every time I pick up a newspaper, another “flamer” is confidently assuming command: U.S. ambassador Madeleine Albright (56), shaping world policy at the United Nations; Janet Reno (55), balancing the scales of justice as America’s first female attorney general; Cabinet secretary Donna Shalala (52), helping to lead the health-care reformation; Ruth Bader Ginsburg (60), once the backseat wife encouraging her husband to go to law school, now joining Sandra Day O’Connor on the Supreme Court. Just this year, Senators Dianne Feinstein (60) and Barbara Boxer (52) led a pack of 50-ish fresh-women into that bastion of aging male back scratchers: the U.S. Congress. In the fall of 1994, some 35 women, most in their 50s, expect to enter gubernatorial races. Women around 50 now lead Canada (Kim Campbell, 46), Turkey (Tansu Çiller, 47) and Norway (Gro Brundtland, 54) and are health and finance chiefs in various European countries. This trend will only widen as the aging of America and European societies accelerates.

The Flaming Fifties woman is transforming the whole concept of middle life—from decline to rule. It may be a revival of women’s ancient roles as priestesses and healers, a shift necessary to revive sick patriarchies and address a health and environmental crisis in the waning days of the 20th century. Or it may just be an old habit. The 50s woman belongs to a generation that has pushed every step of the way. She broke out of 50s conformity into 60s revolution, 70s feminism, and 80s ambition. With everything she’d learned, she roared into the 1990s, having already detonated the expectations others had for her—and the ones she had for herself.

Women in or soon to enter the Flaming Fifties actually straddle two generations. The point women of the Vietnam Generation, led by Hillary Clinton (45), are already in the passageway to the Flaming Fifties (and not all are happy about it). Mrs. Clinton herself said that of all the insulting campaign press criticisms, “the only one that really hurt, and one of the few that was really true, is that I’m middle-aged. . . . I couldn’t believe it when I saw that in print.”

Although they may not realize it yet, Mrs. Clinton and other women in the Vietnam Generation (the forward half of the baby-boomers) stand to gain momentum from the sparks their older sisters have already thrown off. Consider this: by the year 2000, of all adult American women, 42 percent will be over 50. The U.S. Bureau of the Census predicts that this powerhouse age group will number nearly 42 million by then, and it will only continue to swell: the fastest-growing age population is women between 40 and 60. How will American society reconcile its youth fetish with the values of its soon-to-be-50 baby-boomers? Having indulged themselves in the longest adolescence in history, will the forward guard of the Vietnam Generation, in their terror and disgust about aging, push the envelope of “middle age” to 60?

The boomer point women are preceded across the great divide by women socialized in the 1950s, members of the so-called Silent Generation. They are anything but silent now. California state treasurer Kathleen Brown, 48, is already a fireball, gathering steam and an impressive war chest as the favored gubernatorial candidate in the most populous state in the nation. It is fitting that this daughter of a famous political dynasty now assumes it is her turn to contend for the place of power once held by her family’s men (former governors Pat Brown, her father, and Jerry Brown, her brother). At the far end of the Silent Generation are Governor Ann Richards (60)

Discussion at the June gathering focused on many subjects—from each woman’s feelings about turning 50 to forgiveness. Pictured here, from left: Jungian analyst Elizabeth Stevenson, Mary Ann Goff, student, and Judith Jamison, artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.



“Something happened of its own accord,” says Joni Mitchell. “You can feel it created by a chemical change in your body as you go over that hump.”

of Texas and Governor Barbara Roberts (56) of Oregon. Like Kathleen Brown, both married and had babies early. Their children were out of the house while these women were still young, enabling them to be single-minded about climbing the ladder in a tough, male-dominated career structure. By age 50 they were prepared for high positions.

In every field of endeavor, women in their Flaming Fifties are exerting influence. Many who have led very public lives are remaking themselves for a Second Adulthood right before our eyes. In her early 50s, Gloria Steinem (now 59) looked frozen in time. Still pencil-slim and leggy, in her signature minis, with her long 60s (*Continued on page 302*)

Becoming a Legend

material itself. In my experience with *Vu*, design didn't count. I never designed a layout at *Vu*. I'd look at the material and say, This is a wonderful picture, let's make it big, don't let's have the title damage it. Or, conversely, I might allow the journalistic content of the title to dominate the image. I came to believe in the unexpected, in chance, in doing things that hadn't been done before and didn't conform to any established design principles. At *Vogue*, I wanted to break the design obsession, so I defended a more journalistic approach—rougier lettering, no white space, crowded pages, messier layouts."

He was tilting at windmills, of course. Edna Chase, who had been editor in chief at *Vogue* since Alex was two years old, was not interested in messy layouts. She warned Jessica Daves, her eventual successor, that the art department must never

be allowed to "take over" the magazine, and from time to time she would call Alex into her office and ask him to explain why he had chosen to use a photograph that struck her as singularly inelegant. As often as not, the photograph was by Penn, and Alex could find no words to explain its strength or importance. Once, she summoned him to a meeting at Patcévitch's house to complain about the tabloid-style lettering that kept appearing in *Vogue*. She said it was causing people to cancel their subscriptions. Alex didn't argue the point, and from then on, until Mrs. Chase retired, there was less of the offensive Franklin Gothic type in the magazine.

Alex and Mrs. Chase liked and respected each other, but good manners kept him from telling her what he really thought. Alex felt, for example, that the title "art director" was a joke. The material that he dealt with in the art department every day was not art. The facile drawings of Eric or Willaumez were not art, and in Alex's mind

photographs—even Penn's photographs—could never be works of art, either. Photographs to him were documents—momentary glimpses of something that could be printed in ink on a magazine page and eventually discarded. That was their function and their fate. Although he had scarcely painted since he left Europe, Alex thought he knew what it meant to be an artist, and that knowledge, held in reserve in the back of his mind as something to which he could always return, made the absurdities and the frustrations of fashion journalism more bearable. "In a curious way I felt myself superior to everybody I was dealing with and to everything that I was doing," he said, "because I felt that I was an artist. I knew what real art was, or thought I knew, and this gave me a great deal of self-confidence—the kind of unquestioning self-confidence you need to be a good editor or a good art director. I felt that if I chose something, a picture or a layout, it must be right and it must be good. It was right because I chose it." □

The Flaming Fifties

(Continued from page 273) hair, she had all the trappings of youth but moved with reluctance, without animation, as if she were afraid to crack the shell that had served her so long. She seemed unsure of what, if anything, lay down deeper.

"I'd been dealing with aging by defiance," she told me in a conversation several years ago. "I was going to just continue the way I was... become a pioneer dirty old lady who dresses very inappropriately." But she realized the flaw in her defiance technique: "Although you're defying convention," she said, "you're not progressing. You're staying where you are, which is what I've always done," never moving from sister to mother, or from beautiful young woman to wise mature woman. "The victory is not just hanging on to what you already have against all onslaughts, but that you could do something different, and better." As she reached this understanding, she broke out of a troubling writer's block and brought from the depths of her own struggle *Revolution from Within*, one of the signature books of this decade.

Women in their 50s are asserting new power and perspectives in Hollywood. Sherry Lansing is chairman of Paramount Pictures. Barbra Streisand has emerged from her reclusive 40s and

finds that at 51 "I have much less fear." Streisand is trying to push herself out in the world, "to be more loving, more compassionate." Penny Marshall (the 49-year-old director of *A League of Their Own*) and Nora Ephron (the fiftysomething writer-director of *Sleepless in Seattle*, who does not release her age) are pushing the boundaries as well. But studio and network executives—"young callow men," Bette Midler calls them—still haven't bothered to try to represent the real soul and passion of middle-aged women on-screen. "Nobody in Hollywood says, Oh, boy—let's do a play about a 54-year-old woman who falls in love, who still has possibilities!" complains Wendy Wasserstein, the 42-year-old playwright who did just that in *The Sisters Rosensweig*, her hit comedy about three accomplished, still-lusty sisters. (Jane Alexander, 53, one of the play's original stars, moved a month ago from performer to policymaker as President Clinton's choice to head the National Endowment for the Arts.)

Some of America's favorite singers, who once strutted their seductiveness, are now composing a more fit, streamlined, and self-assured sexuality appropriate to their Flaming Fifties. Tina Turner, fearful at 53 that "you can't be a rock 'n' roll old woman," tested the waters on tour this summer and proved otherwise. Her body,

having matured, has a roundedness natural at this age, but now projects even greater physicality and personal power—without trying so hard. Having escaped 16 years of beatings by Ike Turner, Tina published her midlife autobiography to put an end to that chapter. Both the best-seller, *I, Tina*, and *What's Love Got to Do with It?*, the hit film based on the book, emphasize survival and resilience; Tina won't stand for the label of victim. "I stood up for my life," she told *Vanity Fair*.

Like Tina Turner and Gloria Steinem, who have consciously reinvented themselves for Second Adulthood, countless women in their 50s in writing classes, in journals, and on stages across the country are rewriting the personal histories of their young-adult years, not as songs and stories of victimization, defeat, and despair, but as songs and stories of transformation and triumph. This same phenomenon has been noted in works of contemporary literature, where we now have a midlife-progress narrative for very nearly the first time in Western literature. In her book, *Safe at Last in the Middle Years*, Margaret Morganroth Gullette shows how early novels by authors such as John Updike, Saul Bellow, Anne Tyler, and Margaret Drabble depicted young-adulthood as a threatening and overwhelming time. But as the writers themselves have moved

The Flaming Fifties

beyond that dangerous age, their characters have discovered the benefits that can follow lost youth: "I'm more myself than I've been my whole life long," says Macon Leary, protagonist of Tyler's novel *The Accidental Tourist*.

We are talking here about something that goes beyond any particular generation or social class or the details of private lives. The Flaming Fifties are part of a fundamental change in the adult life cycle. Indeed, I believe this presages a new set of stages across the entire life span. In this century alone, human beings have broken the evolutionary pattern. In 1900, a woman's proper expectation of 50 was to be dead. (Americans born in 1900 had a life expectancy of 47.) Today, the average middle-class member of most advanced societies can anticipate a 30-year stretch—or more—of mentally active, productive living *after* 50. Two-thirds of the total gain in life expectancy since the human species emerged has been made in this century!

For healthy women Second Adulthood may actually last longer than young-adulthood. Epidemiological studies suggest that an American woman who reaches age 50 today—free of cancer and heart disease—can expect to see her 92nd birthday. Pacesetter women of the Silent Generation and the ascendant Vietnam Generation are already mapping out new ways to remain fully alive during these extra years.

To be sure, this new consciousness has not reached everywhere. Many mature women still suffer from internalized images of themselves as tired, shapeless, sexless, and superfluous. Some continue with behaviors that contribute to accelerated deterioration, such as chain-smoking, drinking, and eating fatty foods. Blue-collar workingwomen and wives, in particular, may look and feel a decade older than professional women, especially if their middle-class status is being threatened by global economic realignment. Joyce Gibson, the 50-year-old wife of a United Auto Workers member at Caterpillar, who has watched both companies and unions abandon her generation, told *The Wall Street Journal*: "Our lives are dangling out here."

The passage into Second Adulthood must be distinguished from the earlier midlife passage, which is about the dying of youth and which generally occurs as we enter our 40s. Even as we arrive at the full

maturity of our First Adulthood, we are confronted with fearsome signals that we can no longer take for granted the physical, sexual, and occupational advantages that go with youth (can't read fine print; can't work, drink, or make love all night; can't bounce right back after straining a muscle; can't get pregnant without effort and risk).

These first signs begin to register for women in their mid-30s, often occasioning an early midlife personal inventory. To the degree that one is introspective, artistic, nontraditional, or easily unsettled by change, the midlife transition between these two definitive eras of adult life can take on the character of crisis. Others

Judy Collins says she found passing into her 50s exhilarating. "At last, we can get started!"

adapt more gradually and easily. By their mid-40s most women have restabilized, but the themes introduced in the early midlife passage are recapitulated in the late 40s.

Indeed, the late 40s often represent the pits for women, while the early 50s find them at their peak. According to my survey, the women with the lowest sense of well-being were, on average, 47 years old, while those enjoying the highest sense of well-being were, on average, 53. (This range also represents the acute period of biological passage for the average woman going through menopause.) But since entering their Flaming Fifties, a majority of these older women say, they have become more accepting of the aging process—less self-conscious and more outspoken. But before one breaks into this most productive stage, one must accept losses of certain cherished strengths that are fundamental to the identity of young-adulthood. Everyone feels anger and frustration at physical changes in the body.

For women, these losses are further accentuated by menopause. Letting go of the godlike power of reproduction naturally brings on a phase that is cheerless, if not bleak.

"When I turned 50, I cried a lot," says New York businesswoman Judy Corman, describing a common reaction. "You have to grieve, and then when you come out on the other side, it feels very liberating." Corman, already a successful shop owner, moved on to expand her education. On "the other side," she found work with deeper meaning for her, as director of public information for Phoenix House, the nation's largest drug-abuse service agency.

Singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell also describes a pits-to-peak passage. When we first talked, she was a mere babe of 48. When I asked her if she knew how to be 50, she answered mystically: "It will make itself known." Two years later I went back.

"I worry differently," she said. "I went over the hump of the middle-life crazies. There is a kind of mourning period—you go into grief for those things you can no longer do. But then something happened of its own accord. You can feel it created by a chemical change in your body as you go over that hump. Things don't bother me for as long. You weed them out. You have a greater ability to let go and say, 'Oh, I don't want to think about that now,' which is the thing I always admired about men."

An intriguing bit of biological research might validate Mitchell's artistic intuition. Between 40 and 60, people may actually lose cells in the part of the brain that responds to stress, the *locus coeruleus*.

It is particularly impressive to hear someone who has battled illness and depression all her life, as Joni Mitchell has, describe coming out into the clear at 50. The "Trouble Child" (the title of a song on her brilliant album *Court and Spark*), who retreated from society in her 20s, "figuring I'd just gone funny," has always camped out on the thin line between madness and genius. When I sat with her in L.A. in 1991, she was nervous and edgy, still chain-smoking. She had a black beret perched over her braided silver-blond hair, and her skin had the fragility of parchment. She acknowledges now that doing a lot of drugs "dries your juices right up—it really ages you. But I have no desire to go under the blade," she added defiantly.

A solid second marriage to a man younger by 13 years brought her personal happiness but disappointed her fans,

The Flaming Fifties

who would prefer her miserable and raving about love lost. "It was good for my life and bad for my career," she laughs. Fans also insisted that this icon of the 60s look eternally young—"because if you look good for your age, then they look good for their age." It was a time to retreat. Mitchell refused to repeat herself artistically and for a decade avoided performing.

As she neared 50, she found a renewed joy in songwriting. "Rather than turn into a jukebox, I've grown from this period of fallowness," she told me recently. She sings and records until two in the morning and then paints until dawn. But she's stopped painting for the art world (which, she says, wants "chenille toilet seats with embroidered bunnies") and relies on her own philosophy: "Paint what you like, and fuck 'em." She is working out a way to make her guitar sound like a complete orchestra, and she's found a family in the denizens of a local restaurant where she hones her mischievous humor. "I'm getting back to fun," she told me. With a new album due out next year, Joni is contemplating a solo tour. When she separated recently from her husband, Joni did not lapse into the usual depression. "Right now I feel happy and productive—and friendly. That's new." A girlfriend keeps asking her, "Joni, you're separated, why aren't you depressed?" Her answer speaks volumes about women in their 50s.

"I'm just not going to be." Joni Mitchell grins. "I've done that already."

Psychologically speaking, an old self has to die before a new one can be born. And the cycle of death and rebirth has definite phases, although there is considerable variation in the ages at which we grapple with the transition into the second half of adult life. If one has to pick a norm, 45 represents the old age of youth, while 50 initiates the youth of a woman's Second Adulthood. In between, a mourning phase usually sets in.

Whether we recognize it consciously or not, both women and men in their mid- to late 40s are simultaneously undergoing the dying of youth and stumbling into the infancy of Second Adulthood. The striving, competing, proving, and besting of rivals that lent a furious intensity to our young-adulthood, forming the basis of our ego identity, now feel more like dull repetitions of duty: *Why do I have to work so hard? What is it*

all for? This disillusion and ennui is just as natural to this passage as mood swings are to adolescence.

That is presumably why Hillary Rodham Clinton was "really hurt" at being called middle-aged. She wasn't yet ready to identify with the stage ahead; few people in their mid-40s are. But the surest indication that she is now caught up in the turmoil of this passage came in her stream-of-consciousness (delivered without notes) speech at the Liz Carpenter Lectureship Series at the University of Texas, for which she broke away from her father's deathbed. "Why is it in a country as wealthy as we are... that we lack, at some core level, meaning in our individual lives and meaning collectively—that sense that our lives are part of some greater effort, that we are connected to one another?... We are, I think, in a crisis of meaning."

The search for meaning becomes the universal preoccupation of Second Adulthood: it could even be called the Meaning Crisis. Moreover, one can no longer hope to be rescued by the father; approaching 50, we become our own fathers. In the case of the president's wife, her father's death must be reconciled with accepting full ownership of her awesome new political powers. Mrs. Clinton's vague, vulnerable references to a "politics of meaning" over the last year are a sign that she is well and actively engaged in the transformative work of this passage. (Which also explains those young male warriors at *The New Republic* and *The New York Times* who are so eager to ridicule and debunk her search for meaning in politics; they're too young to get it.) In Japan, at the G-7 economic summit last summer, there were signals that the First Lady was just beginning to put a toe in the waters of the Flaming Fifties. She told *The Washington Post*, "One of the big things about being here is to find out how *young 50* sounds."

At the culmination of my research, I had a last-minute idea for a brunch at my apartment in Manhattan. I wanted to share ideas about common themes in our personal journeys with some of the thoughtful women I'd interviewed over the past several years. It seemed fitting to bring it all together. I started by calling up singer Judy Collins. "I wouldn't miss it!" she said, and the next half-dozen women I phoned all sounded just as tickled. Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard, the first Mexican-American woman elected to the House, vowed to break away from the debate on the president's tax bill. Judith Jamison, artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, was enthu-

siastic, as was Linda Ellerbee, who had a refreshing concern. The TV anchorwoman turned essayist and producer wanted to be sure I knew she was only 48. Would that disqualify her? Hardly. She sounded genuinely flattered to be invited—a good sign. Identifying with older women is a positive step toward a successful passage to Second Adulthood.

Within 24 hours, an all-star team of nine women had eagerly accepted my invitation to come together in a celebration of our Flaming Fifties. Stunning in its absence was any hesitation among the invitees about going on the record about their ages. Sitting in my bedroom before they arrived that Sunday afternoon in June, I reviewed my notes on their lives.

"The first half of my life has been an attempt to get over the hurdles of motherhood, divorce, and trying to get the right to be an artist," Judy Collins had told me. "The most difficult thing to remember is that *this is what you're supposed to be doing*. It's almost a daily struggle."

Like so many women wishing for total acceptance from a parent, Judy has had to overcome the habit of driving herself toward the perfection she subliminally hoped might finally secure her father's love. A mythic figure to her, Judy's late alcoholic father hosted a popular Denver radio show. She was his "dreamboat," the gifted vehicle of his own aspirations. Though blind, he played the piano well, but Judy was expected to fulfill his dream of becoming a serious musician. He fully supported her as a performer, yet she was invisible to him as a little girl. When he demanded that she play a piano piece beyond her capacities on his show, she started thinking about how much simpler it would be to be dead. Her suicide attempt at 14 initiated a long battle with depressive episodes.

During her 20s, after a divorce and custody battles, it became clear she had a problem with alcohol. In her 30s "this thing inside of me—the talent—made me a prisoner, almost a hostage. The other side of me, the side who wants to have fun, was dragged along, fearful, always wondering, Can I do this?" Her career ruled her life and she became dependent on her record company to "take care of me." Reaching her late 30s, she was still acting like the gifted child. But by then "my act was a total disaster," she said. "I couldn't sing, I couldn't work. The next step would have been a locked ward." Elektra Records later dropped her flat.

The day after she committed to sobriety, she met a man with whom she has achieved the first mature love relationship of her life. But true healing, she said,

The Flaming Fifties

didn't take place until her mid-40s. The passage into her 50s she has found exhilarating. "At last, we can get started!" Now there is the discipline to go into a locked room voluntarily every day, to compose music or write prose. For the first time, she feels clarity about herself as an artist. "I have a vision of myself now," she told me at the age of 54, "as being a fully composed person."

Next I began to remember the poignant voice of author and *USA Today* columnist Barbara Reynolds, who had told me the story of her struggles as a black woman who was rejected by her own mother.

"The pain caused by a runaway mother cuts deeper than incest," Barbara said. She had endured both. Growing up with her grandmother in Columbus, Ohio, she'd hidden the fact that she had the highest I.Q. in her junior high school, just as now, at 48, she hides inside excess weight. Barbara described how it had felt to have no ego: none in her 20s, even less in her 30s. As a reporter at the *Chicago Tribune* she had been awarded a Nieman Fellowship, but at Harvard for the interview, "I couldn't lift a glass," she recalled. "I started shaking uncontrollably, because my mind and heart said I didn't belong there."

I'll never forget her sweet, wounded expression as she stared into the past at the refuse of the various addictions she had had to overcome and began to tell me about the new life she was building for herself. Divorced and childless, she had adopted a son and planned to become an ordained minister in the Pentecostal or the Methodist church.

Judy and Barbara. Judith Jamison, Congresswoman Roybal-Allard, dry-witted Linda Ellerbee—what common ground, I wondered, would they find with my friend and agent, Lynn Nesbit, who works 70-hour weeks, wears power-red Chanel suits, and studies religion? I took pleasure in anticipating their shocked looks when Elizabeth Stevenson, a Jungian psychoanalyst from Cambridge, Massachusetts, a woman who would strike them at first glance as the soul of propriety, shared her far-out dreams; or when Ginny Ford, a Rochester businesswoman, told the story of running away from her husband and coming back to start a career at midlife. None of them, I knew, would be able to resist Mary Ann Goff, whose first 49 years had been circumscribed by Newark, Ohio, and who turned her life around at 53 when she drove for the first time on an interstate highway. Now 60, she dates avidly and

has a drawerful of sheer teddies that her children find appalling. The gathering was the perfect excuse for me to talk to her again, to see all of them in the full flower of their hard-won selfhood, discovering one another. Would they recall their lives as narratives of female decline? Or would these women tell their stories as narratives of progress? We all have our own personal life story. The way we tell it to ourselves, every day, in the "mind chatter" that rushes through our brains at 200 words per minute when we're not concentrating on something else, *becomes* the story we are living. An important part of the transformative work in middle life, I

I started out last year with breast cancer," said Linda Ellerbee. "The flattering thing about being invited to this dinner was that someone thought I was going to live to be 50!"

am now convinced, is to revise one's story, forgiving the failures and reworking the heroic illusions of youth.

On the Sunday of the gathering, as I went out to greet my guests, I tried to summon all my energy. I wanted to be a catalyst to help these special women share their wisdom and draw strength from one another. For the next three hours, we would speak of everything, but I have tried to arrange the conversations around the main themes as they emerged.

On the Privilege of Being 50

"I just turned 50," Judith Jamison, dancer-choreographer, announced proudly as

she arrived and greeted everyone. She is an extraordinary presence—tall and beautiful with tight black-and-gray cornrows twined close to her scalp. She had materialized in the entrance hall like one of the stone colossi in the temples at Luxor. As she descended the stairs, I remembered her grace and the terrifying power she brought to *Cry*, in the role Alvin Ailey created for her as a tribute to black women.

"Nobody ever tells you about how great it is to be over 45," Judith had told me a few years back. "I can't wait to be 50!" So was it what she'd expected? "As a dancer, it has always been about survival," she said. "And I still jump on the stage with the kids at Christmas and perform."

"Fifty for me was a time when I really, for the first time, owned my body," said Ginny Ford, whose blond hair and dimples remind me of Doris Day. "I had been very ashamed of my body, and now I love it."

In her 30s and 40s, Ginny had great legs and could wear a size 4 off any rack. She favored slinky spaghetti-strap gowns for when she and her husband, Bob, went dancing at the country club. They were Rochester's Perfect Couple, sexy and successful.

"The time I spent dealing with the whole packaging of the outward piece of myself," she said, rolling her big blue eyes. "Now there's all this inner stuff going on. I'm probably 10 pounds heavier, my thighs are a little rumply, my arms have flab. Fifteen years ago I would have starved myself. But now I'm enjoying Bob's pasta. I exercise every day, I enjoy myself sexually, and I'm proud of this body. It really works!"

She then proceeded to tell us how her body had instigated—as if with a will of its own—a life-changing period of self-assessment. A few years back, Ginny, who has always been a strong skier, took her husband on a dream vacation to Jackson Hole, Wyoming. In a disastrous accident, she tore all the ligaments in her knee and spent the following year on crutches. During her time of healing, she also became a grandmother. The juxtaposition of these two life accidents—the death of her young, carelessly agile self and the birth of a new generation of her family—initiated a time of inner questioning. Life accidents are those events we can neither predict nor prevent, and when they coincide with the start of a new stage in the life cycle, the passage is often accelerated.

During her time of enforced retreat, Ginny, who had always been too busy professionally to reflect much on her life,

refocused her professional goals. Now fully recovered, she told us that she would be leaving the very next day on a 100-mile hike across England from the North Sea to the Irish Sea—not the kind of vacation we once would have expected of a woman in her 50s.

Mary Ann Goff spoke of another voyage—her first trip behind the wheel, just seven years before. You might have thought she'd traveled with Thelma and Louise. "I never drove on the interstate until I was 53. My parents were alcoholics, so I got married at 19 to get away from it all," she related as her southern drawl picked up speed. All four of her children were well along in school when she started college; typically, she was 38 before she took her own life seriously.

"My ex-husband just put me down and ridiculed me. He didn't have the education that I was pursuing, so he was very jealous. 'Why do you need this schooling?' he'd say. I thought, 'Do I go on being passive, or do I say, 'This is my life, too'?" Her husband had a prostate disease, and soon their sexual relationship, which had been highly charged, began to disintegrate because of his condition. But Mary Ann blamed herself—her weight, her age. This went on for seven years. "So I went to counseling, and I found out it wasn't me who was crazy." Her husband eventually saw a therapist, who treated his problem, but the relationship failed anyway. However, because she had four children, she waited until she was in her 50s to get a divorce.

"I picked up all my life and moved to Charleston. It was really scary. I had a lot of stumbling blocks, and no one to depend on, but I started all over again. It made me very, very independent. And I felt so much younger!"

I recalled my own 50th birthday: "My daughters gentled me through it. They said, 'Can't you accept and enjoy what you've already done? You made us, and we turned out pretty well. You have work you can be proud of and a wonderful marriage. *Own it. Honor it.*' That was such a gift."

Judy Collins had dashed in late, but the warmth of her personality bound her into the group right away. Her skin looked smooth and natural, and her sandy hair flowed like field grass, caught up with combs in broad wings at the sides of her face. She was no longer the fragile 60s waif with a face swallowed up by huge quartz eyes. The strength of her middle years was apparent in hands made powerful by years of playing the piano and

guitar, and a body as taut as the black tights over her wonderful legs.

"It's important to own who you are," Judy said. "You're not all good and you're not all bad, but the owning is part of the passage, I think."

Barbara Reynolds had chosen the over-size wing chair. At first she sat firm and solemn, her eyes penetrating all of us with fierce honesty. The other, more vulnerable side of her became apparent as she sank deep into the embrace of the chair, still needing to be sheltered, healed.

"I have to be truthful with you," said

Barbara. "Not everybody can face turning 50 with courage." Her mother, she remembered, had lied about her age. This vanity exacted a painful price from the daughter she had abandoned.

For 15 years, from the time she was 2 years old, every time she looked out her window, Barbara longed to glimpse the mother of her dreams in the flesh. She wanted her mother to look up at her and make her real. Finally, she could bear the yearning no longer. At 17, Barbara persuaded her grandmother to let her go visit her mother.

"I walked in and the first thing I saw,

Free personal brewing kit.

Now you can enjoy the legendary freshness and flavor of Starbucks custom roasted whole bean coffees, and receive a free gift.

Just order 1/2 lb. each of our popular Caffè Verona® (80/20 Blend™) and House Blend for \$8.95 (plus shipping), and we'll send you our exclusive Caffè Solo brewing kit, a \$6.95 value, free.



The kit includes a porcelain Starbucks mug, unbreakable filter cone, ten coffee filters and coffee measure. It's perfect for brewing your fresh Caffè Verona and House Blend coffees.

Like all Starbucks blends, Caffè Verona and House Blend begin with the very best coffees found anywhere in the world. Taking our inspiration from the

beans themselves, we create delicious new combinations that offer the perfect balance of body and flavor.

We're so sure you'll love our coffee that we'll gladly refund your money if you're not 100% satisfied.

So call today to get this free gift, and a chance to taste the world's finest coffee, all for just \$8.95 (plus shipping).



To order, call

1-800-STARBUCKS

(1-800-782-7282) Ext. 2E-30

Offer available exclusively through Starbucks Mail Order, 2203 Airport Way S., P.O. Box 34510, Seattle, WA 98124-1510. Limit 1 per customer. Offer ends 12/31/93. © 1993 Starbucks Corporation. All rights reserved.

The Flaming Fifties

on her piano, were pictures of her other four children. But not me." Barbara's voice throttled down from its normal resonance to a whisper. "I said, 'Mother, you have five children.'"

"Well, I have to talk to you about that," her mother said. "You see, I put my age back." She didn't want her friends to know that she had a daughter as old as Barbara.

"As I moved toward 40 and then 50," Barbara admitted, "I began to think, Maybe I should lie about my age, too, maybe something really is wrong." She looked around at the vibrant, sympathetic faces in the room. "But I'm beginning to feel better just by being here."

Linda Ellerbee brought the group down to earth in one sentence. Sprawled in the deepest armchair, with her sneakers kicked off, her hair clipped short, and her pant cuffs rolled up, she looked like a rambunctious kid as she peered through her goggle-like glasses to confront the group.

"I started out last year with breast cancer, so, although I'm 48, to me the flattering thing about being invited to this dinner was that someone thought I was going to live to be 50!"

Sensing the tension, she dissolved it gracefully with a joke. "I have never lied about my age—but I have always lied about my height!" On TV, Linda's commentaries were droll, straight shots to the heart of whatever she chose to dissect. Her voice had a great Dietrich huskiness; she seemed like a woman who could slam down a drink and laugh heartily with the boys.

Her face tensed slightly as she told us how she had left TV before they could tell her to go. "The networks feel that you can grow old on the air as long as you don't look old," she said. "And I wasn't blessed with the kind of face that was going to look 35 forever. So I started my own company to allow me to produce television."

Linda had faced other problems before the cancer—alcoholism, men. All our familiar vices. "But the whole last five years of my life—and this last year in particular—I truly have come to understand the words 'state of grace,'" she said. Her face relaxed, not a trace of makeup obscuring its clarity. "I have never felt quite so alive or quite as grateful or aware about everything. And I think a lot of that comes not from the close brushes but from this five-oh—com-

ing up to 50." The weight of her next words sent shivers through us all. "We've been somewhere, we are somewhere."

On Finding One's Voice

We realized that we had all been defined in our First Adulthood by our relation to others—husbands, children, or the dominant fathers or mentors for whom we performed. Most of the women in the room had not been autonomous, and had no idea how to find the voice of their truest self, until they reached early midlife. Most had made jailbreak marriages, moving directly from fathers to husbands. Judy Collins hadn't written a check for herself until she

Mary Ann
spoke of her first trip
behind the wheel,
just seven years before.
You might
have thought she'd
traveled with
Thelma and Louise.

was 42. Ginny Ford hadn't earned her first paycheck until she was 45.

"I was a traditional housewife and a community volunteer," Ginny explained. "My husband gave me cash to manage the household, but none of it was ever my own. When my youngest went off to college, I drifted into the work world." Starting at 42, she worked her way up to president of the Junior League and took a seat on many boards in town, while continuing her role in the Perfect Couple. "I felt I was on a pedestal, in the eyes of the community and my family. But inside I was crumbling. I needed to get off."

She pulled a midlife adolescent rebellion. Threw some clothes in the back of her car, and disappeared into a yearlong romantic escapade. "It was as if I had to kill off that earlier self," she says. "I brought a different person back—more

open and fun-loving, and financially independent for the first time." Reuniting with her husband was not the hard part; giving up her own apartment was.

But shortly after her rebellion she discovered that she could fulfill her own dreams. While rebuilding her marriage, Ginny became a founding partner of a market-research firm, which she helped transform into a multimillion-dollar business in less than 10 years. In 1986 she cashed in, keeping sole ownership of one division. Then came the skiing accident.

"Being slowed down by the crutches, and bowled over by my grandchild, I did a whole lot of thinking. Instead of rushing at life and producing furiously, I wanted something more meaningful. The net result is I have taken a year off from my business, and have given myself to the National Women's Hall of Fame. They honor women's achievements. I signed on, pro bono, as my legacy to my daughter and granddaughter."

Mary Ann Goff recalled the mind-set of the 1950s, when we were socialized. "I came across a paper the other day I wrote in the 12th grade," she said. "It asked the question 'Can a married woman have a career?' I'd written, 'Absolutely not—her place is in the home.' I couldn't believe it. Did I write that—this can't be me!"

"You really only came alive in your 50s," I reminded her.

"Oh, yes. Once I got on that interstate..."

Vicarious laughter erupted.

When she moved to Charleston, South Carolina, just being in her own apartment felt like a new world. Mary Ann dropped 50 pounds and emerged as a new person. She took a younger lover and a job with the U.S. Air Force and continued collecting credits toward her college degree. "The more you challenge yourself, the more you learn to do, the more your self-esteem really shoots up: Hey! I can do this! You're a success."

"Growing up, it was never me," said the quiet congresswoman, Lucille Roybal-Allard. Petite and dignified with olive skin and a shiny helmet of dark hair, she sat properly on the edge of the sofa. Her father, retired congressman Edward R. Roybal, was the first Hispanic elected to the Los Angeles City Council. "It was always my sister, my brother, my mother, my father who came first, and then, in my adult life, my first husband and my children. I was always putting myself second."

When her father was elected to Congress, 30 years ago, "people in Washington, D.C., had no idea there was any such

species as Mexican-American," she said. At the same time, "some Latinos thought the Roybals were too swell. . . *Mmmphh, that's Roybal's daughter.*" Feeling alienated from the white and even sometimes the Latino communities, she never really had a childhood. "We had to be the model, to prove that Mexicans could eat properly; we had to be careful of everything we said and did." She told us that she grew up scared to speak out and give her own opinions. What if it could be used against her father or reflected badly on the Latino community? As late as six years ago, when she was first elected to the California State Assembly, she still had to fight off panic attacks in order to project her leadership and fight for bills she believed in. "That's just the little girl in me," she tells herself, "who had to be real careful to keep her mouth shut."

Judith Jamison spoke up, suddenly more vulnerable. "My 50th birthday this year was spent in total angst. My father had a heart attack and a triple bypass." She hesitated, and almost visibly shrank. "I always feel like a child inside, because all I am is a performing artist."

All I am is. . . The poignancy of those words reminded us of those parts of ourselves that we had necessarily set aside, or lost to a sense of obligation, back when we made the decisions of our 20s.

"Whatever was assigned to me, I had to go over the edge with it," Judith told the group. "My mentors took advantage of it." Murmurs of recognition. Discovered by master choreographer Agnes de Mille, Judith gravitated toward mentors and what she calls "spiritual walkers" (her phrase comes from Stevie Wonder). Alvin Ailey endorsed her talent, and she helped make the Ailey company famous as she toured throughout the world nonstop for 15 years. For Judith, First Adulthood was about enjoying herself as an artist as well as proving herself worthy of the love of her "spiritual walkers." She had no husband, no children, no inner life, and very little intimacy.

At 39, Judith experienced a small death, and retreated to a house in Connecticut for the next two years, alone. "I was mentally and physically exhausted," she had told me. She was scheduled to collaborate with Miles Davis on a new piece. "When I told him that I had been in the country, just kind of lying there for six months, he said, 'Oh, you just went to sleep.' He understood. In that period, I needed to do that."

Jamison was 41 when she took up choreography. Ailey encouraged her to move on, easing her transition by providing his scholarship students for Judith's experi-

mentations. Their aesthetic marriage flourished into a partnership, and Ailey prepared Judith to carry on his legacy. She was 46 when Ailey died, in 1989, and within several weeks she became artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

Here, again, is a juxtaposition of a life accident with a major transition: Judith was wrestling with the shift from performer—the indulged, gifted child—to master, and was expected to be the artistic matriarch to a group of boisterous males in their 20s who were always in her face, when she almost lost her father. Had the shock given her something to work with?

"Ten years ago, when I was dancing, I wouldn't have dealt with it," she answered. "Dancers are all about 'my leg, my foot.' Now the whole thing is reversed. I have to play mother, nurse, mentor, policewoman. Now it is 'How is your leg, how is your spirit?'"

From Survival to Mastery

The massive psychic shift in the passage to Second Adulthood involves a transition from survival to mastery. In young-adulthood we survive by figuring out how best to please or perform for the powerful ones who will protect and reward us—parents, teachers, lovers, mates, bosses, mentors. It is all about proving ourselves. Men do it by becoming "warriors" and competing for prizes and "killing off" rivals; women do it by seducing, or as mothers who compete through their children, or, more recently, by demonstrating that they are as good as or better than men professionally. The passage into Second Adulthood requires that we move into a psychological state of mastery—where we are capable of acting on the world rather than merely reacting to others. Then we become the mentors.

Mastery is an accumulated inner strength, not dependent on immediate outer conditions or the approval of others. Or, as Judy Collins said, "mastery is an inside job."

All the women at the gathering described aspects of this transformation. Lucille is moving from pleasing as a conventional wife to mastering the skills necessary to effect social change. Judith is moving from pleasing as the child performer to mastery as the teacher. Barbara had never succeeded in pleasing and so has graduated to ministering.

Barbara entered Howard University School of Divinity in 1988, not primarily for the degree but because she wanted to serve the God that had taken her from a

nobody to a somebody. In a worldly sense, she is seen today as one of the most influential black Americans of her generation. Pick up a copy of *USA Today* anywhere in the world and her unique voice will be prominently displayed on the opinion page. Her bosses love her; they told me so. She's a profound TV essayist, a writer of controversial books, and a du Pont visiting scholar at Shenandoah University. But I wondered, having turned 50, could she move beyond surviving to feel *worthy* of it all?

"I've just graduated from the seminary. I can *feel* myself becoming a minister," she said fervently; it will happen this year or next. "I also feel I can at some point master the anxiety within me and lose weight—it's still not too late." Survival for Barbara, for so many women of color, meant trying to fit in. Having found that impossible, she has made herself a professional "misfit" whose voice now counts. "Instead of getting angry, now I try to stop and teach," she says. By mastering her anger and honing her creative skills, she is able to give comfort to those as powerless as she once felt.

"I'm very interested in your becoming a preacher," Lynn Nesbit said to Barbara.

JAMAICA • ANTIGUA • ST. LUCIA • BARBADOS

Where Love Comes to Stay.

At Sandals Resorts everything's included for couples at one single price, even tips and transfers. Relax on the Caribbean's finest white sand beaches. Luxuriate in spacious accommodations with king-size beds. Experience every land & water sport such as water-skiing, scuba diving and golf. Indulge in our "Stay At One, Vacation At Six Program" with full exchange privileges at all six Jamaican resorts. Savor anytime snacks, unlimited premium brand drinks and 29 gourmet restaurants with white glove service. And be moved by a staff as warm as the Caribbean sun. Sandals Resorts - All inclusive. All in the name of love. Call your travel agent or 1-800-SANDALS.

Sandals®

THE CARIBBEAN'S #1 ULTIMATE ALL-INCLUSIVE LUXURY RESORTS FOR COUPLES ONLY.

SANDALS MONTEGO BAY • SANDALS ROYAL CARIBBEAN • SANDALS NEGRIL • SANDALS OCHO RIOS
SANDALS DUNN'S RIVER • SANDALS INN • SANDALS ANTIGUA • SANDALS ST. LUCIA • SANDALS BARBADOS
Golf is available in Jamaica & St. Lucia. Unique Vacations is the worldwide representative for Sandals Resorts.

The Flaming Fifties

"No one talks about religion in New York—it's a word you can't mention. You can talk about sex, anything, but if you're religious"—she affected a look of shock—"people look at you suspiciously."

The literary superagent does not function in a world where people spend a lot of time dwelling on the soul—unless it can be turned into a best-seller. Sitting in her office on Madison Avenue, as I did to interview her a couple of years ago, one could not imagine her finding time to think about these matters. With her arms tensely latticed around her waist, phones jangling, Lynn was tied up in a foreign auction on yet another big book. But even then she had a new dream for her Flaming Fifties: "If I were to do something else right now, I know exactly what I would do. I'd get a Ph.D. in religious studies."

After 23 years of building a solid reputation at ICM, the huge, all-purpose talent agency, Lynn had a radical change forced on her when the male hierarchy there reorganized the agency and did not offer her a policy position on the board. This disruption coincided with the departure from home of her two daughters, with whom she had deeply intimate bonds.

"Both events were more disturbing than I acknowledged to myself," she said. Nesbit joined in a partnership with another successful agent, Morton Janklow, forming what may be the dominant independent literary agency in the country. Even as these unavoidable changes impinged on the youthful illusion that one can control one's life, they stirred up her spiritual innocence. She realized that willpower alone isn't enough to get one past life's pitfalls. It started her on the religious quest that has become the dominant theme of her delayed middle-life passage. "I'm taking one course a semester," Lynn said, "I found that centered me."

I told them that I had found a desire to go back to school to be an almost universal yearning among women in middle life. Many women go to complete themselves. Quite a few get turned on by using their minds, and pursue a master's degree or doctorate for the sheer joy of it—all of this simultaneous with re-entering the workforce, changing careers, or moving from part-time to full-time work. "What is it about us?" I mused. "Perhaps we sense we're just going to go on forever, so we change our perspective on time and on life."

Judy said, "I do think men and women in the middle years suffer these huge reor-

ganizations of their psyches." She realizes now that she can be her own producer, package her own videos, maybe start her own label. Further affirmation came out of the blue last fall when she was summoned by President Clinton to perform at the inaugural gala. There at the Lincoln Memorial she felt like part of American history.

"It's almost as though people are saying suddenly, 'Oh, yes,' remembering how I have permeated their lives personally, politically, socially for these 30 years. That's very thrilling to me. Because that's the visibility I never had with my father." The sightless, selfish, adored father. "In other words, suddenly they not only hear me, but they *see* me."

Finding Your Passion for the Second Half

Commonly, what a woman is most likely to discover missing at this stage is a side of herself left uncultivated since the playful, pre-sexual days before she became a woman—her passion and creativity. Most of the people at the dinner knew what their passion was, and they were, at least to some degree, planning their Second Adulthood around it. But many other women, who have never had time to think about it, find it very difficult to define what it is they can feel passionate about at 50.

Elizabeth Stevenson told us that she found her passion on a trip to Scotland. Never having been there before, she stepped off the plane and felt an overwhelming relief, a connection to some deep level of her historical consciousness. "I was home." She has been going back and forth between the U.S. and Scotland ever since to do research on Stone Age worship circles. "I may look like a nice middle-aged lady, but I'm not," she told the group. "I'm radical." (Indeed, our generation may have broken the trend—we're all becoming more radical as we age.) Finding the passion of her middle life has given birth to a new dream. Elizabeth, together with a rediscovered lover from her early life, is creating a mind-body healing center in Stowe, Vermont.

Mary Ann Goff rediscovered sexual passion in her Flaming Fifties. A believer that being sexually active is the true fountain of youth, Mary Ann had proof when she and a recent lover were living apart. "I saw a great difference in my appearance and body. I think there's a particular sparkle in your eyes when you have constant touching and talking with a lover. Without it, you're there but moving in slow motion, half depressed, half dead.

When you're with someone, stimulated, being touched, you don't feel your age—you feel young." At the moment, she has a platonic relationship, a dinner partner, but she is confidently shopping for a new, healthy lover—not on heart medicine, not a smoker, and no alcoholism. Her son-in-law told her, "Your standards are too high." Mary Ann finds her biggest critics are her prudish adult offspring. Her daughter keeps scolding, "Oh, *Mother*. What are we going to do with a mom who's 60 and wears string bikinis and sheer teddies?"

"Take heed!" Mary Ann tells her. "It might revive *your* marriage." With 20 hours left to go for her bachelor's degree, Mary Ann vowed, "I'm gonna make it." She cocked her head and smiled. "Soon I want to be Dr. Ann—doing sexual education, like Dr. Ruth."

Linda's Ellerbee's passion is for life. "I can't think of anything more wonderful than reaching 50," she said. "I live my life as if the cancer were never going to come back, because nothing else makes sense. I *intend* to reach 50," she said.

From Anger to Forgiveness

In the first half of our gathering, the women had spoken a little about our common social history, referring to the political and cultural events we shared: Elvis, the civil-rights movement, J.F.K.'s assassination, the feminist movement. But we had another shared history as well, a less public one that includes things such as attitudes toward the body, the self, and others (including men), and expectations (of marriage, children, and success). From these kinds of concerns we draw a sense of internal meaning according to which we shape and revise our lives.

As we broke focaccia bread and passed chicken tarragon, the talk turned back to our 40s. Linda Ellerbee remembered a feeling she had had on her 40th birthday—"how angry I was. At that age, I was so tired of waiting for men to get smart."

Everyone howled. Our lives had been hacked open halfway through young-adulthood by the discontinuity of social revolution. We were already moms with babes in diapers when the whole world went teenage. Almost all the leaders of the women's movement came out of the Silent Generation; having fought for liberation, we wanted to try it! Too late for birth control and the carnal nights of the 60s, many of us took the license for adolescent exploration much later, when we were supposed to be settled. All of these

transitions had costs: broken marriages, children cast adrift, and, for some, years of alcoholic chaos.

"They changed the rules on us," I observed.

"And they kept changing them," said Linda. "How about the men in our lives?" She talked about her partnership with Rolfe Tessem over the last seven years. "We run a business together. And we live together." They haven't married, she said. "If a woman marries a man more successful than she is, the world congratulates her. But if a man is married to a woman more successful than he is, the world asks him how he's coping with it. After a while, he begins to think there's something to cope with. It's a major problem."

Others talked about the envy they feel from men in middle age, who age differently and often become more passive and emotionally dependent.

"I kept thinking things would get better someday," Ginny observed. "But *this* is someday."

"You finally have the permission, in this pretty nasty patriarchy, to be who you are," said Elizabeth.

Linda marked our progress. "I attended a women's dinner in the 70s where the main subject was food. If this dinner had happened in the 80s, the subject would have been power. In the 90s, the subject is the journey and forgiveness."

"It's almost as if you have to forgive the things that happened in the first half of your life—the people who failed you and the ways you failed yourself—in order to go on for the second half of the journey," I said.

"And we have a lot to forgive people for!" Linda drummed the table for emphasis.

"We do indeed!" It was a Greek chorus.

"'Forgiveness' is a key word," said Barbara. "I have had to learn to forgive my mother." Struggling to rise above racism and sexism is easier now, she added.

"That's miraculous," Judy Collins said, contemplating something deep inside herself.

"But you have to forgive." Barbara repeated it like a hymn.

It moved Judy sufficiently that she shared her own pain.

"You have forgiven your mother. I have to work on forgiving myself," she said. "I lost my son last year to suicide."

The room hushed. No one moved. Judy sketched in just enough of the story so that we knew she couldn't help sometimes blaming herself "because of the chaos of my background, the alcoholism. . . I was 52 when that happened. In the mid-

dle of all the wonderful things of my life, that this terrible thing, the worst possible thing, could happen—it changes you. There is a point where nothing matters, but everything is O.K. It's mysterious. There's a kind of surrender. Catastrophe opens a space in your life, a silence, if you let it, which I believe can be a transformational place."

Considering the experiences of Judy, Linda, and Barbara, the group had been confronted with three of the most inconceivable losses a woman could endure: a parent, a child, a breast. But they also took us to the next place on the journey.

Linda recalled her teeth-gritting resistance to the miraculous when she went

Whatever
was assigned to me,
I had to go over the edge
with it," dancer
Judith Jamison told
the group.
"My mentors took
advantage of it."

into recovery: "I said, 'I'm going to get sober, but I'm certainly *not* going to find God,' and then one day, 'Oh, shit!'"

Honks of laughter. "I have come to a spiritual place on this journey in the last few years," Linda acknowledged. "I think it has a great deal to do with my age."

"Right," the women murmured.

"I read something in the Bible that helped me," offered Barbara. "When Jesus told Martha to roll the stone away from Lazarus's tomb—a lot of us won't roll that stone away." She confessed, "I can say that it's only been in the last three years that I've begun to be able to forgive my mother."

The intense empathy around that table created what felt like a magnetic field with the power to heal—a circle of healing. As we lifted crystal glasses to toast ourselves, I told the group it reminded me of the Stone

Age women who sat on great limestone slabs, holding crystals, to conduct their sacred rites. "This is archetypal."

"If there's a picture here, it's an old-fashioned one," said Linda. "It's the gathering of women around a quilt, because a quilt is made up of broken pieces of many things, put together into some pattern lovelier than the whole."

"Also, we can finally *see* the pattern," I added, "and that then becomes our guide."

"Of course, I can't sew a stitch," Linda laughed.

"That doesn't matter," Elizabeth said. "It's a beautiful image."

If one is aware of the fact that the fight of life is taking you somewhere, one can not only make the journey better but also be more determined and resilient during the many battles. The impact of the dinner had been to make us all *conscious of the quest*—the realization, upon reaching this point in life, that this is what the struggle has been about, and that we can take the rewards forward with us.

It seemed the most natural thing in the world to join in a sacred moment with a simple prayer. Eyes closed, our hands clasped firmly together in a ring of friendship, we offered up a final thanks for reaching this place and time.

"God," Barbara began in the rolling cadence of the wise old preacher lady we could all imagine her becoming, "whatever strength is in this circle, let it not be broken. Whatever strength is in this circle, let us know where we got it from. Give us the strength to continue forgiving. The hurt's gonna be there, Lord, but the power to forgive will get us through it. Let us be a friend to each other and an example for all the world to see, whatever it's about, Lord, that when people look at us they can see you. Amen."

We all hugged and my guests left, but the event did not leave us. Over the next few weeks, almost everyone called me with reverberations. But it was Barbara's call that crystallized the alchemy that had occurred. She couldn't sleep that night, she said. "There are certain life-changing experiences, and this gathering I would put in that category. I don't feel ashamed anymore. I feel healed. It was like something moved away." Even her voice sounded lighter. "When Linda told us she was so glad to be able to look forward to 50, I realized that 50 is not something to trudge through like a mud ditch. Fifty is a gift." □

Leora Tanenbaum provided research assistance for this article.