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FAMILY MATTERS

Aging Gracefully

ARLENE ISTAR LEV¹

Okay, I'll just say it: I'm getting old. Now, perhaps that doesn't surprise you, but it shocks me every day. Every day when I find that my body just doesn't move as quickly as it used to; every day that I have to work a bit harder to balance myself walking down the stairs or rising from a couch. I'm not talking about real old age here: I just turned 50. Those of you reading this who recently turned 70 just guffawed, I'm sure, but 50 just ain't 30 any way you look at it. My kids yell, "Come on, Mom!" and I answer, "I am 'coming-on' dear. This is *how* I 'come on' now. I'm moving as fast as I can."

I have this weird little line on the side of my nose. It's not a worry line, and it doesn't follow the contours of my face like the creases by the sides of my mouth or the crow's-feet by my eyes. It's just this short little line coming out from the side of my nose. I want to say this "sad" little line, and I'm not sure why I want to say that; probably because it makes me sad. It just sits there. It is not there for any reason that I can discern except I'm getting old, and old people seem to have these lines on their faces sprouting up like grass seed in the spring. You might not even notice it, but it screams at me every time I look in the mirror. "Hello, old lady," it seems to say. "Vieja," as my ex used to refer to her ex. It's just the first line of many; more will follow.

Years ago, a friend told me a story: She called her doctor because she had these spots on her hand, and they were multiplying at a rapid rate. He said, "What do they look like?" "Well," she said, "they look kind of brown. They look kind of like age spots." And the physician, surely rolling his eyes, gently said, "And..." She still didn't get it. The realization of what he was saying struck her with the slow painful awareness like a car that is bearing down on you and is going to imminently hit you. The whole world, they say, moves in incredibly slow motion except that it all happens so fast, way too fast, to move out of the way of the car. The realization that "I have age spots on my hands" is a shock to the soul—a collision with the future.

Yesterday I was a little girl. I could easily fold my legs up so that I could rest my face on my knees. I remember the smell of my knees. Today, cutting my toenails is not so easy. There are days I can do it easily—when my back is more limber—and there are days I simply can't do it—not if my

life depended on it. For the first time, I really understand how an old person, a really old person, can allow their feet to look so damn skanky.

Now, some of this aging stuff is exaggerated for me because I have long-term back problems: getting up and bending over have always been a bit challenging. Nothing that daily yoga wouldn't fix, and, God knows, I should be doing that. And that is part of this aging thing: things that were always good ideas (eat healthy, exercise, get a good night's sleep) have now become if not a moral imperative, then certainly a physical one. Indian food gives me indigestion, chocolate at night gives me heartburn, and you really don't want to know what cheese does, but let's just say if we could harness it, it would classify as a weapon of mass destruction.

If I don't get a good night's sleep, I cannot function. I used to be able to take a red-eye and fly cross-country, present at a conference, fly home, and go to work a few hours later. Sure, I was tired, but I could do it. I could not do it today. I need to leave a day's margin on either side of the trip or else I become the sleeping therapist—the one people tell stories about at cocktail parties. “And then she began to yawn, and I swear her head bobbed as if falling asleep, and after I pay her so much money!”

Exercise is no longer simply a good idea. If I don't stretch daily, my body begins to twist like a pretzel, and moving becomes excruciatingly painful. A few years ago I really hurt my back. I was in bed for days on painkillers and muscle relaxants. I got up, so slowly and painfully to go to the bathroom, and while sitting on the toilet, I dropped the roll of toilet paper (God knows, if I don't put them in the dispenser, no one else will ever do it. I've done the research; trust me on this one). I watched the toilet paper roll away from me. And I cried. There was simply no way I could bend down and reach it. Like the proverbial car collision, aging came at me, and I saw my future. I understood in that moment that, although my back would heal, a time would come when I could not care for myself. I saw myself, for a brief flash, as an old, old woman, needing help to go to the bathroom, and wondering when my children would call.

I was raised by old people. My grandparents raised me for the first decade of my life; my grandfather was born not in the past century, but the one before that. However, now that I look back, I realize my grandmother was actually only in her early fifties when I lived with them. She was definitely older than I am now; she wore old-lady shoes, sat on park benches, and took a lot of medicines. I do not own any old-lady shoes, though I gave up anything with a heel years ago. Frankly, I would love to just sit on a park bench, but it will be another few decades before I will have the time to do that. Actually, I do take quite a few medicines now (high blood pressure, thyroid, etc.). My partner says the medicine cabinet looks like her parents' used to, with bottles carefully lined up on different shelves for different family members. The medical assistant taking down my medical history says, “Ah, you are aging into medicine.” May I protest? I don't want

to age into medicine, but he reminds me of the alternatives. But no matter how many lifestyle changes I make, without those medications my blood pressure goes crazy, and as hard as life can be sometimes, I'm clear that a stroke would not make things better.

I proudly tell the medical assistant that I've never had any surgery. Well, one failed in vitro fertilization, and a bunch of root canals. Oh yeah, and for my fiftieth birthday, arthroscopic surgery for a torn meniscus—an outpatient surgery that I watched on closed-circuit television during the operation. This is a common surgery for those who are active in sports. People often tear their meniscus when rotating on their knee during basketball, for example. Myself, I bent down to pick up a piece of paper on the floor. I heard a small pop and didn't think much more about it. After six weeks of limping around, I tried chiropractic and physical therapy. After another month of increasing pain, I went to see the holistic doctor, who looked at me and said, "I think you need surgery." So now I can't really say, "I've never had surgery," though I can still say, "I've never had *serious* surgery," but I am old enough to imagine I may not always be able to say that.

I've noticed for some years now that my morning routine, always a lengthy process, has become a painfully long ordeal. You see, some parts of my body are dry and need lotion, and other parts need powder to stay dry. Caring for my teeth is not simply a health issue, but a financial one. Between the orthodontist for the kids and the root canals and implants for the adults, dental care (with insurance, mind you) ran into the near \$10,000 range in the past few years. And my hair, oh my hair—my one vanity, you know? My illegal spousal unit asks me, "Do you really need that many different kinds of shampoo, conditioner, and hair treatment?" Well, sadly, I do or else my hair somehow manages to be both oily and dry at the same time, and those wiry gray hairs just stick out in all directions. I honestly don't care when working in the garden, but it is a bit distracting while trying to keep students' attention when teaching a class. Food, sleep, exercise, and daily hygiene—no wonder people retire; it takes all day just for my activities of daily living (ADLs).

When transwomen I work with me talk about their electrolysis, I listen with genuine, personal interest. "Real women," they say, "do not have facial hair!" Not to minimize the pain of beard removal, I sometimes take their hands and let them feel the small rug that grows on my chin. "It's hard to remove all that beard hair," I say, "but real women most definitely have facial hair." So, part of my morning routine now involves plucking, too. Now, some of you reading this are old enough to remember the days when dykes proudly wore their facial hair; I still have a button that says, "Bearded women are soft touches." In truth, I couldn't give a hoot about my facial hair; I just think my dean might.

One of the interesting things about aging is that things that were once radical now appear old-fashioned, odd, or in the case of facial

hair, perhaps disgusting to the younger set. My children find my home remedies—echinacea tincture, garlic—not just quaint but really strange, and a sign that I'm a bit of a biddy. They move toward pharmaceuticals with the same urgency that we moved away from them, as we searched for the health food store in the East Village to buy organic toothpaste. "You are very weird," my son has taken to telling me. You see, my son is very "kewl." Very. He likes to wear the latest fashion and watch cutting-edge television shows. I try to tell him that I was once very "kewl," too. Very. And that the things he finds odd about my tastes in clothing and my media interests are because they were once cutting edge. He raises his eyebrows slightly. "Ur, yeah, Mom," he says, while backing out of the room, out of the door, and into a world where old people like me don't slow him down.

The world I grew up in is now history. Pictures of my youthful protests pepper the 1960s section of my son's history book. When signing up for something on the Internet, I have to scroll way down to get to my birth year. I know that 1958 sounds like a very, very, long time ago to my children—truly another century. My mother was born in 1930. She was a teenager during World War II. I vaguely remember her telling me about the world she grew up in. But it looked old and faded to me like the black and white photos of her dressed in old-fashioned clothing with what looks like thick lipstick on her smiling face. My children pick up photos of me in my teenage years. I am wearing long hippie skirts, and all my male friends have thick beards. The picture on the mantel of Laura and me was taken on our way to Washington, DC, to an anti-war rally; I literally have flowers entwined in my hair. The picture of Linda and me was taken at a gay rights rally in San Francisco. "Is that really you?" they ask incredulously. "Why are you dressed like that?" "Because that was the height of fashion, dear," I say, "at least for young dykes in the 1980s." My partner was ruminating the other day: "Do you think that this look of having one's underwear pulled down below their pants is to this generation what bellbottoms were to ours?" Can it be that bellbottoms looked as asinine to my mother as the underwear thing looks to me?

I remember when summer went on forever, and the time between the beginning of the school year and Christmas break was eons. Now, summer vacations consist of three things: making a list of the activities I wanted to do with the children, putting away the winter gloves about mid-August, and buying school supplies. Weeks, months, years fly by, "captive on a carousel of time," as Joni Mitchell once sang. My kids say their summers still seem to go on forever; long and lazy. I'm relieved that it's just my aging body that is in fast forward, and time still moves slowly for them. Like Joni Mitchell, who is now 66 years old, I find myself "dragging my feet to slow those circles down." I once heard an 80-year-old woman say, "When you reach my age, you wake up and brush your teeth, and then, whoosh, it's the next day again."

For all of us, whether or not we are parents, children's growth is a marker of time. Everyone has had the experience of being shocked by the age or size of a child. It could be a neighbor or a friend's child, but suddenly you find yourself saying those dreaded words from your own childhood. "Wow, have you grown up! How old are you now?" I once heard my then ten-year-old say these words to a five-year-old child. He remembers vividly when that child was born.

As I write these very words, the ten-year-old child I just mentioned just celebrated his Bar Mitzvah. Even he says, "Wow, I can't believe I'm thirteen!" In Judaism, becoming Bar Mitzvah means that a child has become an adult in the eyes of the Jewish community and signifies that he is fully capable of making moral decisions and of fulfilling religious obligations. My partner and I shared a traditional blessing for our son at his Bar Mitzvah, written by Rabbi Eliezer, known as Rabbi Eliezer, *the Great* (note: Eliezer is his younger brother's name), which says "A parent needs to take care of his son until he is thirteen; from then on the parents says 'blessed is the God who has exempted me from the punishment of this one.'" Our prayer read:

I hereby release my son as an independent soul under the protective wings and guidance of the Shechinah.² I will no longer bear responsibility and take the spiritual consequences of his mistakes, sin, and errors as I did when he was a child. In the presence of this holy congregation, I declare him to be a young adult with both the freedoms and responsibilities that this title implies.

Needless to say there wasn't a dry eye in the house; perhaps even more poignant when you get the visual. My son towers over me. He is, no joke, over a foot and two inches taller than me (it's not terribly hard to be taller than me since I am only four feet, ten inches tall, and shrinking, but he towers over almost all adults now). We read those words looking up—way up—at him. My partner wanted to make him sit down, but I voted for reality as it is. One of the pictures of our family on the day of the Bar Mitzvah I have relabeled "Gulliver and the Lilliputians." My son leans his elbow easily on my shoulder and bends his entire body way down and over to hold and kiss me, which he still does, hello and good-bye, in public and before bed.

I once had a dream when he was a small baby: I was putting something in the trunk of my car when this tall brown boy leaned in over my head to help me. I remember in the dream thinking, "Oh, it's you, my son; that's who you will be." I woke up, and here he is.

I recently became reacquainted with an old friend. I knew she had a son a few years older than mine. I said to her, "Wow, your boy must be post-Bar Mitzvah already." She said, "He has his own apartment." As in: he's all grown up. Another recent experience was when a client referred her friend to me. She said, "You know her. Well, actually you know her mother." When I was

in college one of the young women in my circle of friends had a baby; she was the first woman I knew to choose motherhood at age 18 over abortion. This baby was part of our social world, passed back and forth, from one friendly hand to another and back again, when she needed a diaper change. Well, that young girl is now a woman in her twenties, and seeking some therapy with her girlfriend.

When I was a kid, I would often watch television with my mother, who would gasp and cry at the death of some politician or entertainer that I'd never heard of before. That scene is now repeated with my children. "Oh my God, Betty Friedan died," I gasp, and my kids give me that look. "Who's that?" they say disdainfully. How could anyone possibly be important if they haven't personally heard of them? A half-century later my children have no sense of the pre-feminist and pre-queer world that detonated Betty Friedan's dissatisfaction with married life with children, or Andrea Dworkin's fury at patriarchy and pornography, or the pain and despair of losing Harvey Milk. It's not that I don't try to teach them, but it is difficult to get their attention away from video games, iTunes, and text messaging.

They live in a world where black men really do become President. No joke. I'll give you a sense of my son's political reality, as a young black Jewish teen growing up in a progressive family. When Hillary Clinton first announced that she would run for Presidential office, my son asked me, "What is the big deal about this? Why is everyone talking about it?" I said, "Well, we've never had a woman president. For that matter we've only had white Protestant men." He was very thoughtful and then said, "I don't think it's a big deal for there to be a woman president. I don't think it's a big deal for there to be a black President, or a Jewish president. I don't think it's a big deal to have a gay president. Now, a transgender president, Mom, I don't think we are ready for that yet." Like his mother, he is perhaps a bit idealistic, but his vision is huge. I like having children because it is a window to the future, but as creaky as my bones are getting, I think a look back is good too.

Reminiscing isn't just a thing to do, but a kind of therapy for the soul, and this aging soul needs a bit of remembering. Will you come with me down memory lane just a little ways? I would like to tell you a bit about the world I grew up, in the days before boys could pierce their ears, when girls weren't allowed to use tampons until they were married, when the thought of gay marriage was what lovers whispered to one another in bed—not what politicians discussed on television. I want to particularly talk about feminism, about what it was like growing up at the dawn of the feminist movement, how it transformed my life, and the legacy of those heady days.

I was still a pre-teen as the sixties were coming to a close. The year after Martin Luther King Jr. and Bobby Kennedy died, I spent my time listening to Michael Jackson sing "A, B, C, it's easy as 1, 2, 3 ..." on an AM radio

that I carried with me at all times. My best friend Linda and I chain-smoked cigarettes hanging out at the local schoolyard wearing army jackets with male names emblazoned on the pocket. In the humid Brooklyn summer evenings, Linda would take me upstairs to her attic bedroom, climb on top of me, and rub herself against me pretending to be my boyfriend. The next day she flashed the “L” sign to me and winked.

I couldn't imagine marrying a boy, and since there was no other alternative, I decided in my early teens that marriage was a trap that I would never willingly step into. I was liberated not because I had sex with boys, or even because I had sex with girls, but because I insisted on my right to have sex with whomever I pleased. When I voiced opinions in school on interracial relationships, the Viet Nam War, and gay liberation (meaning gay men) I was sent to the principal's office. When I smacked a boy upside the head who tried to grab my breasts, the home economics teacher told me that I would never get married if I couldn't stop acting like that. I made a pact with myself to continue acting just like that for as long as I could. I didn't play dumb, so they called me a women's libber, a bitch, and a witch. Years later, I circled naked under the stars with radical dykes and claimed those identities with pride.

My single mother spoon-fed me women's liberation and taught me to work hard, get a good job, and never expect anyone else to take care of me. Yet, she was once very disappointed in me because I got a speeding ticket, saying, “You are a beautiful woman, and you let some man give you a ticket. He'd give you anything you wanted if you played your cards right.” I struggled with the hand I was dealt and paid my ticket, because I simply couldn't give a man a smile he didn't deserve.

I discovered feminism with an insatiable hunger. I read every book, saw every film, bought every woman's music album, and read *Off Our Backs* religiously. I joined consciousness-raising groups, support groups, and coming-out groups. I attended concerts, panel discussions, conferences, and festivals. I snuck *Lesbian/Woman* out of the Brooklyn Public Library and read it under the covers. I marched in Washington, DC, for the Equal Rights Amendment and in local small-town gay pride rallies in upstate New York. I worked at rape crisis centers, provided birth control to teens, and cleaned abortion machines. I spent hours trying to reach consensus. I have never shaved my underarms.

Of course, eventually the bubble burst. I realized feminism was not perfect—that we had made some glaring mistakes. Feminism tried to be all things to all women without really hearing the voices of women of color or working-class women or women working in the sex industry. We put down stay-at-home mothers and stay-up-late-at-night butch/femme bar dykes. For all that feminism had taught me about gender, it also denigrated my desire for butch women. I got tired of hiding sexy lingerie in the back of my sock drawer, and the expression “The personal is political” began to take on a

new meaning. I stopped drinking herbal tea about 20 years ago. After living in lesbian-feminist communities for most of my life, I just lost the taste. Potlucks became tedious, and political correctness became exhausting. Feminist discussions circled 'round and 'round like our covens under the stars, and political actions were so mired down with rhetoric that I could determine the conversation and tone as well as the players before I entered the room. I grew tired of marching and began to suspect we had lost direction.

I began to question feminist authority and wondered whether feminist answers were the only answers. I was battered by another woman and realized that violence was not just a male prerogative. I began to read *On Our Backs* and queer theory. I've learned that some of what sucks about human relationships has little to do with gender or politics, and some of what is great about living has lots to do with gender. I began to change and like so many lovers before and since, feminism—she who loved my body like no other—did not necessarily change with me.

The lesbian-feminist community that reared me does not exist anymore. The small coffee houses, the sense of commonality, the badges we wore to recognize one another on crowded enemy streets are relics of another day. Partially the movement that has been absorbed into the larger LGBTQI-alphabet soup movement for queer civil rights. Partially it became transformed into academic women's studies programs. Partially it has been co-opted, sold out to the dazzle of consumer capitalism and the lure of romantic security represented by gay business and gay marriage. Partially, it continues onward, limping, like all of us aging crones still following behind.

Today, in the online social work course I teach, the female students insist they are not feminists. Of course they believe in equal rights and equal pay for equal work. Of course they think that girls should go to college and become doctors. Of course, they think they can have it all—work and children, love, and a professional paycheck. They look up to me as their role model but still believe that feminism is a bad word and that feminists hate men. I try to explain that it was actually men who hated women, and we rebelled—us feminists. I tell them that all they have in their lives today are the fruits of a movement that women planted with our own hands—the soil was our very bodies. The men in the class tell me that they too have been battered by the hands of a woman, raped by their mothers. I tell them that all pain matters; women do not have a monopoly on victimization. But I also tell them the story of women's liberation, of how battered women were called masochists who invited their husbands to beat them, and how fathers ruled their homes and rape in marriage was legal (a friend who read this just told me it still is in some states). I tell them that I was 11 years old before I was allowed to wear pants to school, and they tell me they had no idea I was *that* old.

It is true I have grown a bit old, not quite a crone, but no longer anywhere in the vicinity of young. I can see reflected in my students' eyes that

they see me as a graying fat maternal rendition of their mother, a bit hipper perhaps, but from another generation—someone with a view from afar. My feminism is quaint to them; not the radical edge of human transformation but nostalgia from a bygone generation. I have become, in their eyes, a woman who still thinks that gender matters.

At 50 years old, I still devour feminist books, but I no longer allow feminism to devour me. I am critical of some of what has been done in the name of feminism, but I will not let other women define feminism for me or dictate which acts of mine are feminist and which are colonized. I stand firm when I am accused of being a feminist by those who are attempting to insult me. I claim and reclaim myself as a feminist still—a feminist teacher, a feminist therapist, a feminist academic. I keep insisting that feminism is not a dirty word, but a movement that has made possible all that has come since.

I work for transgender rights, argue queer theory, and insist that it is feminism that was the mother of these freedoms. I give credit to women's liberation for not only changing my world, but for changing the whole world, for starting a dialogue about rethinking gender that continues on today. Like all important tasks, dismembering patriarchy is the work of my many lifetimes. A client says, "In those days, we wanted to change the world." I tell her, "We did change the world. We succeeded. It is not the same world."

When my older son was about eight, he was invited to a birthday party. The girl's name was Alex, and when I asked him what she might like for a present he said, "She likes footballs and action figures; that's all she likes." "Really?" I said, surprised because we've certainly bought enough of those Barbie-type toys for other girls in his class. "Those are not typical things that most of the girls in your class play with," I say. He looked surprised. "Most of the girls play football," he said. (He hates football, by the way.) "Anyway," he said, "You know, Mom, there really aren't 'boy' or 'girl' toys. Kids can do anything they want." "Yeah," my partner added for emphasis, suppressing a laugh. "What were *you* thinking, Momma? Sheesh!" I sighed. "When I was young," I said, "Most girls weren't allowed to play with those kinds of toys, and they were teased if they did." He looked shocked and surprised by my small-town conventionalism. "THAT," he assures me was "a long, long time ago." I hope he is right, but I suspect it is more a matter of geography, educational environment, parental influence, etc. Even though we now have a black president, half the country still voted for the other guy.

Nonetheless, the feminist and queer heroes of my youth are men and women pushing 70 and 80 now; each day brings word of more deaths. A generation is passing away. I read the obituaries in feminist papers today before I read the festival news, and each time I gasp. Sometimes I see faces and hear names that I haven't heard in a decade or more. "I honor your life," I whisper, caressing the page. Every paper reports the deaths of the women who changed my life, women who died of cancer, and women who died

from their own hands—feminist leaders, thinkers, and activists who died of disabilities that were supposed to kill them 30 years ago and crones who dared to die as old, old women. And the men who survived AIDS are getting old now, having lived a life filled with ghosts. They had to live each life fully for the others who couldn't. It is the passing of an era, a generation. I want to make note of some passings, those stories that may not make it to the evening news, but who have made the lives we live possible. Read their names, memorize them, tell them to your children.

When radical feminist writer Andrea Dworkin died a few years ago, a friend said she “didn't recognize her name.” I guess that's every writer's dream—for your ideas to outlive your name—but I want to scream, “How can you not know of Andrea's work?” The passing of Connie Panzarino and Mary Francis Platt did not make major waves in or outside of our queer communities although these fearless, disabled lesbian activists transformed much of disability politics in this country; their legacy lives on in every ramped sidewalk in America.

I just heard through the grapevine that my friend Annie died. She must've been an old lady because she was no spring chicken when I knew her. She, a white woman, had raised three African-American daughters at a time when white women didn't sleep with black men. When I met her she was lovers with my friend Clove. If memory serves me Clove was younger than her grown daughters, and she was older than Clove's mom. They had passionate sex and then Annie left to go swim with the dolphins; I think she was in her sixties then. Although I haven't seen her in two decades, I'm sad to know she's gone. Farewell, Annie. I hope I too can swim with the dolphins someday.

Betty Berzon, lesbian psychotherapist and author of nine books addressing lesbian and gay life, including *Positively Gay*, and *Permanent Partners*, was a founding mother of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, the largest gay community center in the world, providing services for over a quarter-million people a year. Betty, who died in 2006, worked with others (like Judd Marmor, who died in 2004) to remove the diagnosis of homosexuality from the list of psychiatric disorders. In 1973, homosexuality was officially removed from the diagnostic manuals, and in one fell swoop (to quote Richard Green), “several million mentally ill persons were cured.”

Stanley Biber, who died in 2006, was a medical doctor who performed thousands of sex reassignment surgeries long before transgender was a household word. From the small town of Trinidad, Colorado, which became known as the “sex-change capital of the world,” he perfected the surgical art of genital surgery, assisting transsexuals in their dream to fully actualize themselves. Dr. Marci Bowers, a gynecological surgeon, parent of three, and male-to-female transsexual herself who has continued Biber's practice, said, “He put the operation on the world map. He made it safe, reproducible, and functional, and he brought happiness to an awful lot of people.”

The thing about aging is that not all people live long enough to die old. Gloria Anzaldua, Chicano lesbian-feminist activist, writer, and cultural theorist and Eric Rofes, gay Jewish health activist, sex radical, author, and teacher, both died way too young, having transformed our communities and leaving a powerful legacy for lesbians of color and those living with HIV.

On my desktop is a picture, not of my children, but of an old couple embracing. Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon are sitting close together in front of a bay window overlooking the city of San Francisco. They are leaning into each other, laughing heartedly. The picture was taken months before Del died, only a few months after they were legally married in California. I keep the picture there to remind me of the long life of lesbian love. I want to keep fresh how the world can change in a lifetime. From the homophobic 1950s, they watched the world transform around them and were engaged every step of the way in its transformation.

Today I live with two young boys and a dyke who can pass for one. My breasts miss the sun in Michigan every summer. I embrace the queer youth of today, and I know they can do what they are doing precisely because we did the work of feminism and queer organizing. However, I still rear my sons to be feminists just in case we don't eradicate gender completely in the next few decades. I plan to get old, older, and tattooed, grow my chin hairs, and wear bright red lipstick. Feminism and queer liberation have given me the freedom to be fully myself. I mourn the dead, I honor the passage of time, and I search the eyes of women and men to find those who remember.

I decided recently that I want to live to be 100. The first 50 years have been a blast, and I have so much more to do. So, at 50, I still take classes towards my PhD, and my partner and I contemplate building another room onto the house so we can adopt a girl or maybe two, we smile. I want to live to be an old, old woman, even if the bones creak. We only have a short time here on this fragile planet. Let us all do our work in the world with passion and honor and remember those who have come before us, building a better world for the children who are watching our every move.

NOTES

1. Arlene Istar Lev is a social worker, feminist family therapist, and author of *Transgender Emergence* (2004) and *The Complete Lesbian and Gay Parenting Guide* (2004). With her partner, the dog groomer, she parents two sons, ages 13 and 8.

2. A feminine Hebrew name for God, connoting dwelling place.