

Margaret
Cunningham
Women's Center

Women and aging: *Choices now provide more options*

Lydia Lee Cox, Ph. D.
Executive Director, Senior Citizens, Inc.

Life presents one of its most challenging paradoxes in the aging process. Paradoxical . . . because hardly anyone wants to discuss aging and its ramifications . . . yet if we are to meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities that growing older presents, we will have to talk about it.

It is particularly important that women talk about aging and how we will grow old together. In the next few years women will live longer and represent a greater segment of the total population than in any previous time in American history. There are now five times as many widows as widowers, and fully half of all women over 65 are widows. Another six percent have never been married, and four percent are divorced.

. . . older women outnumber older men in every age category.

According to U. S. Census Bureau statistics, older women outnumber older men in every age category.

Women who are currently between the ages of 55-62 represent one of the most vulnerable segments of our population. Many of these women have never worked outside the home and do not possess marketable skills to enter the workplace.

Due to societal pressures of another

time, many of these women were expected to stay home and remain caregivers for their young, regardless of the household economic status or their own desires. As a result of this choice, many women now reaching retirement age have no retirement benefits or other income sources.

Even families who were "lucky" enough to have a primary breadwinner who was eligible for retirement benefits don't always escape this dilemma. In many cases, husbands took care of all the financial matters, and set up benefits programs that provided income only as long as they were alive.

Monetary considerations are not the only worries for the aging woman of today. Many couples face enormous psychological adjustments upon reaching retirement age.

The woman who stayed home was typically denied business clout and financial control, but enjoyed "power" within her realm. More than ever, these women's spouses are returning to the household because of earlier retirement ages and higher incomes. These men are used to directing businesses and managing subordinates. Some of them begin to direct their spouses in how to run the family "business," thereby usurping the woman's authority or power in the one area in which she was allowed to exercise it.

Additional stress is caused by the changing roles of men and women in their later years. Statistical evidence has shown that women typically become more assertive or "masculine," while men begin to explore their



Lydia Cox, Director, Senior Citizens, Inc

previously underdeveloped creative or "feminine" side.

The women who help make up one-third of the entire United States population -- those born between the years 1946-64 -- will begin turning 65 in the year 2011. There is every reason to believe that their old age will be very different than the experiences of today's older woman.

This age group has faced every societal challenge in innovative and creative ways, and their response to old age will probably be no different. As "Age Wave" author Ken Dychtwald has said, "This generation will be the first one in our history that takes 100 years to reach age 50."

All of us, regardless of our age, need to lay the groundwork today for our old age. We all are becoming older with each day that we live. Wherever you are . . . start preparing for your future now by making life choices that will build your self-worth and develop interpersonal skills that will enable you to effectively build relationships. In order to avoid social isolation, women will need to adapt to a system of more relationships of a shorter duration. Learning how to manage your personal economic affairs at a younger age will enable you to provide adequate financial

[continued page two]



Senior Citizens, Inc. is a non-profit organization focused on service to seniors, some active and strong - some frail and homebound. With four centers and ten branches, they offer shared meals, continuing education, fitness and recreation, health screening and information, and daily opportunities to make friends and share activities with others.

It's your health

Tampon absorbency to be standardized

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has proposed standardized absorbency testing and labeling for tampons so purchasers can compare brands, and will be able to buy lower absorbency products to reduce the risk of toxic shock. Currently, the industry has no uniform labeling system.

The FDA's proposed regulation would require that absorbency be designated by the letters A through F, with A indicating the lowest absorbency and F the highest. An "A" tampon would be one that absorbed six grams or less of water in a standardized test. An "F" tampon would absorb over eighteen grams. (There are about twenty-eight grams to an ounce.)

Along with an absorbency letter, tampon boxes would be required to include an explanation of the absorbency ranges, and how women can use this information to compare tampon absorbencies and select tampons with the lowest absorbency needed to control menstrual flow. Tampon labeling is already required to advise that use of the lowest absorbency needed may minimize the risk of toxic shock.

A warning about the association between tampon use and toxic shock syndrome has been required in tampon labeling since 1982, along with a listing of the syndrome's symptoms. The symptoms of toxic shock include sudden high fever, vomiting, diarrhea, fainting or near fainting when standing up, dizziness, and a rash that looks like a sunburn. The FDA proposal also presents alternative options for displaying absorbency information on tampon labeling and requests comment on what further steps may be needed to ensure that clear information about tampon-associated toxic shock syndrome is conveyed to consumers.

Reprinted from NAACOG (the organization for obstetric, gynecologic, and neonatal nurses), March 1989. [Contributed by Beth Colvin Huff.] ■

Women and aging [continued from page one] means for yourself.

Women will have to use their entrepreneurial skills to find new ways of living. Compatible persons will have to pool their financial resources and share responsibilities in order to maintain independent living arrangements.

All of us suffer anxiety about becoming dependent as we grow older. Remaining confident about our ability to meet the challenges of aging means taking control of our lives at the earliest possible age. We need to learn how to take care of ourselves . . . physically, emotionally, financially, and spiritually. Of equal importance is gaining social experiences throughout our lives that will provide each of us with the ability to continue to make choices about how we live . . . regardless of our ages. ■

Letter to the editor

I am writing to express my dismay over the fact that the attached quote ["I married beneath me. All women do." Nancy Witcher, Lady Astor] appeared in *Women's VU*. Seeking equality for women is one thing, inferring that men are inferior to women is quite another. Can you imagine how you would feel had the quote read "I married beneath me. All men do." You would have felt insulted and degraded, and rightly so. Should men feel any differently? I think it is ironic that feminists are now guilty of the same sexist arrogance for which they have so long criticized men.

Helen M. Church, Secretary-Technical, Department of Spanish and Portuguese

Women seek more education

Women may soon surpass men in terms of education.

Since 1979, more than half of college students have been women, and that trend is likely to continue through 1998, according to the Department of Education. By 1998, nearly half of doctorate degrees are expected to be granted to women.

Nearly seven million women were enrolled in college last fall, making up 54% of college students. That compares with 49.9% in 1978. The data suggest that women, who make up 52% of the U.S. population in general, are enrolling at a higher rate than men.

Women have been receiving over half of the bachelor's degrees since 1982, and a majority of master's degrees since 1986. They still account for only 35% of doctorates, but this share is expected to reach 46% by 1998. - Compiled by the staff of *American Demographics* magazine.

Wall Street Journal, March 27, 1989



In the library

Summer reading found at women's center

Lauri Wright, BS, MLS
Women's center librarian

Whether at the beach or the pool, in a plane or car, or just on the patio, summer is a favorite time for reading. These suggestions from the women's center library aren't the classics your sophomore English teacher recommended, nor are they the latest bestsellers, but you're sure to find something to suit your reading tastes here.

Portrait of an Artist is a biography of Georgia O'Keeffe by Laurie Lisle. It includes photographs.

Sylvia Plath fans will enjoy *Letters Home* which follows her correspondence from college days until her death. Her mother edits and provides commentary for the letters.

Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology edited by Barbara Smith, contains poetry, photographs, nonfiction, fiction by women such as Willie M. Coleman, Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, and Renita Weems (Instructor of Hebrew, VU Divinity School).

Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions is Gloria Steinem's 1983 collection of essays. This includes her famous expose "I Was a Playboy Bunny" and profiles of Marilyn Monroe, Pat Nixon, Linda Lovelace, Jackie Kennedy Onassis, and Alice Walker.

I'm Eve is Chris Sizemore's, the woman with multiple personalities in *The Three Faces of Eve*, own story. Her account delves into her childhood with great detail and looks at her struggles to "unify" herself and her eventual recovery.

Fairy tale devotees, or those who read to children, will enjoy *Tatterhood and Other Tales*, edited by Ethel Johnson Phelps. These are old tales of magic and adventure that feature strong women characters: no Cinderellas or Snow Whites waiting for a prince here.

Revelations: Diaries of Women contains excerpts from various women's diaries from the early nineteenth century to the recent past. These include Louisa May Alcott, George Sand, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, and Anne Frank. A short biographical sketch introduces each woman. Women from many cultures and with a variety of interests are represented.

Editor's note: We regret that this will be the last of Lauri Wright's columns in Women's VU. During the past year she has made significant contributions to the women's center library and this newsletter. We are sorry to say good-bye. ■

Women's center programs

Call 322-4843 for further information on the programs listed below.

Dissertation Writers Group will meet on Thursday, June 1, 4:15 p.m. until 6:15 p.m. in Godchaux living room. Women of all schools and disciplines are invited. If you wish to be added to the mailing list for this group, please call the women's center.

Book Group will meet on Monday, June 12, 5:15 p.m. until 6:15 p.m. at the women's center. Kathleen Kitzmiller will lead the discussion of *The Woman Warrior* by Maxine Hong Kingston. New members welcome. Light refreshments. ■

Nashville YWCA seeks new Executive Director

Applications are being received by the Search Committee until July 12. Qualifications include Master's Degree or its equivalent and five years experience in administration. Resumes can be sent to the YWCA, 1608 Woodmont Blvd., Nashville, TN 37215.



photo by Lesley Collins

Arsht speaks for VU

Tannya Kennedy (A&S '87)
Business Reporter for the Nashville Banner

Most people shy away from public scrutiny. Leslye Arsht's livelihood depends on it. As Vanderbilt's associate vice-chancellor for news and public affairs, she is the university's official voice.

"The simple part for someone like me is to help organize how to tell about it (the University)," Arsht said from her Kirkland Hall office.

Arsht, who was recruited from more than 250 candidates, is fresh from a two-year stint as deputy assistant to the President and deputy White House press secretary -- positions she relished but was ready to relinquish.

"It was another major experience for me professionally and personally as is Vanderbilt. I decided before the Reagan Administration ended that I did not want to stay in the White House press office," said the Texas native.

"It's important that people serving in the government refresh themselves." Besides, the hours were grueling. Arsht was on call seven days a week and usually worked a twelve-hour day. Asked whether she can adjust to her new work schedule, she said, "It's my hope that I will be working closer to what some call normal working hours." Besides stamina, Arsht's White House post also required emotional fortitude. During one particularly

[continued page four]

Announcements et cetera

Arsht *[continued from page three]*

hectic week, she fielded inquiries after two traumatic events -- the U.S.-flagged oil tanker *Bridgeton* hit a mine in the Persian Gulf, and U.S. Secretary of Commerce Malcolm Baldrige died. "You just have to do it and you have to be fairly up about it. And it's hard not to get annoyed when you've heard it (a question) for the forty-second time," Arsht said.

She predicts one day a woman will hold the visible and much coveted position of White House press secretary. "There are people inside and outside the White House who would like to see a woman press secretary," Arsht said, noting you don't have to be the boss to make a difference. "It's really how much influence you have and how much opinion you carry. There were a lot of women who were influencing policy in the (Reagan) White House."

Prior to her White House stint, Arsht was with the Cabot Corp., Union Carbide, the EPA, and in the Nixon administration. She philosophizes, "Everything I've done I believe in. And in each case the fun for me is to be able to take what I've learned to other places and see whether it works or not." ■

Theatre As A Teaching Tool. With the help of the PG-13 Players (teen theatre troupe), Planned Parenthood of Nashville's Teen Theatre Coordinator and Drama Consultant will take you through the processes of writing and developing theatre productions which get at teen issues. This training on Tuesday, June 13, from 6:30 p.m. until 9:00 p.m. will assist those teaching social and life skills. Cost \$20. Class limited to twenty. Call 327-1095 to register.

The Rape and Sexual Abuse Center, which burned to the ground in April, 1988, has moved to its new location at 56 Lindsley Street in a lovely restored Victorian house. The phone numbers will remain the same -- business office is 259-9055 and the 24-hour crisis and support line remains 327-1110.

The center is in need of volunteers to staff the crisis line during the summer while some of the regulars are on vacation. Call the business number for more information.

Planned Parenthood of Nashville needs volunteer escorts now more than ever to help protect their patients' right to privacy.

If you are willing to work 4 hours a month to protect women from harassment, call Judi at 327-1097.

Coming unglued

by Jami Lynne Borman
Systems Analyst
Washington, D.C.

When we put our house on the market, I spent days wallpapering the kitchen, adding to the resale value. The realtor who came to appraise the house asked, "Did your husband wallpaper this himself?" "No," I began to explain, but before I could finish he interrupted me: "Well, the man you hired did an excellent job."

Savvy, March 1986

Edited by JUDITH T. HELFER

To receive each issue of Women's VU (published monthly except July and August), return the form below or call the Women's Center, 322-4843. Newsletters are sent free upon request to all students. Faculty and staff subscriptions are free to a campus address.

A yearly subscription to off-campus addresses (except students) is \$3.00. Please make checks payable to Vanderbilt University.

Name _____

Department _____

Address _____

Campus phone _____

Student (please give school and class)

Staff _____ Faculty _____ Adm. _____ Other _____

Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center

Vanderbilt University
Franklin Bldg., West Side Row
Box 1513, Station B
Nashville, TN 37235

Address Correction Requested
Include mailing label