

A View from 80

By Marge Nelson, 1928

Regarding the question of why OLOC requires that you be 60, here are some brief notes of our important history. A major theme in organizing OLOC in 1989 was our experience of “ageism” from younger lesbians. We complained that they spoke for us, defined feminism and lesbianism for us while ignoring our experiences.

What is key here is that we, too, had been raised to ignore our experience. We needed to create space and time where we would not have to defend ourselves or be outshouted and could explore together. So in the mid 1970's we begin gathering and talking and writing about “older women’s liberation.” Who were we? What was our experience of oppression? What were our dreams? This history is little known or respected.

I was part of this. From my initial awakening in 1963 from reading Betty Friedan’s brilliant analysis of our generation’s “problem that has no name” until a decade later when I met Polly and came out with her, I was incredibly alone in everything I did, all the liberation struggles I was part of. I was a mother of three children and had spent years as a housewife doing unpaid labor 24/ 7. This lack of income affects me as it does other women today. And the young women called me middle-class? They wanted to talk about how much they hated their mothers and really couldn’t hear me.

Because of our particular generation’s experience, our aging has its own flavor. Future generations may not need these limits. It is important to end with a note that we are still experiencing ageism in our local Dyke march where young women thank us and wiggle their tits at us as they march by our viewing seats, but limit and deny our access to the mike. What do you think about that?

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