

One Woman's Life Journey

By Elsie Ticoll



I grew up in a loving, caring home. My father was a factory worker and a devoted family man. My mother was a very giving and kind person. I had only one sister and no brothers; my sister and I were brought up as equals.

In my youth, I felt equal to the boys I encountered in school and in the organizations to which I belonged. I married a man who had values similar to my own. We got along very well. We raised two children and had a happy home life.

At age fifty-five I had a severe complete cardiac arrest and took a whole year to recover. My husband gave me a lot of care and support. Now, at age seventy I continue to function thanks to a damaged but still determined heart.

At age fifty-nine, in spite of my heart conditions, I was in the prime of life. I had a happy marriage and a good financial situation. My husband and I had bought a new home in Montreal, and were looking toward the future. We had worked out our small disagreements. We attended concerts and plays and took wonderful holidays. My husband accepted the idea of feminism, and had supported my decisions to get a full-time paying job at age fifty. He helped with food shopping, meals and housework. We continued to have discussions about local and world events.

My husband died six weeks after we moved into our new home. It was the loss of my world, my goals, my joys. I wrote at the time:

*The sun still shines
I don't know why*

*The earth still turns
Are they mistaken
Or am I?*

The sun was not shining for me. I was ready to give up and die too. I do not believe in life after death, so my husband and I would not meet again. I wanted my end.

But I knew I would continue to live. How? How? How?

I knew that nothing would make me feel better, nothing would relieve my grief. I felt that only time would ease it somewhat. But how to fill time while it takes so long to pass? My parents had lived into their eighties!

*Twenty years of limbo
Is too high a price
To pay for my sins
Why can't I skip over limbo
And find peace with my beloved?*

Within a year after my husband's death, both my son and daughter moved to Toronto for work.

I could not bear the social life with our old couple friends. I immersed myself in books, mostly biographies, in an effort to escape my own life and join other women whose lives came alive on the page. My job was almost impossible to endure. I grasped at telephone conversations:

*I'll sit by the phone
 And wait for your call
 I am drowning in conversations
 They come and go
 Every one is a straw
 At which I clutch
 The straws are all
 Enmeshed in the wires
 They won't come out
 I'll never gather them in my hands
 My useless, empty hands
 I am drowning in tears.*

I knew I would continue to live. But how? I decided to use my useless, empty hands to knit — something I had never done before. I started knitting scarves for friends and relatives. I went on to knitting sweaters and learning to weave. I made a plea to Time the Healer:

*Time — Where are you?
 Why don't you come?
 The waiting is so long and heavy
 I can't see you.
 Are you there?
 Are you lurking around the corner?
 Under a tree?
 Far away
 Yes. Time, you are far away.
 Could they be confusing you with
 Thyme?
 Shall I make salads with Thyme?
 Sit by my loom and munch lettuce
 and spinach
 With Thyme dressing?
 Oh — Time — Where is thy healing?
 Where are you — Time?*

I spent many of my leisure hours planning, designing, shopping for wool. I knitted and wove for three whole years. During that period I spent my summer vacations attending weaving classes. Using all my leisure time and concentrating most of my thoughts on knitting and weaving gave me small, important goals. I felt satisfaction from each piece of finished work, and appreciation from the people to whom I offered my scarves and sweaters. Art helped me connect with myself and acted as a bridge between me and other people.

At the end of my third year of widowhood, I was operated on for lymphoma of the stomach. Three quarters of my stomach was removed in surgery. The physical healing process began. Nine months after the operation I retired from my job and moved to Toronto. It was time to be near my children and my new granddaughter. I became involved in volunteer work. Feminism had been part of

my consciousness for many years. Through my volunteer work I met another woman who was also a feminist. We were both very interested in introducing feminism to other older women. We decided to form a discussion group. Along with several other women, we started what became known as the Founders' group of what eventually was to emerge as the Older Women's Network.

The Founders' group spent several years meeting monthly, mainly reading and discussing feminist literature and planning for expansion so that we could reach other older women. We began appealing to the government for financial support. Funding was granted for the organization of three open-forum meetings. These meetings (Women in Limbo — 55 Years and Older; Housing Options; Mandatory Retirement) were well attended and amply demonstrated the need for an organization for older women. Out of these initiatives the Older Women's Network (OWN) came to life.

OWN, now four years old and several hundred members strong, has many lives. It is:

- an advocacy organization for older women, lobbying the government to increase pensions and against mandatory retirement;
- a meeting-place for women seeking the company and companionship of other women;
- actively involved in numerous community projects (a co-operative housing project, for example);
- supportive of numerous special interest groups (such as New Reproductive Technologies, Life Traces, and Creative Expression).

OWN has an office, a newsletter, an elected Council and regular meetings. It is a vibrant organization, in continual evolution. For many women OWN is a place to spend our last years listening to one another, having fun together, growing and building self-confidence.

In terms of my personal evolution, OWN has been extremely important. It has helped me connect with other older women, and has allowed me to channel my energies in new directions.

My life has changed enormously over the past decade, in ways I could not have foreseen when my husband and I bought that house in Montreal. I have been fortunate to be able to weave another rich and colourful life. Time has come at last.

G A L L E R I E

CALL FOR ENTRIES

Forbidden Subjects: Self-Portraits by Lesbian Artists

Please send self-portrait(s) [slides or black-and-white photos], along with a 1–3 page statement discussing the process and importance of making a self-portrait.

Include some biographical information and a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Deadline: 1 June 1992.

Gallerie Publications
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 Panorama Drive
 North Vancouver, BC
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Anthology of Contemporary Black Women's Journals

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Patricia Bell-Scott and Sandra Murray Nettles are soliciting contributions for a collection which will offer unique personal reflections about self; family, love, friendship, and work relationships; as well as social, political and world events.

Journal excerpts from women of all ages, backgrounds, and world views are sought, to document the diversity, continuities and contradictions in Black women's lives. Of particular interest are submissions from Black girls or entries written during girlhood.

Interested journalists should submit 10–30 pages in triplicate by 1 July 1992 with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to:

Patricia Bell-Scott
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 Dawson Hall
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 Athens, GA 30602