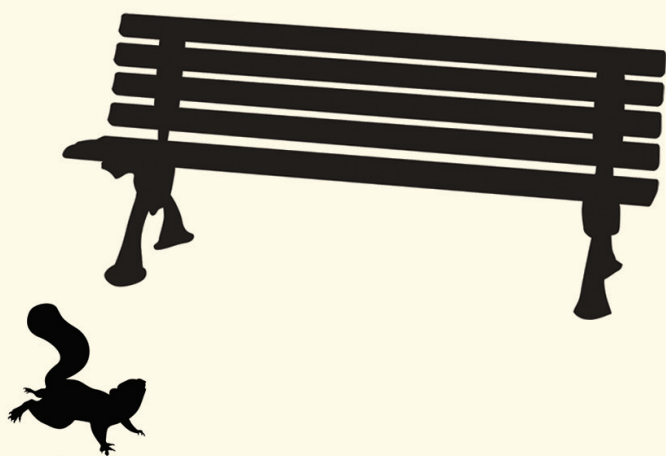


BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF  
*The Art of Resilience*

# FIERCE WITH AGE



CHASING GOD  
AND SQUIRRELS  
IN BROOKLYN

---

CAROL ORSBORN

## PRAISE FOR CAROL ORSBORN

*"Fierce with Age* is thought-provoking, brave, and courageous. Carol Orsborn tackles both the shadow and promise of transitioning beyond midlife, showing us aging as the opportunity to grow whole, rather than just grow old."

—MADDY AND KEN DYCHTOWALD, AUTHORS  
AND CO-FOUNDERS OF *AGE WAVE*

"In a youth-centric society, Boomer women have understandably resisted the notion of growing old, but there comes a time in every life when denial of aging cracks. This is a time ripe for a book like *Fierce with Age*."

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—JUSTINE WILLIS TOMS, CO-FOUNDER OF NEW DIMENSIONS RADIO AND AUTHOR OF *SMALL PLEASURES: FINDING GRACE IN A CHAOTIC WORLD*

"Through lyrically written pages of her memoir, *Fierce with Age*, Dr. Carol Orsborn conveys today's vital challenge for the Baby Boomer generation: to understand and accept aging and all the ramifications. This book is a poignant invitation for Boomers to try on the liberating possibilities of aging, freed from denial and dodging. Through Orsborn's lucid spiritual lens, coupled with the sophisticated nuances of a Boomer generation marketing expert, readers witness wisdom, wit, and wrath of a well-considered journey. Her memoir shares insightful stories, reflections and advice that can help Boomers discard illusions and illegitimacies of youth obsession, revealing instead the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual paths toward acceptance of the aging process, fiercely."

—BRENT GREEN, AUTHOR OF *MARKETING TO LEADING-EDGE BABY BOOMERS* AND *GENERATION REINVENTION*

“Dr. Carol Orsborn confronts aging—not gracefully, but fiercely—inviting us on her journey of unflinching honesty and tender revelation. Her diary of growing older may inspire your own.”

—MARY LOU QUINLAN, AUTHOR OF *THE GOD BOX*

“By telling us her story of struggle and transformation, Carol gives us hope that we, too, can be ‘fierce with age’ and, so, live fully with the fire for life.”

—ROBERT L. WEBER, PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY,  
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL DEPARTMENT OF  
PSYCHIATRY

“This is a rich, intimate, and hard-to-put-down read that reminds me aging may not be for sissies, but it can be for seers, adventurers, and a few lucky squirrels. Carol Orsborn takes me there.”

—LEAH KOMAIKO, AUTHOR OF *AM I OLD YET?*

“Carol Orsborn bravely invites us to accompany her as she wanders in the wilderness of doubt and confusion after her job and identity are stripped away, and as she gradually claims new dreams and renewed faith. Orsborn’s searingly honest and ultimately hopeful account of turning toward aging offers invaluable inspiration to all of us who are, or will be, on the journey of later life.”

—RABBI DAYLE A. FRIEDMAN, MSW, MAJCS,  
BCC, AUTHOR OF *JEWISH VISIONS FOR AGING*

“I’ve not read anything as honest and revealing as the tale of Carol Orsborn’s personal journey into becoming *Fierce with Age*. Through searching deeply and having the courage to share the experience, she offers us all insights and validation of who we can become in midlife and the years beyond.”

—CONNIE GOLDMAN, AUTHOR OF *WHO AM I...  
NOW THAT I’M NOT WHO I WAS?*

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*Now we are beyond the narcissism of youth,  
above the survival struggles of young adulthood,  
beyond the grind of middle-age,  
and prepared to look beyond ourselves  
into the very heartbeat of life.  
Now we can let our spirits fly.  
We can do what our souls demand  
that fully human beings do.  
This is the moment for which we were born.*

—JOAN CHITTISTER



## INTRODUCTION

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### WILD SPACE

I DIDN'T KNOW I WAS WRITING A BOOK ABOUT MY journey into the wild space beyond midlife for an entire season of keeping up my daily diary. But then again, when I started this bravest of all my diaries, I was still "Carol Orsborn."

Now, I'm not. I'm something else entirely than the brand and identity that has defined me over the past six decades and twenty books. This is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, I'm surprisingly re-energized about who I am becoming, and fiercely curious about what lies ahead. As I said, this is not a bad thing—but certainly different. And, may I add, this takes a fair amount of getting used to.

Just one year previously, I had been an accomplished author, scholar, and businesswoman at the peak of my career. After twenty books on spirituality, a doctorate in religion, and recovery from breast cancer years ago, my relationship with God was secure. Basking in the heat of midlife, I prided myself on looking and acting at least ten years younger than my chronological age. As much as I welcomed the birth of my first grandchild, I couldn't believe that I was old enough to have sourced not just one, but two generations. I took comfort in the fact that the average age of grandparents

in America is forty-something, so much younger than the stereotypes. While I knew I was not forty (not even as in “sixty is the new forty”), I did think I was going to be, at the very least, “the new sixty.”

This ebullient mood, alas, was not to last for long. For reasons you will soon learn, my persona unexpectedly found itself cracked open against the onslaught of time. One moment, I was a smart, spiritual woman at the peak of her game. The next moment, it was as if I had forgotten everything I’d learned over the course of my life. I’d forgotten how to be powerful, how to feel worthy and visible. I’d even forgotten how to pray. Shockingly out of control, I could not get things to go back the way they were, complete a grieving process, or beat a diagnosis. Rather, I had entered no less than a new, prolonged life stage: one that our entire society either denies, reviles, or sentimentalizes in order to trivialize.

In short, I had become old.

As I write this introduction at the end of this year’s transition, no one is more surprised, or gratified, than I to have emerged with a most astonishing discovery: that I’m okay with this. In fact, I am more than merely accepting aging. I am actually excited about this new life stage for one very good reason: I am catching my first, promising glimpse of what it truly means to be free. Plummet into aging, stare mortality in the eye, surrender everything, and what else is there left to fear? The way is perilous, danger on all sides. But I am no longer a woman afraid of age. I have become, instead, a woman fierce with age.

My diary had unknowingly begun its journey towards publication most of the way through this tumultuous year, when I bumped into an old friend—or should I say a good friend coming to grips with the fact that in the year since we’d last met,

she, too, had grown old. In Celia's case, it had been an illness that turned her from a lithe dance instructor who could not only choreograph the steps but do them, into an elderly woman who needed a walker. I admit I was shocked. She looked much smaller, grayer, and more melancholy. But beneath the veneer of frailty, Celia was still Celia to me.

When she asked what I'd been up to, I shocked her back. I didn't have any glamorous book tour to report. No new client. The fact that I had nothing noteworthy to share was entirely uncharacteristic of me. I struggled to find the words to describe this strange new place in which I'd found myself. Then, from depths unknown, I decided to tell her about the private diary I'd been keeping.

"Frankly, Celia, I've been grappling with the unexpected onset of growing older. One day, it was business as usual. Then suddenly, I found myself feeling ashamed for still being alive."

"It's stupid, isn't it," she nodded in agreement. "The biggest emotion I feel about needing a walker is embarrassment. What the hell is that about?"

"I'm not going to lie," I said. "I had a tough year. In fact, keeping a diary was the only thing that kept me going. Writing it all down, I managed to turn myself from victim to witness. Then life got good again."

"Really?" she said. "And you captured all this in your diary? Can I read it?"

That was the day this book was born. Celia opened up the possibility that speaking my journey towards wholeness out loud might actually be of use to others. But after writing more than twenty books, I also knew that making the commitment to turn my diary into a published book was not one to be undertaken lightly. There would be questions I would have to wrestle with about how much of my own journey I

would actually want to make public, particularly given the always vulnerable and often embarrassing nature of so many of my entries. There would also be sensitivities about respecting the intimate details of family members, friends, and peers who did not know that they were to end up as characters in a book. And, too, there would be the tension between telling the story just as it unfolded versus bringing expanded perspective to the writing, editing, and publishing process as I continue making sense of the year just past.

Buoyed by Celia's encouragement, I trust the effort will be worth it. After all, I've already come so far. Not, by any means, as judged by any external criteria. For as I write this introduction at diary's end, I am surrounded by moving boxes that not only symbolize but actually contain the artifacts of midlife marked for storage. And while the movers know the exact storage facility where my lifetime of goods is going, I am none too sure where I, myself, am headed. No matter. Whatever happens with me next, I am feeling unbridled, wild, feral, even. Plus, I have remembered how to pray.

Because of everything I've endured, I begin this new phase of my life journey no longer ashamed or depleted about aging, but rather, curious and excited. While the contours of this wild terrain beyond midlife have not yet fully revealed themselves to me, I am clear that rather than experiencing myself at an ending, I am most definitively starting something profoundly and unexpectedly new. This initiation of a fresh life stage bears with it the hallmarks of all the previous life stages combined: the high anticipation, the celebration, and the bold, outright terror. And so it is that I end this introduction—and this year—fundamentally changed for the good. I would not have it any other way.

# FALL

---

*Old age is a plain,  
an alto plano,  
with nothing when you come  
onto it but horizon;  
there are few discernible features,  
at least at first glance,  
no tracks to follow.  
Accustomed to limits,  
to guidelines,  
to markers,  
you stand there stunned,  
amazed.  
You haven't had such a sense of space  
since you were twenty—  
the splendor, the terror of it.*

—MARVIN BARRETT









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EPIPHANY

MY JOURNEY TO THE WILD SIDE OF MIDLIFE started in the heart of a mean fall in New York City. One week previously, I had been at the peak of my career, loving my job working for the start-up of my dreams. I was actually being paid fairly by the CEO, who shared my missionary passion for getting brand marketers to take women at midlife seriously. When I'd landed the job several years before, the only woman in her fifties or over on the team, I had taken on the very public role of poster girl for my generation. To attract clients, I blogged and spoke about whatever was on my mind on the company's Web site. To top it off, I truly believed I was doing God's work. Life was sweet.

Happily, for those first few years on the job, what I wanted to write about and what marketers wanted to hear about older women pretty much coincided. I loved to shock young creatives with stories about grandmothers climbing the Himalayas and taking up surfing. I wrote about mature women executives who in recessionary times had turned out to be the last consumer standing, taking on responsibility for both the financial and emotional well-being of multiple generations. The women in my cohort were defying the

stereotypes of aging. We were acting, buying, and influencing just like younger consumers. No, scratch that. We were acting, buying, and influencing even bigger, better, and more than younger consumers.

Then I crossed the threshold of my sixtieth year and kept going. Somehow, I had not only arrived at “Can you believe I’m 62?” but was catapulting headlong towards “You look great for 63.” Shockingly, my next birthday was going to transpire on the East Coast, thousands of miles from home, because my husband, Dan, had landed a job in NYC he couldn’t refuse. Meanwhile, the start-up for which I was working virtually didn’t care whether I was in California or New York. Before we could second-guess our decision, we put our beloved canyon cottage up for rent and moved east.



“EVERYBODY SHOULD LIVE IN NEW YORK AT least once in their lives,” I told Maggie, my friend, an artist and the manager of a boutique that catered to the mature L.A. canyon crowd. Maggie and I had met a couple of years previously, having arrived at the entrance to the boutique at exactly the same moment; I needed a new jacket for my next book tour and Maggie was responding to the help wanted sign in the window. Her plan was to not only ask the owner for the job, but to hang her paintings for sale.

I had helped Maggie maneuver her unwieldy painting through the door, and by the time we reached the counter, our friendship had begun. I’d gotten the perfect jacket, and Maggie had gotten both the job and the gallery space. Each of us saw this as a good omen and decided to celebrate our successes together at Starbucks.

Two years later, I was back at the boutique, this time to say good-bye. Maggie took it surprisingly well. In fact, she saw my departure as a sign from God that she, too, was due for a big change. “We’ve got to make our sixties mean something,” she’d said, rearranging her bangs in the three-way mirror, hiding a fast-growing crop of gray roots. Looking at our reflections, I

caught a glimpse of her most famous painting, hung just behind us. It was the one of a garden elf that had been made into posters and that had graced most of the boutique customers' homes in the eighties, when we were busy decorating our first living rooms. The elf, an icon of eternal youth, had made her fame—but not her fortune. The latter had gone to an unscrupulous business partner, and, too, by the nineties, pictures of elves had gone sadly out of style. We had commiserated over many a grande latte since we'd met, as, despite my superb jacket, this latest book tour had been a dud. Self-help books for Boomer women had gone the way of elves, sad to say, as the market had turned first to chick lit and then to mommy porn.

Rather than spending long hours at her easel in her home studio, as Maggie had for most of her life, "the elf artist" was now managing a boutique and complaining about plantar fasciitis. And while still thinking of myself primarily as an author in her prime, who lived in a charming cottage in a canyon in Los Angeles, the truth is that I was working for a marketing Web site, poised to trail after my husband to a high-rise in New York.



ASIDE FROM COMMISERATING ABOUT MY impending birthday with Maggie, who was herself turning 60, I instinctively kept it quiet. Fifties is one thing. Sixties is another. Nevertheless, between crisp white shirts with the collars turned up and designer tortoise-shell glasses, I did think I looked good for my age. Increasingly, however, my blogs were betraying me. This betrayal started while I had still been in Los Angeles, and moved with me to New York, as I found myself writing more and more about simplifying rather than consuming and railing against costly anti-aging moisturizers that promised to keep us “forever young.”

Then, one sad day, just a few months after the move, I went to the company Web site for which I had been serving as spokes-blogger, only to be introduced to the new poster girl for the cause. She could barely have been brushing fifty, and could pass for about thirty-five. What’s more, her tone was unreservedly perkier than mine. And how could it not have been? Upon inquiry, I was let in on the scoop. The new spokeswoman for the Web site was a fictional avatar: the purchased image of a Photoshopped model given voice by staff members closer to my son’s age. She was to author

articles and interact with visitors over the Web, jobs I had previously undertaken with pride. But unlike me, she would never challenge young brand managers by suggesting that they refrain from saying things like “I know what older women want because I, myself, have a mother in her fifties.”

Shortly thereafter, I received notice that while I had earned the unending gratitude and respect of my beloved CEO, he could no longer offer me employment. I understood that I would still play some smaller role in the firm. But nevertheless, here it was, in undeniable black, white, and pink slip: formal notice. I would dearly have loved to spend the rest of my life wallowing in self-pity, but the dog needed to be taken for a walk in the park.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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CAROL ORSBORN, PH.D., IS FOUNDER OF FIERCE WITH AGE, the Online Digest of Boomer Wisdom, Inspiration and Spirituality. She is an internationally recognized thought leader on the Boomer generation. Through her retreats, blogs, speeches, marketing consulting, and over twenty books, Carol has chronicled the challenges her generation has faced and the stereotypes they've defied as they've transited from early parenthood through midlife crisis and beyond.

Carol has been a leading voice for her generation of women since she founded Overachievers Anonymous in the late 1980s, credited as a progenitor of both the simplicity and work/life balance movements. Since then, she has appeared multiple times on the *Today* show, *Oprah*, *NBC Nightly News*, and in the pages of *The New York Times* and *USA Today*. Carol is currently a blogger with *Huffington Post*, *Beliefnet*, and *Next Avenue*, PBS's initiative for the Boomer generation. In addition to her leadership role with Fierce with Age, Carol is Executive Director of CoroFaith, offering audio-based spiritual content to hospitals and the aging community. Previously, she served as co-founder of FH Boom, the first global initiative by a top ten PR company dedicated to helping brands connect with the Boomer generation.

Carol, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of UC Berkeley, received her Masters of Theological Studies and Doctorate in the History and Critical Theory of Religion from Vanderbilt University, specializing in adult development and ritual studies. She has done postgraduate work in spiritual guidance at both Stillpoint and the Spirituality Center at Mount St. Mary's College in Los Angeles and the New Seminary of Interfaith Studies in Manhattan.

Dr. Orsborn continues life on the wild side of midlife at the side of her husband Dan, and their dog, Lucky, splitting their time between Los Angeles, California, and Nashville, Tennessee. She is the mother of two adult children, and the grandmother of one.