

Baby Boomer Women at Midlife

By Dotsie Bregel

There are 38 million baby boomer women turning ages 44-62. The sheer number of us is changing the image of midlife women like no generation before.

Middle age finds us pondering how we've lived the first half of our lives and what to do about the second. Some of us are in the grips of a midlife crisis, going through menopause or even considering cosmetic makeovers. Many are caring for elderly parents while parenting our children and working full time. But don't let that concern you. Boomer women are reinventing themselves at midlife by choosing to follow their passions.

As little girls we lived the simple life. Moms were at home caring for their children and husbands; dads worked nine to five and dinner was on the table at six. We jumped rope, played hop-scotch, married off Barbie and Ken, and played with our Hula Hoops and Slinkies. Violence in school meant the few boys who threw eggs at the windows of their least favorite teacher. We practiced duck-and-cover drills and wore silver bracelets with our POW's name and birth date.

The first wave of boomer women came of age during the women's movement and civil right's era. We helped seed the modern day drug culture, had illegal abortions, and protested Vietnam while losing boyfriends in battle. Some of us burned our bras and helped spark a sexual revolution in the 1960s and early '70s.

The second wave of boomer women benefited from the women's movement. We had greater access to legal abortions and the pill. We led a metamorphosis from housewives to career women. This group came of age in the late 1970s and early '80s. We created the diet and fitness craze, but were also responsible for ushering in a society that is more global in its thinking while becoming more conscious of individual rights and our environment.

In the 1960s, when some boomers were in diapers and others entered adulthood, society-shaping events took place: the assassinations of JFK, MLK, Malcolm X, and RFK; racial riots; *Roe v. Wade*; the moon landing; and The Beatles. Woodstock, the celebration of peace, love, and rock and roll, codified a generational divide once and for all.

As young women we were told the world was our oyster. We should DO something with our lives. We should never become dependent on a man. We were the generation that could have it all, do it all, and be it all. Education, Prince Charming, families, careers—you name it and we could have it. We chose diverse paths. Some of us aborted our babies while others gave birth. Some chose the corporate ladder while others chose to stay home. Some lived together while friends married. Some of us divorced and became single moms while others chose to stay in loveless marriages.

We chose to challenge ideas and reinvent lifestyles. We altered the traditional role of the sexes as we played tug-of-war with work and home. Believing the voices we heard, we attacked life with a vengeance, entering the workforce while exchanging our roller skates for pumps, candy necklaces for pearls, and wax lips for lip gloss. We returned to the workplace three months after giving birth, pumping our breasts at lunchtime. The societal expectation was for us to work. Our self worth was questioned when we chose to stay home like our mothers before us. Staying home meant we didn't get a pay check and chanced missing the next rung on that corporate ladder. We felt guilty leaving our children in child care while our friends who stayed home felt guilty for not working.

At midlife the 40s and 50s are no longer as old as we once thought. We are more educated, spiritual, wealthy, and healthier than any generation of women to precede us. We've changed society's expectation and continue to redefine womanhood. We will be the biggest and richest market segment by the year 2010.

At midlife we're transforming and influencing every segment of society. With children leaving the nest, we have time to reflect. We're going inward, hiring life coaches, exploring, and finding new direction. We're seeking spiritual guidance and questioning if we've been true to ourselves or society's expectations. We're searching for peace, solace, and direction for the rest of our days on earth and the afterlife. We're seeking balance and pursuing our passions. We're no longer obsessed with being who others want us to be. We're finding contentment in who we are being called to be.

We've had more choices than our mother's generation and have lived and continue to navigate uncharted courses. We are pioneers in our own right. We're faithful, loving, and hard-working women who multi-task to survive. We continue to better ourselves so we can help those who need us. We come from various backgrounds carrying different baggage. We love our country, but we're probably not the rebels we once were. We're trying to be all that we can be.

At midlife we're celebrating and reflecting while experiencing midlife epiphanies. We are wise women who have lived, loved, and enjoyed making a difference. And will continue to do so.

Dotsie Bregel is Founder of the National Association of Baby Boomer Women, www.nabbw.com and the wildly popular Web site www.BoomerWomenSpeak.com, the # 1 site for "baby boomer women online. She is passionate about empowering and educating midlife women. Dotsie has been mentioned in *Time* magazine and *AARP Bulletin* among dozens of newspapers across the nation. She frequently does radio interviews and appeared on *The Early Show* (CBS) with Dave Price. You may contact her at dots@boomerwomenspeak.com or 1-877-bboomer.