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HITTING SIXTY WITH A BOOM:
THE NEW OLD AGE

When you see an older woman walking down the street, what do you really think about her? Ask yourself. We're not talking about a forty-year-old woman or a fifty-year-old woman, but a sixty-, seventy-, or eighty-year-old woman with real signs of age. Could you imagine that she and her husband lay in bed that morning having sex and talking about world politics? Or that she just met the love of her life and is exploding with desire? Or that she's thinking of leaving her job and joining the Peace Corps and is feeling more creative, adventuresome, and alive than ever before? Well, if you haven't you're not alone.

Our images of older women—the grandmother, widow, fragile little old lady—are so strongly etched in our minds that we've become blind to the full lives of amazing older women living all around us. We've got no idea what's going on behind their closed doors and consequently have no access to the insights of some of the most sexually experienced women on this planet. Older women are *still doing it*, still loving it, and still getting better at it,

“it” being whatever their passion is: from having sex to exploring new ideas to embarking on a creative project. Sharing their neglected stories, *Still Doing It* tells the real and revolutionary experiences of some of today’s extraordinary older women.

One of them, Elaine, eighty, from Rhode Island, is a deeply spiritual, churchgoing African-American woman who doesn’t have a wrinkle on her face. After her divorce, she worked hard as a nurse to raise her children on her own. She says, with high energy and a twinkle in her eye, “I think society does have a hard time with the fact that I am not only a grandmother but also a great-grandmother and I’m still very sexual. They think, Oh, my God, there’s something wrong with her. They just don’t think these things go together. I see grandmas, and that’s all they are, grandmas. But that’s not me. I think I’m a good grandmother and great-grandmother, but there’s a part of my life that’s still mine, and I’m not ready to give that up.”

Of course, not all women over sixty are sexual. Not all younger women are sexual, for that matter. There are older women who report that they never liked sex that much when they were younger and they’re just as happy to give it up. And there are women who report they have less interest in sex as they grow older. But as Cornell University gynecologist Dr. Peggy Polanescky points out, our sexuality ebbs and flows throughout our lives due in great part to our circumstances. “I think some women, for whatever reason, over time, lose interest, but sometimes they lose interest because they stop doing it, or sometimes their husband has prostate cancer or something and it all gets tied into his illness, and you don’t have a partner for a number of years. It waxes and wanes, even in younger women it can wax and wane,

where couples can go a couple of months and they're just not as interested, and then suddenly everything's back again, depending on what is going on in their lives."

People often ask us where we found the thirty-five women interviewed for this book, insinuating that you'd have to go to the ends of the earth to find them. The reality is that phenomenal older women, those who are in relationships and those who are not, are everywhere. We met Rebecca, sixty, a soft-spoken, elegant woman with a shock of white hair who caught our eye when we sat next to her on a plane. She had just taken early retirement and reinvented herself as a photographer after thirty years in another profession. We spotted Tamara (not her real name), sixty-nine, a graphic artist, in a doctor's office, her attention-grabbing tattoo of her granddaughter's name boldly covering her bicep. We met Lori, eighty, a vivacious, German-born beauty, with an artsy style and the chiseled face to match it, at a party.

Friends marvel that once we found these women they were willing to openly talk about their sex life, exclaiming their mother would *never* talk about her sexuality publicly. It's true that women in their sixties, seventies, and eighties grew up in the 1940s and 1950s, when frank discussion about sex was not exactly encouraged, and many older women today are uncomfortable talking about their sex life. We'd be lying if we didn't say that many women we approached didn't want to participate, even anonymously. But two things must be emphasized: (1) Reticence to divulge intimate details (not unusual among younger women, too) is *not* always a reflection of what is happening privately, and (2) the assumption that older women aren't sexual is actually reinforced by younger people, who not only

avoid talking to older women about their sexual or romantic lives but often exclude them from social events, assuming that they wouldn't be interested.

Freddie, seventy-nine, with a great head of red hair and a dry sense of humor, is still a practicing psychotherapist. She reports that even in a therapeutic situation clients often assume they can't talk about their sex life because of her age. She frequently has to bring up the topic so her younger clients see that she's neither uncomfortable nor shocked. Once that wall is broken she reports that clients forget about her age and talk freely. The irony, of course, is that women over sixty were obviously sexual before younger people were born, and many still have very strong sexual feelings, which our ageist society rarely acknowledges. All the women interviewed for this book expressed real joy, even gratitude, at being able to share their feelings about sex and romance, a really important part of their consciousness that most younger people wrongly assume they've outgrown.

PIONEERS

The truth is that there are remarkable senior women everywhere whose irreverence, daring, and sexuality could teach younger women a thing or two. Despite stereotypes to the contrary, they're taking more risks, not fewer, as they age. After a lifetime of worrying about what other people think of them, many frankly don't care anymore. Their awareness of their mortality has made them see just how precious life is. They know what they want, and they're willing to go for it, whether it's letting a potential lover know they're interested or going to Peru to climb

Machu Picchu. Even “traditional” women, like Juanita, seventy-four, a stunning African-American woman with high cheekbones and the posture of a queen, are not willing to be denied what they want and how they want it. A devout Christian who worked as a chambermaid before marrying a much older man who died while her kids were growing up, Juanita doesn’t want to remarry. She’s unwilling, however, to give up the gratifying relationship and sex life she has with her long-term boyfriend that, outside of marriage, her church considers to be a sin.

THERE WEREN’T OPTIONS

It’s easy to think that many older women were traditional as young women. The majority married young and quickly had children. Those who did engage in premarital sex most often hid the fact. But there weren’t the same options women enjoy now: to postpone marriage, live with rather than marry partners, or choose to have children on their own. Instead they had to wait until later in life to make those changes and reinvent themselves to become the women they are today.

Elizabeth, seventy-four, from Pittsburgh, who radiates an inner and outer grace, now enjoys two boyfriends, one for sex and one for his mind. Not the kind of life her strict Christian background prepared her for. “You weren’t supposed to have any sexual activity until you were married. Well, it turns out I didn’t wait until I got married, but I ended up marrying the first man I slept with. And I thought it was the thing I wanted to do. But I was only nineteen years old, and I thought, Well, maybe I won’t find anybody else. I wasn’t pregnant when we got married, but I

did get pregnant that first month; we were still in college. So right from the beginning it wasn't easy for me to express my sexuality because I didn't want to get pregnant. Even after I was married it was hard for me to go and get a diaphragm. I mean, looking back on it today, it's hard to believe, but that's the way it was in the nineteen fifties. I was embarrassed to go and get birth control. I had two children, and I was still embarrassed."

Penny, eighty-five, a petite, pretty woman with the bearing of someone raised to be a lady, married her husband at "twenty-one or twenty-two." She was from Massachusetts, and he was a Hoosier, so she moved to Indianapolis to be with him. But she soon found that he was not the most loving partner. "I almost felt as though [his work] was his mistress. He was a golfer and a businessman, and I was like someone on the shelf who, if you want to say hi, there I'll be." She thought about leaving him a couple of times, but put everyone's needs before her own. "I couldn't do it because I thought of my two children. It would not be fair to my husband or to my husband's mother and dad. So I came back to Indianapolis. I got involved in a lot of volunteer work. It's what filled in the gaps for me." It would take fifty years, until her husband's death, before Penny would know the joy of a really attentive lover.

Cara, sixty-six, a woman with a dark intensity, is now a lesbian, but she was a devout Mormon as a young woman. She married young and had three children. It wasn't until 1975, when she was thirty-six and moved from her home in Salt Lake City to the more liberal Ann Arbor, Michigan, that she got divorced and came out. "It was the era. I didn't have a lot of options. The older women I admired were married people, and so growing up you dated boys, got married, had children. I was aware of my sexual

orientation all the time, but yeah, I repressed it because there was nothing I could do about it. Until probably the 1970s, the American Medical Association still considered homosexuality a mental illness.” So Cara married to cover up her secret, “. . . and I wanted children. I wanted a family, and back in those days it was the only way to have a kid.”

But as the sexual revolution dawned, women suddenly had more options. Ellen, seventy-four, a former nutritionist whose boundless, kinetic energy still commands, credits the women’s movement with giving her the courage to leave a loving, but sexually unsatisfying marriage to live more authentically as an out lesbian. “In high school I had crushes on girlfriends. I remember being madly in love with Gene Tierney in *Laura*. I expect that their mothers caught wind and told their daughters you better not go near that Ellen girl. I felt that I was doing something wrong. I ultimately did get married, but in my late thirties we began to have younger women in the house who helped take care of the children, and by that time I was really ready to make sexual advances. I knew that I had to get a divorce.” Ellen’s face lights up when she speaks of what the women’s movement did for her. “I cannot tell you how lucky I feel to have come out just at the time that the women’s movement was exploding,” she says. “It legitimized everything I felt. I became alive. I physically became alive.” Today she reports her sexual life has the sublime quality of enjoying something that was once forbidden.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the percentage of women thirty to thirty-four who were never married practically tripled between 1970 and 2000, reaching 22 percent.

To longtime sexual revolutionaries like Betty, a seventy-eight-year-old sex expert who came of age and into her own in the days of love-ins and key parties, today's young people sometimes seem hopelessly staid. "In the sixties—can you imagine—on Saturday night, instead of sitting around watching television like everyone is doing now, we were at a party having sex with a lot of wonderful people. I mean, how much fun can you have? Well, I can tell you: It's a lot more than we're having now." But even Betty says of getting married at twenty-nine, "It was the nineteen fifties; you had to get married."

While women like Betty and Ellen may be outspoken for their generation, they mark a sea change. Women over sixty-five are the fastest-growing segment of the population. By 2030, 28 percent of the population will be over sixty-five, and two thirds of these will be women. The baby boomers, the largest and most influential generation in American history, started turning sixty in 2006, and as their numbers increase, society is in for a shock. These boomers are women who came of age in the era of free love and flower power, of mass protests and bra burning, of birth control and sexual experimentation, and they're not about to throw in their wild-child ways when they sign up for Medicare. These movers and shakers will not settle into sexless obscurity, satisfied with merely living longer; they want to have fun, too. And with the average life span of American women already pushing eighty, sixty can be just the beginning of a whole new chapter. As futurist Maddie Dychtwald, sixty, says, "As we live longer, reinvention is going to be the key." Just picture it: Seniors buying sex toys, gay-friendly nursing homes, and women not only finding the loves of their lives in their seventies and eighties but also getting into alternative relationships, switching careers, following their creative and sexual

desires. Yet despite the fact that there are already groundbreaking older women out there and we are on the cusp of a revolution, the image of older women as sexually dried up is still pervasive.

A LITTLE HISTORY LESSON

The truth is, older people, and especially older women, have always been more sexual than society has been prepared to accept. This stubborn streak of denial seems to run especially deep in the United States, which has a long, troubling history of denying women's sexuality dating back to (not surprisingly) the Puritans. At a time when accusations of witchcraft in Europe and elsewhere were being met increasingly with doubt and acquittals, in colonial Massachusetts older women were still being hanged as witches largely because of their overt sexuality or positions of power.

At the center of the Salem, Massachusetts, trials was Tituba, the Arawak native who was sold to Reverend Samuel Parris, and was believed to be his concubine and mother of his child. Then there was Bridget Bishop, who was approaching sixty and just five years into her third marriage when she was accused of witchcraft. Clearly, these sexually active, strong-minded older women were more than the Puritans were prepared to tolerate. Ruth, seventy-two, a wisecracking, superathletic psychologist, says, "When they were burning witches at the stake in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries most of these were older women who were viewed as dangerous in terms of sex and sexuality, and I think there was a sense that men, the male hierarchy, felt threatened."

Science has quelled accusations of witchcraft in the intervening centuries, but it hasn't eradicated society's fear of women's

sexuality. As Joyce, a documentary filmmaker and psychologist with an easy manner that invites comfort, says, “If we accept that women are sexual after their childbearing years, we have to admit that their sexuality is not about bringing in the next generation but about unabashed joy and pleasure.” But as the brief fad of female circumcision in this country in the 1860s for cases of nymphomania or intractable masturbation* attests, unabashed joy and pleasure were clearly not what society wanted women to enjoy.

Dr. Alfred Kinsey, however, took bold steps toward sexual understanding with the establishment of the Kinsey Institute for Sex Research. His 1948 publication of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* was greeted as a medical breakthrough and went on to sell hundreds of thousands of copies. However, an international media storm greeted his 1953 follow-up on women’s sexuality, which reported that women were masturbating, having sex before they married, and, yes, being sexually active even as grandmothers. The study was widely hailed by fellow scientists but immediately prompted denunciations by pastor and presidential advisor Reverend Billy Graham, which eventually led the Rockefeller Foundation, Kinsey’s key patron, to withdraw its financial support for his research.

LIVING LONGER, HAPPIER, SEXIER LIVES

As the century progressed, however, research in support of Kinsey’s findings began to accrue. In the 1960s, gerontolo-

*Documented in Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English’s legendary book *For Her Own Good*.

gist Dr. Ruth Weg began her lifelong study of the sexuality of older women. In 1975 she initiated her pioneering program “Sexuality and the Whole Person,” which included a then-revolutionary discussion of “alternative lifestyles for independent adults (homosexuality, bisexuality, polygamy)” that led to the eventual establishment of the American Society on Aging’s (ASA) Lesbian and Gay Aging Issues Network. Dr. Weg’s subsequent book, *Sexuality in the*

The publication of Kinsey’s Sexual Behavior in the Human Female also prompted a follow-up poll of 1,000 women between the ages of eighteen and fifty by The People, a London tabloid, which primly concluded: “British women are much more moral, more conventional, and more faithful to the marriage bond than the American women of the Kinsey Report.” Obviously fear of women’s sexuality is not only an American hang-up.

Later Years: Roles and Behavior, first published in 1983, put sexuality on the map for gerontologists and those working with older adults. In 1980 the then-fifty-two-year-old Dr. Ruth Westheimer created a sensation with a fifteen-minute radio segment called “Sexually Speaking,” which championed sexual literacy among women and men of all ages. Her openness about sexuality was embraced like a breath of fresh air.

These medical pioneers made deep dents in our puritanical notions of age, yet incredibly the stereotype of the worn-out, sexless older woman has followed us into the twenty-first century. Dr. Christina Puchalski, an internist at George Washington University Hospital in Washington, D.C., reports that she “has to laugh when I do a sexual history with my older patients and I have a medical student in the room. They’re just in shock that people have sex after sixty-five.”

Fifty years after Kinsey, ageist stereotypes continue to strait-jacket older women. Sadly, many older women themselves, who can't help but be affected by pervasive ageist assumptions, initially find it surprising that they still feel sexual. As Elaine, who has come to accept that she is a great-grandmother who likes sex, told us, "I found that I had these yearnings, and at first I thought, Oh, God, you're much too old for this. But then I thought, Why would I be having these feelings if my body were too old?"

ADVERTISING

It's not surprising that many women feel the way Elaine does. There are so few images of and stories about women over sixty being sexual. A major culprit is the billion-dollar advertising industry, whose purchase of air time largely determines television programming. Unfortunately, it still uses a model from the Depression era that assumes that older people are so rigid and have so much brand loyalty that the brands they choose are fixed in stone. Of course, how many older people do you know who wouldn't be open to trying a new toothpaste, a new brand of sneakers, or a new car for that matter? But real or not, if advertisers perceive they can't make money from a particular demographic, they're not going to finance projects geared to that group. Maddie Dychtwald, whose work concentrates on issues relating to older women and business, says perhaps, "it's because the average age of the buyers is twenty-eight. . . . Whatever the reason, it's clearly rubbish. In fact, sixty percent of the wealth in this country is in the hands of people over fifty." What makes this preconception particularly perverse is that the advertising

industry is actually losing money because of it. But even an over-sixty CBS senior executive, David F. Poltrack, who wants to create programming for older audiences, recently declared at New York's Women in Film and Television that the ageist biases in the advertising industry still work against what he's able to bring to the screen.

A few smart people, however, are not willing to simply accept this antiquated reasoning. In 2006 acclaimed indie director Susan Seidelman made *The Boynton Beach Club*, a film about a woman in her sixties dating. The response she got from distributors was predictable: "It's a nice movie, but we don't believe there's enough commercial potential in that demographic," Seidelman recalled. "That didn't compute for me. I'm over fifty, and I go to the movies at least once a week. My mother is over seventy, and she goes twice a week. My sixteen-year-old son barely goes at all; he's online all the time. I think people over fifty are the most underrepresented audience."* In order to prove her point Seidelman engineered a limited release in South Florida and Palm Springs, California. The huge numbers of people who showed up to see the film got it theatrical distribution in 2006 with Roadside Attractions in the United States and a worldwide release. Eric d'Arbeloff, co-owner of Roadside Attractions, told us, "There's no question the older audience reliably goes to movies, yet for the most part they're ignored by the studios. So they represent an opportunity for independent distributors like us, as we discovered on our successful releases of *Ladies in Lavender* and *Boynton Beach Club*. Still, the older audience is not without its challenges:

*Stephen Farber, "Hollywood Awakens to the Geriatric Demographic," *The New York Times*, July 2, 2006.

They tend not to come out on the first weekend, which is tough because the theaters give us so little time. Second, they don't buy or rent DVDs the way younger people do, and this is where the profit in the business is now made."

Clearly audiences (largely older but also younger) are hungry for film and television that portrays older lives, particularly those with romantic/sexual themes. But the fight to make the mainstream media aware that older life is something audiences are going to pay to see is still far from over.

In the last few years we've begun to see a handful of titillating older women in the movies. Witness Helen Mirren in *Calendar Girls*, Diane Keaton in *Something's Gotta Give*, Charlotte Rampling in *Heading South*, Susan Sarandon in *Alfie*, and Barbra Streisand playing a senior sex therapist married to Dustin Hoffman in the hit *Meet the Fockers*. But these characters are still only in their late fifties or early sixties. The image of women in their mid to late sixties, seventies, and eighties who are sexually vibrant is still largely absent, even taboo.

What's so sad is that not only are older women being denied images of sexuality and romance that reflect their reality, but the rest of us aren't seeing the joy our later years can bring. We're so inundated with the image of sex as two hot pumping young bodies that even thinking of women in their seventies and eighties having sex seems foreign, if not distasteful.

If you go on the Internet and look up "older women and sexuality," it's shocking how little is there. And what there is is mostly porn sites with names like "SEXUALLY EXPLICIT: Granny Goes Wild!" The message is clear: Women over sixty having sex is a joke. And since most of us, if we're lucky, are going to reach that age, the joke ultimately will be on us.

But whether it's been documented or not, the truth, and what we should all be shouting from the rooftops, is that the reality of older women's lives is a hell of a lot better than the images we're exposed to. And psychological, sociological, and medical data overwhelmingly prove it. Despite what popular culture leads us to believe, the National Institutes of Health report that 80 percent of women experience mild or no menopausal symptoms. For some women, the increased levels of testosterone that come with menopause actually increase their sexual appetite. Harriet, a well-read seventy-nine-year-old bohemian with a head of long, flowing white hair and an irreverence that charms many and alarms a few, declares, "After menopause your whole hormonal structure changes, and you become much more sexual. I mean, it's something that women are really being confused about, and it's being hidden from them, I think. . . . First of all, the psychological factor that you don't have to worry about getting knocked up is a big factor. And second of all, that testosterone thing just gets you hotter all the time. You have to balance it with estrogen, otherwise you'll grow a beard or something [laughs], but it's great. Sex is getting better all the time . . . and I feel very much part of that thing, the freedom of it. I feel great."

Betty, seventy-eight, also met menopause with zest. Showing us a picture of herself in dominatrix attire that was taken when she was already in her fifties, Betty says, "After menopause I thought, It's supposed to be all over. . . . *Hmmmm*, I don't think so. I think I'll get into some kinky stuff. I've never done that before."

Betty's response to menopause may be radical, but it's not uncommon for postmenopausal sex to improve. First there's the wonderful spontaneity of not having to worry about using birth

control (where people know their partners and ideally have been tested for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases). And despite all the hoopla around how painful the empty nest is, many older women report that it actually gave their sex life a boost. It makes sense that not having to keep an ear open for a crying toddler or worry that a teenager will hear you moan can do more than a little to encourage sexual experimentation. And if you're retired, the luxury of having sex in the morning or afternoon and not just when you hit the pillow already exhausted is obviously another boon to lovemaking.

Just getting older and coming into one's own can have a profound effect on a woman's sexuality. We don't live in a culture that teaches us about it. We're all just supposed to know what to do. But most of the women interviewed told us they didn't know what they wanted sexually when they were younger and if they did they were often too afraid to ask for it. Many said maturity and sexual confidence have made them more comfortable with letting go and seeking their own pleasure. Dell, eighty-four, a woman with an intense gaze and the willowy body of a dancer, started Eve's Garden, the first sex boutique geared for women, in New York City in the 1970s. She says of her sexuality now, "For me it only gets greater as I get older. And I feel it's a factor of liberating myself in a psychological way as well, dropping the trappings of constraint because when you get older you feel, well, this is it. You know, you don't want to cover up anymore. I am freer and less fearful and just more open to what life has to offer, and that's reflected in my sexual nature."

So if women are living longer, healthier lives and remaining open to the possibility of romance and vibrant sexuality as they

age, why do we persist in thinking of older women not as enjoying their maturity but (as one cosmetics commercial declares) “fighting it every step of the way”? Much of the answer lies in the money to be made from making women fear the aging process.

As Lois Banner, a cultural historian at the University of Southern California, explains, “Society persists in seeing aging in terms of loss rather than benefit, because capitalism is invested in this vision of its aging people. Capitalism is modeled on the idea of constant change, of what is new. Therefore to look on aging people as becoming better instead of becoming deficient would be to fundamentally challenge the way the whole system is organized and structured. And I think it’s going to get worse and worse because there’s so much money to be made from it.”

According to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, there was a 44 percent increase in the number of plastic surgeries performed in the United States in 2004. Some findings conclude that women feel pressure from ageism on the job to undergo cosmetic surgery. As Ruth, whose day-long bike rides and yoga make her look far younger than she is, says of looking for a job as a research psychologist at sixty-three, “So maybe I didn’t look sixty, but I surely didn’t look forty or fifty, and I know I didn’t get certain jobs because of it.”

The billion-dollar cosmetics industry, in fact our whole culture, is built on the premise that old age needs to be fixed. And despite how older women really perceive themselves, most are deeply affected by the feeling that they’re “over the hill.” Almost every woman we interviewed, no matter how enlightened or sexually active, told us that she feels invisible when walking on the street. As two women in our forties, we have already begun to feel

it. As we approach fifty, it's hard not to be filled with some trepidation, despite knowing so many women who hit their stride in the fifth and sixth decades of their lives.

But ageism is a prejudice like any other, full of misconceptions, fears, and stereotypes. In opening our eyes to this culture's perverse and pervasive youth obsession hopefully we can empower ourselves to be bold and feel good at any age. For older women who buy into society's notions of what they "should be like" feel self-conscious, but older women who call their own shots and believe in themselves (while not being immune to that self-consciousness) lead happier, healthier, more fulfilling lives.

It's been over forty years since Dr. Ruth Weg reported her eye-opening findings that "if we've been orgasmic as young women, we will only become more so as we age." And if we can keep having (and wanting) sex, then it makes sense that we don't have to lose other aspects of who we are. So if you've always loved to dance the night away, you'll likely still want to cut a rug when you're older, and if you've always had a quick wit and enjoyed snappy repartee, why assume you'll change? Many women actually become sharper, funnier, and more outspoken as they age.

Our bodies do need care over time. You may be able to get away with eating badly and not exercising regularly when you're in your twenties or thirties, but in your sixties that can make the difference between feeling really good and really sexual and having a host of aches, pains, and other physical problems. Even some women who do take good care of themselves eventually face debilitating pain in their knees or hips that requires surgery or replacement. But our bodies can continue to rejuvenate. And

with a little determination and a commitment to eating well and exercising our bodies, we can stay strong and agile. Marnie, seventy-five, a very handsome woman from Minnesota whose thirty years of teaching aerobics has resulted in energy to spare, had a knee operation and then went on to rank in the national skiing finals for her age group. Her body not only looks great, but she's stronger than most people half her age.

Even health can't protect us from the losses that life and aging bring. Every woman we interviewed had experienced the death of a spouse, sibling, or good friend, and many are cancer survivors. But, paradoxically, many told us that grieving and ultimately coping with losses made them more resilient and more eager to experience whatever life has to offer. In fact, many older women find that being closer to the end of their lives than to the beginning makes them more open, more compassionate, more willing to take chances. They are, as cultural critic Dr. Morganroth Gullette describes it, "declining to decline," opting instead to let loose and live large.

Older women are reinventing themselves as they age, not just getting older but coming into their own. In the next eight chapters we'll be exploring the lives of women over sixty from across the country and from every socioeconomic situation: partnered, single, gay, straight, black, white, Latina, religious and not. We'll look at their romances, struggles to find romance, sexuality, and relationship with their bodies. We'll explore their experience of ageism, their losses, and their ongoing drive for adventure, romance, and growth.

While the culture at large persists in seeing older women as staid, prudish, and traditional, there are easily as many young

men and women who fit that bill. With boomers on board, the time has come to stop associating older women with rocking chairs and knitting needles; there are fascinating, passionate older women all over the world who are nothing like Whistler's mother.

So what's sex got to do with the age revolution? Sex is so much more than a physical act; it's a metaphor for life itself, an expression of vitality, connection, and joy. Women over sixty are clearly not having sex to procreate, but they *are* having sex. Acknowledging this reality means coming to terms with the fact that women of all ages might have sex simply because they *like* it. And if women are having sex because they want to, what other desires might they pursue in every aspect of their lives?

There are incredible, sexual, energetic older women all over the world, and we're going to tell you about some of them. If you are a young or middle-aged woman today and you're afraid that as you age your life will be over, it's time to stop worrying and start thinking about what you want to do, what you want to accomplish. If you're sixty+ now and are in a rut, it's time to reinvent yourself, find new things to be passionate about. We're all on this earth for a relatively short time. So why waste a precious moment of it? Older life can be fabulous, and women of all ages who don't know this are not alone. We don't pretend that being seventy is the same as being thirty or forty nor deny that aging comes with inevitable difficulties, but the reality is that there are slews of older women out there having the time of their lives. Old age was never what most people thought it was, and it's undergoing the most radical transformation it ever has. Now that

the boomers are coming of age, the time of reckoning has arrived. If we can celebrate this part of our later lives, perhaps we can begin to understand that age isn't a numbers game, and birthdays aren't for counting. It's not about the candles; it's about the cake. *¡Viva la revolución!*