



The voice of mid-life and older women

NEWSLETTER

San Francisco



January - March 2024

OWL-SF focuses exclusively on critical issues facing women as they age. We work together to improve the status and quality of life for midlife and older women through national, state and local networks.

OWL-SF Presents

Get Ready to Vote on Important Local Issues at the March Presidential Primary Election

When: Saturday, January 27, 11 AM to 1 PM

**Where: SF Main Library,
Hispanic Room (lower level)**

100 Larkin St., Civic Center, San Francisco CA

Hear presentations by speakers “For and Against” on three selected San Francisco ballot measures with Q & A period for audience members.

Measure B: Police Officer Staffing Levels and Amending Tax Funding (Charter Amendment)

Measure E: Police Department Policies and Procedures (Ordinance)

Measure F: Illegal Substance Dependence Screening and Treatment for Recipients of City Public Assistance (Ordinance)

*An in-person Meeting
Coffee and Refreshments! The Public and Guests Welcome!*

OWL-SF * PO Box 170622, San Francisco, Ca. 94117
Phone 415-712-1695 * Web site: www.owlsf.org * E-mail: info@owlsf.org

2024: OWL Looks Forward to Another Good Year

OWL-SF is kicking off the New Year with its much-anticipated ballot measures meeting on January 27. This meeting, a twenty year or so tradition with OWL, features “For and Against” arguments on selected ballot measures appearing on the March 5, 2024, Presidential Primary Election ballot. Speakers will present opposing positions on 3 measures in an atmosphere of civil discourse, a rare occurrence in this time of partisanship and divisiveness. See the front page of this newsletter for full details. You don’t want to miss it!



In 2024, we are also looking forward to monthly OWL membership meetings on topics of interest to older women, including heart health, practical updates on technology, and planning for the future as we age. Most membership meetings are presented on Zoom on the 4th Saturday of the month. Meetings in July and December are reserved for in-person gatherings where we can connect with old friends and make new ones while having fun at the same time.

The OWL-SF Newsletter continues in 2024 and beyond. Not only does our newsletter keep us updated on our organization, but it also features many interesting and helpful topics. This issue has, among other things, reviews of books recommended by our own OWL members. Speaking of books, don’t forget the OWL Book Club which meets monthly on Zoom. Contact Louise DiMattio by OWL’s email, or by phone if you are interested in joining.

Finally, the Political Advocacy Committee will continue to send out alerts on current topics for advocacy, and opportunities for education such as the chance to attend the Reparations symposium sponsored by the League of Women Voters on January 10th. The committee helps members stay current on many issues, including Laguna Honda Hospital’s quest for recertification. For more information about the recertification of LHH, see the full PAC Report in this issue.

We encourage you to get involved with OWL in 2024 by attending an event, joining a committee, or sending us your ideas for meeting topics, activities, advocacy issues and gatherings.

Let’s make it a good year together!
—*Melanie Grossman*

H.R. 6639: Poverty Line Act of 2023

On December 6th U.S. Representative Kevin Mullin introduced a bill to update the federal poverty line and incorporate regional cost-of-living differences, citing an antiquated formula that hasn’t seen substantive changes in more than five decades.

The cost of living is top of mind for many Americans, especially in our Bay Area district. With that in mind, he introduced the Poverty Line Act to modernize the outdated federal poverty line with support from a national coalition of lawmakers and organizations. His bill received support from a variety of national organizations such as the Southern Poverty Law Center and Feeding America, and local organizations like Peninsula Family Service and Samaritan House. Mullins noted “The federal poverty line hasn’t been updated since the Johnson administration even though it is one of the primary factors used to determine eligibility for a range of benefits, including Medicaid, SNAP, LIHEAP, Head Start, and others. It is long past time we bring the poverty line into the 21st Century. “

Follow the bill’s progress at www.govtrack.com:
<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/118/hr6639>

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Margaret Lew, Editor

Political Advocacy Committee
Glenda Hope
Melanie Grossman
Co-Chairwomen

OWL–SF Board meetings: first Monday of the month, 4:00-5:00 pm, Zoom link available on request

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CARA Update

Happy New Year! Cara Kicks Off Our 2024 Senior Vote Program

2024 will bring some of our biggest challenges yet. The local, state and national elections will determine whether we will have new opportunities to build our Senior and Disability platform or whether we must fight to hold on to the programs and policies we have won and depend upon.

CARA will kick off our Senior Vote 2024 program on January 12th at Noon, where we will be recruiting at least 300 Senior Ambassadors (that's you!) to talk with older voters in our 5+ target districts. Join BOWZER (from Sha Na Na and President of Social Security Works PAC) to learn about our 2024 plans, and sign up to be a senior ambassador. You can get a head start by signing up (<https://californiaalliance.org/senior-vote-2024/>) to be one of our Senior Vote Ambassadors!

CARA Says Goodbye to Outgoing Staff and Welcome to the New Staff/ and New Roles

Hiring A New Bay Area/ Northern CA Organizer: We said goodbye to FX Crowley on December 15th as our Bay Area Organizer. He will be returning to his union IATSE to help one of the locals. We are currently advertising for a Northern CA Organizer (Bay Area and North State CATs). If you know anyone who might be interested, please share the job announcement – link here (<https://californiaalliance.org/join-our-team/>). Until we find the right person for the job, Jodi Reid will staff these CATs.

New Cara Executive Director: We are so pleased to announce that Dwane Camp, Jr., currently CARA's Legislative Director, has been promoted to E.D. for CARA. He will replace Jodi Reid, who will be stepping down from this role after 20 years!!! She will continue as ED through February 2024 and then transition to a new role as a Consultant with CARA, working as needed with the CARA Staff and Board – helping behind the scenes to ensure that the transition to a new ED, our Senior Vote Program, etc. continue to blossom and grow.

As you can see, we have many changes before us in 2024. We will need your energy, involvement, and commitment to CARA during this important year.

To Join a CARA Action Team, contact our office or your area organizer to get involved. Click here for list of CATs (<https://californiaalliance.org/cara-action-teams/>) and their meeting dates and times for 2024.

Shopping Tip: Consider ECOS Detergents.

Woman Owned Business. Never tested on animals. Fragrance free or scented options. Meets EPA Safer Products standards. Hypoallergenic. Support our sisters who are preserving our environment with their business.

Relax and Recharge Try Napping

Excerpts from article by Dr. Dennis Hwang, MD, medical director at Kaiser Permanente's Sleep Center in San Bernardino County, California

Sleep is essential for our overall health. But what happens when you don't get a good night's sleep and find yourself tired during the day? Enter the nap. Naps may have health benefits, like reducing stress and improving memory. One study showed that daytime napping following the COVID-19 pandemic actually helped relieve stress and stabilize sleep patterns.

Tips on napping

Know if napping is right for you — Those with a sleep disorder like insomnia, are advised to avoid naps so they can sleep better at night.

Time it correctly — If you're going to nap, it's a good idea to plan it for halfway through your day. If you wake up at 6 a.m. and plan to go to bed at 10 p.m., your halfway point is 2 p.m. Napping any later in the day could make it harder to fall asleep at night.

Create a calm space — Just as you might prepare for better sleep at night, you can try the same habits for a midday nap. A cooler room, listening to soothing music, calming techniques and guided activities can help you try for better sleep.

Set an alarm for a short period — How long you snooze makes a difference in how you feel when you wake up. "To avoid entering a deep sleep, set an alarm for 20 minutes. However, up to 30 minutes is fine," says Dr. Hwang.

Looking to boost your energy? Try catching some daytime z's with a "coffee nap" or "nappuccino." You start by drinking a caffeinated drink like coffee, then take a 20-minute nap. The caffeine will take effect in about 20 to 30 minutes, so when you wake up, you'll have extra energy. However, caffeine can last in your system for up to 12 hours. Be careful not to let too much coffee disrupt your regular sleep schedule.

A nap may not always be possible during your workday, but just taking a mental break can have some benefits.

Try finding a quiet place to put on headphones and listen to calming music. You could also explore mental health resources like the Calm app—perfect for a quick, restful break.

From self-care apps to guided meditations, you have many options to help relieve stress, improve sleep, foster mindfulness, and more.

WELCOME NEW MEMBER!

Penny Sullivan

Creating Your Plan for Aging: What to Think About and How to Begin

Creating a plan for aging is top of mind for many of us, but it can be daunting! Allison O’Shea, founder of Openly Aging (<https://openlyaging.com/>) reminds us that 60% of people between the ages of 85 and 89 will need some form of support because of health problems or functional limitations, and 75% of those over age 90 will need support. We all have a different vision of what that support will look like, should we need it. She provides four core principles that can be used to put a plan into place and encourages us to think about “triggers” which are the conditions that indicate the next step of the plan should be implemented.

Support System: What resources are available for support? For example, who can you rely on to drive you to the hospital or pay your bills while you are in rehabilitation? What are the triggers that would indicate it’s time to pull them in to help? Have conversations with those people now, so they know when you’d like them to step in, and to what degree. This is a good time for you to communicate your goals and values, and even to set boundaries. It’s also a good time to make a realistic assessment of how much your loved ones are capable of doing for you. If possible, talk it through with them, and talk about other ways you can meet your needs.

Lifestyle Options: You may want to stay in your home or eventually move to an intentional community environment. A broad array of options is available, and one size does not fit all. Take the time in advance to understand these options and how each option may or may not meet your needs. Talk to the people in your support system about your preferences, and what triggers would indicate modifying your home, downsizing, or moving to a care community.

Supportive Services: Consider the support services you may need beyond what your friends and family can provide, particularly if you plan to stay in your home as long as possible. Additional services you may need are meal preparation, transportation, cleaning, and money management, to name just a few. Identify service providers and community service organizations who may help you meet these needs. Talk to the people in your support system about your preferences, and what triggers would indicate bringing a service provider on board.

Social Engagement: There is a significant linkage between longevity and social engagement. But the kind of social engagement that brings us joy can vary widely. Consider how you enjoy connecting with others. Do you prefer one-on-one relationships, or team activities? Do you like to serve on boards, or do you prefer book clubs? As you age, what are the ways you can continue to stay connected? If you are unable to drive, how will you maintain those activities?

Most important, Allison pointed out that the more proactive you are in developing an aging plan the more control and agency you will have later in life.

—*Submitted by Glenda Hope*

Political Advocacy Committee Report — January 2024

Throughout the Fall of 2023 OWL worked to address national, state, and local issues. Nationally, we urged Congress to protect Social Security and Medicare by opposing the establishment of a “Debt Commission” proposed by House Speaker Mike Johnson, Senators Manchin, and others. State-wide, we worked to protect the environment through an alert urging California lawmakers to end fossil fuel subsidies, and locally we joined others to ensure that the plan to close streets for the APEC conference be modified to ensure that vulnerable residents, small businesses, childcare centers, and essential services were still available to those who relied on them.

Several OWL successes also occurred this Fall. In October, we celebrated Governor Newsom’s signing into law California’s AB 645 which created a pilot program in several California cities—including San Francisco—installing cameras to enforce speed limits. This Bill was the subject of a September OWL Alert, and it was gratifying to see that our efforts were part of the push to make our streets safer. OWL’s position was also included in the minutes of the Joint Conference Committee Meeting for Laguna Honda Hospital and Rehabilitation Center on November 14, 2023. Our submitted comments said in part, “...Many patients are languishing in out of county facilities. This highlights the dire lack of facilities to care for needy qualified patients here in San Francisco. We need to have more and better services for the elderly, disabled, and unwell, including those who need more intensive behavioral and addictions treatment. Also, the waver to prevent the closure of existing beds at Laguna Honda Hospital is especially important to serve San Franciscans in need of skilled nursing beds, which are scarce and getting scarcer. Older women who do not have family to support them are especially hurt by the lack of quality placements accepting Medical in San Francisco. Laguna Honda has traditionally been their refuge. Please work to prevent bed cuts and improve alternate services in the city.” Although Laguna Honda has continued to make headway in its quest for recertification, it is not out of the woods yet and continues to need our support. Still, we are very proud of our contributions to grassroots social change.

—*Melanie Grossman*

The Mayor's Disability Council and Accessibility Issues

Did you know that the shuttle buses on JFK Promenade (formerly JFK Drive) are ADA-compliant and have been for years? I didn't know that until after attending the Mayor's Disability Council in December! The reason I thought they were not ADA-compliant is that there have been so many complaints about their not meeting the needs of people with disabilities. Does that mean that the ADA guidelines need to be expanded or that some needs cannot be met? Maybe I'll get answers from the next meeting of the Mayor's Disability Council, which is scheduled for Friday, January 19th from 1:00 to 4:00 pm. Would you like to join me?

As a member of Transit Justice, I've participated in two "Rise Up for Elevators" rallies at Hallidie Plaza because the elevator there hasn't worked for years and people in wheelchairs, parents with kids in strollers, and tourists with luggage need working elevators. Another issue of concern has been accessibility on JFK Promenade and specifically shuttle buses.

Getting a response from San Francisco departments isn't always easy, so I was grateful when Helen Smolinski, ADA Grievance and Housing Initiative Coordinator for the San Francisco Mayor's Office on Disability replied by phone and by email to my complaints about accessibility issues at Hallidie Plaza and my questions about ADA-compliant shuttle buses on JFK Promenade. She let me know she had filed official complaints on November 7th, and the Departments of Public Works (DPW) and Recreation and Parks (RPD), had a month—based on working days—to respond. I circled December 19th on my calendar.

We kept in touch, and she let me know of a meeting of the Mayor's Disability Council (MDC) with JFK Promenade on its agenda on December 15th, 2023, which I attended. In addition to an update by the RPD on accessibility commitments for JFK Drive closure last year, public comment was possible on issues not on the agenda if they were within the purview of the MDC, which meant that I could bring up the non-functioning Hallidie Plaza elevators.

The MDC usually allows each person making public comment three minutes, but they can allow less time if there are a lot of public comments. People with disabilities can speak first—in person or remotely. My first public comment was about the elevator at Hallidie Plaza that's been non-functioning for several years. I mentioned the actions that Transit Justice had taken on this issue on Market and 5th Streets both on June 6th and September 7th and acknowledged the response from Helen Smolinski.

In keeping with the Brown Act, the Mayor's Disability Council members can't take action or discuss any item not appearing on the agenda, so I wrote to them at MDC@sfgove.org to get the non-functioning elevator on the posted agenda. As of January 9th, I don't see a response other than an acknowledgement that I'll be on their listserve.

Lucas Tobin, RPD ADA Coordinator for programmatic Access, gave a slide show that went way beyond the shuttle buses. As regards shuttles, he said that they started running many years ago, when JFK was closed on the weekends, and they have always been compliant. They expanded the service to seven days a week when JFK was first closed due to COVID, but since no one was riding them, the shuttle service was scaled back to weekends and holidays until March 2022, when it was expanded to seven days, with increased service and what he called "an improved route."

He said there have been incidents in which a driver refused to take passengers because of fears that their wheelchairs couldn't be secured. In fact, they could have been, so now RPD is focusing on educating their drivers. Other important concerns are a lack of adequate curbside signage for the shuttles showing location for stops and schedules of availability. In addition there is a need for on-board information, audio and traditional signage. He said that marked paratransit vehicles all can drive on JFK Promenade and other roads closed to vehicles.

Soon after this December 15th meeting of the Mayor's Disability Council Lucas Tobin sent in his written response to our concerns. He also said he would like to attend an upcoming Transit Justice meeting.

As of this writing on January 4th the Department of Public Works has missed its December 19th deadline to response to our complaint about the non-functioning elevators.

—*Tina Martin*



Tina Martin, Melanie Grossman and Kathie Piccagli at the second Rise up for Elevators action.



Kathie demonstrated the challenge of using a rollator to walk even a block from the huge non-functioning elevator to the small one that works.

What Are You Reading?

Here are some favorites from members of the OWL Book Club

Tina Martin

I love Michael Gorra's non-fiction book *Portrait of a Novel: Henry James and the Making of an American Masterpiece* because I was fascinated that Isabel Archer is such a strong woman in that era and admired by men for being "her own woman"—until she isn't! Reading Michael Gorra's book is like re-reading *Portrait of a Lady* with brilliant annotations. Michael Gorra is a very good writer himself and has great insights—even though he still hasn't convinced me that Isabel Archer would do what she did at the end!



Tina's Bookshelf

Another book I loved is *Small Things Like These* by Claire Keegan. My son and I read it for December because it has a Christmas theme, and it's a fast read during a season when we're all so actively engaged in holiday fun. The protagonist Bill Furlong reminded me of a very serious Tevye, a man with five daughters and a wife who's afraid his kindness will put the family at risk, but delivering coal instead of milk to his village, and seeing what's going on behind the doors at the convent in their Irish town.

Cheryl Shimek

I really enjoyed *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus. Found the storyline relevant and the heroine quite relatable despite her some of her interesting personality quirks.

Juliet C Rothman

Am now reading *Democracy Awakening - Notes on the State of America* by Heather Cox Richardson. Found her during covid times and her daily 'Letters from an American' have both educated me and preserved my sanity in these crazy times. Watching and listening to her interviews during her book tour were inspiring.

One of my favorites this year was *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig. It made me do a lot of personal thinking and reflection — and it's also a great possible topic for discussion with friends and family. I've discussed it with a number of people, and everyone seems to really enjoy the discussion and asks about the author, so that they can read the book too.

Ruth Nemzoff

I love this book, *The Golem and the Jinni* by Helene Wecker ... terrific writing and great insight into the superstitions Syrians and Jews brought to this country. Also wonderful picture of life in NYC at the turn of the last century. I read *The Hidden Palace*, the second book in her series which is even more complex, and I loved it. Both of them are long, so they're not great book club books if people are worried about length, but they're definitely great reading for snuggling up with a good book. I would definitely advise reading them in order Gollum then Hidden Palace as it will make the second book more meaningful.

Freedom to Read is Essential for a Democracy

Did you know that in 2021 – 2022, attempts were made to challenge, censor or ban 1,643 unique book titles across the United States? That is a huge number to wrap my mind around. School boards and libraries are inundated with activists who are determined to change policies to make banning books much, much easier. The top five States (but by no means the only States) where book bans exist are Florida (accounts for 40% of the incidents), Texas, Missouri, Utah, and (surprise!) Pennsylvania.

I would like to offer a challenge to you. We at Great Books are hosting a whole lot of free discussions in 2024, each one focusing on a Banned Book. I'd like to program the most frequently banned books in the USA right now, mix them up with some perennially banned books that we haven't read already and test our mettle by applying the Shared Inquiry Method and see what happens. I truly want to understand what it is about these books that cause furor across the land. And, can we have civil discourse when discussing them? The first one was on Steinbeck's novella *Of Mice and Men* which was an amazing discussion. The next one will be a discussion of August Wilson's play *Fences* on January 27th (unfortunately conflicting with our OWL meeting!).

Contact me (ladimat@aol.com) to register for the next discussion. Since this is a free event, we respectfully request that you carefully check your calendar for your availability prior to registering. Your registration is your commitment to participate!

Why is this book banned? Can we find an answer? Have your children or your grandchildren read it? Invite them to join us

—*Louise DiMattio*

Favorites From the Monday Book Club - Part 3

Our Monday Book Club has been meeting each month on Tuesdays for more than 23 years. We're a diverse group of men and women aged from 30 to 90 so it's not often we agree that we really like a book. In the April—June 2020 OWL Newsletter and the April—June 2023 OWL Newsletter some of the books we all (or most all) liked are listed, and here's some more:

All the Light We Cannot See by Anthony Doerr: Deftly interweaving the lives of multiple characters in France and Germany during WWII, Doerr illuminates the ways, against all odds, that people try to be good to one another.

The Woman Behind the New Deal: The Life of Frances Perkins, FDR'S Secretary of Labor and His Moral Conscience by Kirstin Downey: Arriving in Washington at the height of the Great Depression, Perkins pushed for massive public works projects that created millions of jobs for unemployed workers. She breathed life back into the nation's labor movement, boosting living standards across the country. As head of the Immigration Service, she fought to bring European refugees to safety in the United States. Her greatest triumph was creating Social Security.

The Darling by Russell Banks: Set in Liberia and the United States from 1975 through 1991, *The Darling* is the story of Hannah Musgrave, a political radical and member of the Weather Underground. Hannah flees America for West Africa, where she and her Liberian husband become friends of the notorious warlord and ex-president, Charles Taylor. Hannah's encounter with Taylor ultimately triggers a series of events whose momentum catches Hannah's family in its grip and forces her to make a heartrending choice.

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks by Rebecca Skloot: Henrietta Lacks was a poor Southern tobacco farmer who worked the same land as her enslaved ancestors, yet her cells—taken without her knowledge—became one of the most important tools in medicine. The first “immortal” human cells grown in culture, they are still alive today, though she has been dead for more than sixty years. Her cells were vital for developing the polio vaccine; uncovered secrets of cancer, viruses, and the atom bomb's effects; helped lead to important advances like in vitro fertilization, cloning, and gene mapping; and have been bought and sold by the billions. Yet Henrietta Lacks remains virtually unknown, buried in an unmarked grave.

The River of Doubt: Theodore Roosevelt's Darkest Journey by Candice Millard : After his humiliating election defeat in 1912, Roosevelt set his sights on the most punishing physical challenge he could find, the first descent of an unmapped, rapids-choked tributary of the Amazon. Together with his son Kermit and Brazil's most famous explorer, Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon, Roosevelt accomplished a feat so great that many at the time refused to believe it. In the process, he changed the map of the western hemisphere forever. Along the way, Roosevelt and his men faced an unbelievable series of hardships, losing their canoes and supplies to punishing whitewater rapids, and enduring starvation, Indian attack, disease, drowning, and a murder within their own ranks.

—Joan Downey

Join a Great Books Weekend

The discussions, food, accommodations, and a chance to talk with other like minded people can't be beat.

The Barbara McConnell Asilomar Great Books Weekend
Friday, April 12, 2024 at 6:00 PM to Sunday, April 14, 2024 at 1:00 PM
Asilomar Conference Center, Pacific Grove, CA

Registration is now open at the Great Books Weekend web site: <https://www.greatbooksncal.org/asilomar>

—Louise DiMattio

Calendar

For a complete and up to date listing see the OWL website: <http://www.owlsf.org/calendar/>

January 1 Monday — OWL Board Meeting 4:00-5:00pm (via Zoom)

January 27 Saturday— OWL General Meeting 11:00-1:00pm *March Election Ballot Measures, San Francisco Main Library (See Cover Page for details)*

February 5 Monday — OWL Board Meeting 4:00-5:00pm (via Zoom)

February 24 Saturday— OWL General Meeting 11:00-Noon (via Zoom) *Heart Health (Details to be announced)*

March 4 Monday — OWL Board Meeting 4:00-5:00pm (via Zoom)

March 23 Saturday— OWL General Meeting 11:00-Noon (via Zoom) *Technology (Details to be announced)*

YES! I WANT TO JOIN OWL-SF!

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

City State ZIP

TELEPHONE: _____

E-MAIL: _____

Annual dues of \$50 are recommended. (If you are unable to pay the recommended amount, OWL-SF has established a sliding fee scale from \$10 -\$50.) Members receive the quarterly OWL SF Newsletter, advocacy Alerts and invitations to monthly meetings.

Make a check out to and mail to:

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The Founding of OWL

OWL was born in 1980 in Des Moines, Iowa, during one of the pre-conferences held around the county in preparation for the third White House Conference on Aging, which was held in 1981 in Washington, DC. At the pre-conference in Des Moines, TISH SOMMERS noted that little attention was being paid to the ways in which aging was different for women. She called for a special "ad hoc" meeting to discuss this concern. OWL has been a voice for the special concerns of midlife and older women ever since.

OWL-SF will not share or sell our membership list or any information about our members.

Comments or questions? Please contact the OWL-SF Office at (415) 712-1695;
e-mail: info@owlsf.org