

OWL

The voice of mid-life and older women

NEWSLETTER

San Francisco



July - September 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.

OWLs Meet for Lunch in July

OWL-SF hosted 34 members and friends at its annual July luncheon on Saturday, July 27th at the Delancey Street Foundation restaurant. Good food, good cheer as old friends and new gathered to celebrate summer.



Photos by Tina Martin

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Phone 415-712-1695 * Web site: www.owlsf.org * E-mail: info@owlsf.org

OWL PAC Report

OWL's Political Advocacy Committee zeroed in on issues especially affecting older women this spring and summer in response to the OWL Board Retreat in April, where board members voted to return to OWL's original mission of focusing on issues important to mid-life and older women. It wasn't hard to find topics and to address them through our weekly alerts, monthly membership meetings and protests.

OWL Alerts encourage members to take action through phone calls, emails and letter writing to register concern and to ask for support on the local, state and national levels. For example, one Alert that went out to members was in support of California Bill (SB1236), which will make it easier for older women to apply to Medigap. Another Alert asked members to call or write to SF City College's Chancellor and Board of Trustees, asking them to restore City College's Older Adults Program. Still another Alert asked members to contact State legislators and asked them to prevent AT&T from abandoning land line service in California, which would be particularly disastrous for older women who do not have access to a cell phone or are unable to use them because of disabilities or expense.



Laguna Honda, which historically admitted a higher percentage of older women to receive rehabilitation and long-term care, was still very much on the agenda of the Political Advocacy Committee this Spring. Although LHH has at long last achieved full certification from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), and there are many unanswered questions about oversight of the facility to prevent decertification in the future, the readmission of patients transferred out of county during the recertification process, and the urgent need for an official waiver to CMS to prevent the loss of 120 beds in order to comply with new rules passed after the LHH remodel. OWL joined with Gray Panthers in calling for a Special Meeting of the Board of Supervisors to address these and other unanswered questions.

Additionally, the Political Advocacy Committee took action in April by joining with Gray Panthers and other organizations to raise awareness of the importance of the resolution of problems at LHH. The gathering on the steps of City Hall held signs and chanted about the people's ownership of LHH and the continued need for action on behalf of older San Franciscans, especially older women, who are without family or resources and unable to live independently and depend on Laguna Honda for care.

As always, the Political Advocacy Committee invites OWL members to join us in our advocacy efforts by emailing us at <info@owlsf.org> or calling OWL at 415-712-1695.

—*Melanie Grossman*

All Women's Issues Were Not Resolved In 1920

All Women Activists Are Not Wild-Eyed Radicals

Women's Health Care Is Not Adequately Covered

Women's Economic Security Is Not Based On The Charity Of Men

Everything You Need To Know About "The System" Was Not Taught In School

Board Members

Maxine Anderson

Paula Barber VP

Joan Downey, Treasurer

Melanie Grossman, President

Glenda Hope

Margaret Lew

Betty Traynor, Secretary

Newsletter

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

Phone: (415) 712-1695

Email: info@owlsf.org

Web: www.owlsf.org

Mail: Post Office Box 170622,
San Francisco, CA 94117

Alzheimer's Disease: Risk Factors and Risk Reduction

Stefanie Bonigut with the Alzheimer's Association was our very informative speaker for OWL's June membership meeting at the San Francisco Public Library, Main Branch. She explained the difference between dementia, an umbrella term for many types of memory changes, and Alzheimer's disease, which is a special form of dementia that includes formation of protein plaques and tangles in the brain. She made the point that dementia is not a normal part of aging, and all of us have some plaques that can be cleared out during sleep.



Stefanie Bonigut, speaker, welcomed by Melanie Grossman.
Photo by Joan Downey

She discussed risk factors that besides those we cannot change — age, family history, genetics, ethnicity and gender (Hispanic and Black older adults and women being at higher risk)— include at least 12 more such as hearing loss, diabetes, social isolation, smoking, brain injury, and hypertension. The good news is that research on Alzheimer's has increased greatly in the last 10 years, with new medications being developed that can slow down the disease if taken in its early stages, plus studies of beneficial life styles such as physical activity, a heart-healthy diet, and social interactions (like attending OWL gatherings).

The Q & A period at the end of the presentation was equally interesting, especially the question on how to handle a situation where a person with Alzheimer's Disease repeats themselves constantly. Stefanie explained that people living with Alzheimer's still have their feelings and want to be included, listened to, and understood. She suggested that we address the feelings behind what they are saying. Sometimes it helps to let the person know that you not only hear them, but understand what it means to them.

Stefanie gave us many more details plus a very informative brochure from the Alzheimer's Association. Check out their website for more information www.alz.org and/or call 800.272.3900 (24/7 Helpline) to answer any questions and to find support groups.

—Betty Traynor & Melanie Grossman

San Francisco Symphony Tickets Available from OWL

OWL-SF has reserved a limited number of tickets for our members for the performance at Davies Symphony Hall on Thursday, September 12 at 7:30pm for the San Francisco Symphony's All San Francisco Concert. This special evening celebrates music and culture, bringing together the Bay Area's many nonprofit, social services and community organizations.

In this year's All San Francisco Concert, Music Director Esa-Pekka Salonen conducts the San Francisco Symphony performing Sibelius' *Karelia* Suite, Grieg's *Peer Gynt* Suite No. 1, Debussy's *Danses sacree et profane* (featuring solist and Principal Harp Katherine Siochi and Ravel's *Daphnis & Chloe* Suite No. 2.

Contact the OWL office to receive one for this special performance. Symphony Tickets: \$12.00

Save the Date

OWL-SF Membership Meeting November Ballot Issues

***September 28th
11:00am-Noon
Via ZOOM***

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

**Paula Kotakis
Linda Miller**

Save the Date

OWL-SF

October Membership Meeting

**San Francisco
Walk to End Alzheimer's
Saturday, October 19th**

Join OWL members on the San Francisco Walk to End Alzheimer's beginning at Pier 27, The Embarcadero—More information to come.



Penpals from Afar -- Tina's final final draft

I was working on my final draft of this *SeniorBeat* Guest Column when I got word that the editor had put an earlier draft online! Here's the draft I had almost finished. In red you see what isn't online! See the online version at *SeniorBeat*, published June 12, 2024. Unlike this version it includes many photos. <https://sfseniorbeat.org/archives/>

My correspondence with Jutta Mengersen (now Brockhaus), the "World's Ideal Pen Pal," began in 1963, when we were both in high school. She was in Detmold, Germany, and I was in Columbia, South Carolina. Since then, we've met in my home in San Francisco and in her home in Bremen, Germany, as well as in France and Switzerland. The diary we've shared since 2001, now in its fourth volume, has traveled all the way to Mali. But it's through letters (remember those?) that our friendship has been sustained.

I was matched with Jutta after Harriet Clarkson, a girl in our high school, returned from an exchange program in Germany. So many people there were interested in getting U.S. pen pals that she sought volunteers. I was thrilled when I got my first letter from Jutta, who had sung in a choir with Harriet. But I had two reservations. She wasn't French, a language I could study at our high school. Second, she was German. Back in 1963, my dad wouldn't even buy a Volkswagen because he didn't want to support the re-industrialization of Germany. But I could tell from Jutta's first letter that she was no Nazi. She would more likely have been a member of the Von Trapp family, ready to "climb every mountain" to escape Nazis.

I had always been in awe of people from other countries who spoke a language other than their native one, and that was Jutta. She also knew French and English and would later teach French. I would go on to teach English to immigrants and international students at City College, traveling the world just by going to class, and while living abroad, I would be a person from another country who spoke a language other than my native one.

I've kept every letter and postcard Jutta ever wrote to me, and when she turned 60 more than 15 years ago, I laid them out on the floor of my study and shaped them into a six and a zero. It took up the entire space. When Jutta turned 70, in 2017, I created a slide show, which I call a "Talkie" and put it on YouTube. I am very low-tech, so there were no bells and whistles, but my voice accompanied the pictures.

In the past decade, we've occasionally communicated through email – maybe 20 exchanges a year although when this article was about to go online, we went way beyond that average, emailing day and night. We've texted occasionally, as when Jutta was in Brittany with her friend Doris, and they got together with my French friend Annie Billon, who lives there. Annie texted me a photo of them in the rain, saying hello from more than 5,000 miles away, and I got to respond in real-time – though nine hours apart.

More recently Jutta texted me to say, "Maybe you didn't know that since 2 months, I'm in possession of a real smartphone. For the first time in my life. So, I can meet you in WhatsApp!" I felt appalled rather than thrilled at the prospect. I texted back that I don't have WhatsApp. Of course, I could get it in a minute; I just don't want to. My fingers are clumsy on the tiny keyboard, but that's not the only reason. I still cherish letters. In a world where so much is digital and transitory, letters seem personal and lasting. Our stamped letters have continued, a few times a year, tracking our lives from time to time, and Jutta has sent postcards depicting two old ladies having fun doing what they did as young girls.

I've kept all personal letters over the years and have trunks of them. But Jutta's are special because she's made them into art with drawings and collages and by the way she puts words on the page. She's done the same thing with the diaries we've shared since 2001. She also decorates the envelopes.

How does a friendship like ours – sustained mostly at a distance – relate to the lives of seniors? It connects and gives a perspective on life, including ways to live it and illustrations of how we've lived it so far.

I can trace a lot of my life since the age of 18 through the addresses on the letters from Jutta – South Carolina, Kansas, several addresses in San Francisco, and Hawaii, where I was in Peace Corps training for Tonga in the South Pacific. It was then that I stopped writing to Jutta because I thought we were too old to be pen pals. After Tonga, Spain, Algeria, a marriage, a baby, and a full-time contract teaching English as a Second Language at City College of San Francisco, I decided we weren't too old after all and wanted to get back in touch with her. But it wasn't a straightforward path.

A LUCKY BREAK

I sent a letter to Jutta Mengersen at her address in Detmold. But her name had changed after marriage, and she hadn't lived in the family home for decades. By chance, her mother, Vera, who had also changed addresses, was in a clinic in Detmold for two or three months and asked that all mail addressed to her be forwarded to Jutta Brockhaus in Bremen. When the post office saw my letter to Jutta Mengersen, they forwarded it along with her mother's mail.

Jutta responded right away, and we updated each other as well as we could. But of course, I'd cheated her out of letters with the beautiful Tongan, Spanish, and Algerian stamps. Four years after we'd resumed writing, she and her husband, Andreas, planned their first trip to the United States, one they thought would be the last with their three children, Jan, 22; Anne, 19; and Max, 15. Of course, Jutta and I had sent each other pictures, but what surprised me most was that when they arrived in 1997, she was so much the way I had pictured her from her letters – warm, open-minded, creative, and generally lovely and unique.

All the Brockhauses were savvy travelers and had places like the Cartoon Museum on Mission Street on their list of places to visit. Jutta's son Jan rented a bike and went all around San Francisco. "They've forever raised the bar on tourists," my son commented.

I took them, along with my mother and father, to see the San Francisco Ballet at Stern Grove, across from my house. I held an open house so my friends could meet them, and a couple of my friends invited them over for dinner. Friends Betsy and Sal even put up Jutta, Andreas, and Max in their in-law apartment for their week's stay. Later, Betsy and Sal invited Max to live with them for a year of high school. He accepted, and when he arrived in 2001, he brought the first volume of Jutta and my shared diary.

In 2011, Jutta and Andreas invited me and my then-partner to stay for a week at their home in Bremen, where I immediately noticed the anti-Nazi sign on their front door, reminding me of my first considerations back in 1963!

Jutta goes for depth over distance (no "If It's Tuesday, this must be Belgium" for her!), so we stayed in the northern part of Germany, getting to know Bremen very well. I got to see again one of the couples who'd brought our shared diary from Bremen to San Francisco a few years earlier. Jutta and Andreas took us to Spiekeroog, an island off the North Sea coast. We also visited Hamburg and Berlin, home of their son Jan, who gave us a great tour as well as a car ride in reverse down a one-way street to get to a boat about to depart. Jan, a photographer, also suggested a way of taking pictures showing a little bit of Berlin's monument and a lot of sky for my mother, who was ailing and loved clouds. I still use his technique when the sky is beautiful.

A SPECIAL PILGRIMAGE

Jutta and I also met twice in Paris, a city I'd been to only a couple of times but where Jutta had studied extensively and later taken her students studying French (one of whom brought our shared diary to San Francisco after accepting a biotechnology job in Emeryville).

Jutta joined my French friend Annie and me when I was staying with the Billons for a week before a reunion with other friends in Brittany. Annie's husband Jean-Paul was rapturous about Jutta's French. "She speaks French with a French accent," he said, adding hopefully, "I'll bet she even speaks German with a French accent." The greatest compliment I ever got on my French was from the curator of the Paris Art Gallery, Emmanuel Navon, right after I returned from Algeria. I had been his volunteer reader before I left for Algeria, and when I visited him two years later, he had a French journalist with him when we conversed in French: "Tina, your French is excellent!" he said. "Yes!" the French journalist agreed. "But of course I have an American accent," I admitted, really believing I had no accent at all—just bad pronunciation. "No, you don't!" the French journalist said. "You have a Romanian accent!"

We went to Giverny with Annie and other French friends and had a picnic on the Seine. We sang French songs and recited poetry. The French writer Michelle Labbé invited us for drinks in her garden and recited Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" in French after I'd recited it in English. But, hey, everyone was speaking in French, including me (except for "Jabberwocky," and that's hardly English)!

Then we made a special trip to Switzerland. We'd both traveled through Switzerland, but never together until 2014 after I'd retired from 32 years of teaching at CCSF and before I had a reunion with my best friend in fifth grade, Sara, in New York City. Our pilgrimage was to visit our favorite Swiss writer, Alex Capus, someone I'd met only through letters when he interviewed me for a book he was writing: *Sailing By Starlight: In Search Of Treasure Island*. Jutta met him when he did a reading in Bremen. Later, in Hamburg, she'd shown him our shared diary, which he signed in a very special way, even adding an illustration! He told Jutta he really liked the idea of life-long friendships.

We arranged to meet him in his hometown of Olten. My son planned it so Jutta, traveling from Bremen, and I, traveling from San Francisco, would meet for a specific train in Zurich. We boarded together like clockwork. Capus introduced us to his wife (who is very much like the character Tina in his novel, *Life Is Good*), treated us to dinner, and showed us around town. The three days we were there, Jutta and I frequented his inn, the Galicia Bar, where concerts are held and which has a mural of the Camino de Santiago, a walk she'd already taken and one I would do two years later. We both sent each other postcards.

One surprise in our continuing correspondence is that even though both of us got married and became mothers, our interests really didn't change a lot; they just evolved. She's loved French writers since high school when she read "The Little Prince." She quoted it in one of her first letters to me. Later, she worked with students and teachers in Mali and has also used her French to help refugees. I was in the U.S. Peace Corps and International Volunteer Services, and I now celebrate French with a Francophone/Francophile group *Déguster et Chanter*. When my friend Annie and I write to each other, she writes in her native language and I write in mine, and we can understand each other.

Jutta and I continue to write about our volunteer work, travels, friends, special reunions, political concerns (particularly regarding wars), books, and, of course, our adult children and, in the case of Jutta, her grandchildren. Around 2016 Jutta and I were both back in touch with Harriet Clarkson, who had added a German last name after marrying an Austrian. (After the US election that year, Harriet said she was very happy to be living in Austria for the rest of her life.)

In 2023, my sister Dana and her son Karl, while on a trip to Berlin, met Jutta and her son Jan. Jutta was just about to leave for a bicycling tour around Lake Mosel, but she made a special effort to get to Berlin in time to visit with them.

I haven't seen Jutta in person since 2016 when we were in Paris with Annie and her friends for the second time – right after I'd done the last leg of the Camino de Santiago. Besides knowing that air travel is the worst thing we can do for our carbon footprint, I think our lives are so full and our correspondence so rich that we don't need to travel to see one another. We let our shared diary do the traveling. We'll soon begin a new volume. So far, we've stayed off Zoom, Facetime, and WhatsApp.

—Tina Martin

I Was Spoofed

Recently, I answered a call from my credit union – or so that’s what showed as the caller ID on my phone. The caller told me that my bank account had been hacked, explained what the next steps were, and sent a code to my phone for me to read back so she could get into my account.

A few minutes later I got an email from the credit union telling me that my account had been hacked. The caller had been the hacker and I was the one who had given her the code so she could get into the account.

I did not realize that scammers could falsify the information transmitted to your caller ID display to disguise their identity. They can, and its called spoofing. Luckily the credit union caught the hack right away so I did not lose any money, but setting up a new account and changing all the bill-pays took time.

If you get a call from a business that wants access to your account, it would be best to initiate a call to them for verification.

—Joan Downey

LHH Resumes Admissions Years of Work Bring a Victory

Thanks to the efforts of many supporters including OWL-SF, Laguna Honda Hospital has resumed the admission of patients, beginning with those transferred to facilities outside the city. However, as our recent Alert revealed, the 2-to-a-bathroom rule threatens to eliminate 120 beds, and a waiver of this rule is needed in order to prevent such a drastic cut. Urge the San Francisco Department of Public Health and the City Attorney to apply for a waiver of the 2-to-a-bathroom rule so that Laguna Honda can care for more patients. Contact Dr. Grant Colfax, Director of SFDPH, and San Francisco City Attorney David Chiu to urge them to make good on their promises to apply for the waiver, and keep crucial beds available at Laguna Honda. Share this message with friends, family and colleagues in San Francisco.

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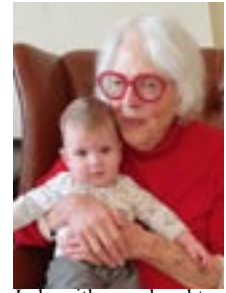
Wiley’s Dictionary:

SMARTPHONE A device that connects you to everything while leaving you utterly alone.
from BC Comic

Judith Rosemarie Lujan

Members of OWL-SF will be sad to learn of the death of Judy Lujan, a valued member since 2017.

Judy died at home on July 22, 2024, at the age of 82. She was a lifelong teacher and learner who spent more than 43 years in education, and her kindness and warmth will be remembered by everyone who was lucky enough to know her. She had a remarkable talent of striking up conversation with anyone anywhere, and within minutes she would be hearing their life story and have made a new friend.



Judy with granddaughter Katrina Lujan

Judy was born June 6, 1942, in Mt. Angel, Oregon where she also grew up. After graduating from Mt. Angel Academy in 1960, she entered the Benedictine Sisters. Here she began her teaching career, first as a student teacher and then on assignment at St. Edward’s School in Lebanon, Oregon. During this time, she also attended Mt. Angel College, where she received her bachelor’s degree in 1968. After graduation, she left the convent and moved to San Francisco, which would remain her home for the rest of her life. She earned two Masters Degrees at the University of San Francisco, 1971 in Teaching of Religion, and 1986 in Education with an emphasis in educational computing. Teaching in San Francisco schools through the 70s and 80s she was honored as a Star Teacher in 1990 by Mayor Art Agnos for her work. See her obituary at: <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/san-francisco-ca/judith-lujan-11906860>

SF Senior Power Community Resources In the Outer Sunset

SF Senior Power was founded in 2018 by Margaret Graf, a retired attorney and registered nurse resident of the Outer Sunset of San Francisco for 50+ years. Dealing with a loved one who suffers from dementia and Alzheimer’s Disease led to a search for a community based social program that would support, educate and inspire others in a similar position to find the strength to deal with daily coping. The vision of a non-profit organization to support that goal through preventative care and empower Seniors to care for their physical, mental emotional health began to take shape and has rapidly grown. SF Senior Power is currently funded by grants and support from Community Living Campaign and POPS, a local merchants’ association. Meetings, every 2nd Thursday of the month, are currently held at 10am at Taraval Police Station, 2345 24th Avenue. Meetings consist of a guest speaker, announcements of special interest to the community and senior citizen oriented, Qigong exercises, raffles, and social time with light refreshments. Group field trips are held quarterly. Plans include expanding the exercise program and offering bilingual English/Cantonese communication at meetings and events. Website: <https://sfseiorpower.com/>
Phone: 415-652-4751

Strong Women of Our Past

A Dangerous Woman

July 31 is the birthday of the woman Teddy Roosevelt once called “the most dangerous woman in America” when she was 87 years old. Mary Harris Jones was born to a tenant farmer in Cork, Ireland, in 1837. Her family fled the potato famine when she was just 10, resettling in Toronto. She trained to be a teacher and took a job in Memphis, where on the eve of the Civil War she married a union foundry worker and started a family. But in 1867, a yellow fever epidemic swept through the city, taking the lives of her husband and all four children. A widow at 30, she moved to Chicago and built a successful dressmaking business - only to lose everything in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. Jones then threw herself into the city’s bustling labor movement, where she worked in obscurity for the next 20 years. By the turn of the century, she emerged as a charismatic speaker and one of the country’s leading labor organizers, co-founding the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

She traveled the country to wherever there was labor struggle, sometimes evading company security by wading the riverbed into town, earning her the nickname “The Miner’s Angel.” She used storytelling, the Bible, humor, and even coarse language to reach a crowd. She said: “I asked a man in prison once how he happened to be there and he said he had stolen a pair of shoes. I said if he had stolen a railroad, he would be a United States Senator.” Jones also had little patience for hesitation, volunteering to lead a strike “if there were no men present.” A passionate critic of child labor, she organized a children’s march from Philadelphia to the home of Theodore Roosevelt in Oyster Bay, New York with banners reading, “We want to go to school and not the mines!” At the age of 88, she published a first-person account of her time in the labor movement called *The Autobiography of Mother Jones* (1925). She died at the age of 93 and is buried at a miners’ cemetery in Mt. Olive, Illinois.

She said: “Whatever the fight, don’t be ladylike.”

Source: Writers Almanac

The Women Of Copper Country

by Mary Doria Russell

A real page turner, this novel is based on the real life Annie Klobuchar Clemenc (pronounced Clements) an early labor activist most of us have never heard of. Dubbed Big Annie, she led a courageous strike against the largest copper mining company in the world. Located in Calumet, Michigan, (who knew copper was mined there?), the company controlled the lives, housing and “fortunes” of the families who sent their men and boys deep into the earth with scant protection while wives and children lived in dread of the news that their loved ones would not be coming home.

Of course, this was long before Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor in FDR’s Cabinet led the President to enact Social Security. Pensions? Ha Ha!

The book also details the abuse so many women endured from their husbands with no recourse to legal aid or income to support themselves and their children if they divorced or simply ran. Big Annie had to cope with that abuse even as she was becoming “America’s Joan of Arc.”

You will find this book enthralling and inspiring.

—*Glenda Hope*

Readers: What are you reading?

Share your reviews and recommendations, send them to the editor:

Email: info@owlsf.org

Calendar

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

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

July 27 Saturday— OWL Luncheon 11:30-2:00pm, At Delancy Street Restaurant

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

August — No General Meeting

September 2 Monday — OWL Board Meeting 4:00-5:00pm (via Zoom)

September 28 Saturday— OWL General Meeting 11:00-Noon November Ballot Measures (via Zoom)

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:

OWL-SF
PO Box 170622
San Francisco, CA 94117

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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