

Breaking the 50 barrier

On a new Web site, women revel in their newfound freedom

Remember that nagging question that first surfaced in the '70s: What do women want? I don't have a particular answer, but I can tell you that my mother and her peers



By Judy Bolton Fasman

wanted independence – emotional and financial. I'm from the generation whose mothers went back in droves to graduate school, law school and even

medical school. I'm among the first generation that considered marrying at 30 a prime age.

I am the amniocentesis generation – anyone pregnant at 35 and under is young, young, young. But I also remember when girls were not allowed to read from the Torah, and women rabbis were as real as dybbuks in a Sholem Aleichem story. I'm from the generation that pushed fertility to the limit. Single motherhood to my cohorts and me is no longer the post-modern equivalent of a scarlet letter.

In keeping with our generation, Felice Shapiro wants women to know that it is better after 50: life, confidence, and wisdom. Last fall, Shapiro founded the Web site Betterafter50.com. This isn't Shapiro's first venture in publishing. In 1998 she sold a group of parenting magazines in



Felice Shapiro, founder of Betterafter50.com.

the New York metro area and took time out to devote to a new marriage. Shapiro was widowed seven years ago when her husband died in a traffic accident.

She knew that her next business venture would have a personal slant. Just on the other side of 50, she was meeting women the same age that longed for a place to share topics, tell stories and risk openness. Shapiro likens Betterafter50.com to the 21st century version of a "kitchen table. It's a place to process our stuff. We are real. Not created in a boardroom."

Shapiro's observation was in evidence on one of the site's recent forums in which women chatted about jump-starting romance in a long marriage. An article on the homepage invited readers to envision starting a new business born of passion. This is the kind of girl talk I crave.

Shapiro and her contributors sing the body electric, too. They take on everything from Botox to training for marathons. There's also wit and advice for those of us in the salami generation – wedged between aging parents and

our own family obligations. It's enough to bring on a hot flash. Yes, there's menopause, and there's a lot of talk about it in the blogosphere. But a Betterafter50.com contributor puts the menopausal body into stark, uncomfortable relief when she pulls out a three-inch hair from her chin. Funny? Maybe. True? Absolutely.

But is a site like Betterafter50.com a balm for some of us? I just got a card in the mail for a skin and laser center called Forever Young. Do I want to be young forever? It sounds tiring. In her posting "Coming to Grips with 50," Jeanne Muchnick, Betterafter50.com's associate editor, taps into the ambivalence I felt when I had my big birthday last year:

I used to think women were crazy to not share their age when asked, but now I get it. It's not that I'm embarrassed I'm 50. I just feel that people have preconceived notions of what 50 is like and judge you based on that. Admit it, ladies: It's a hard number to swallow.

*On the other hand, once you land on the other side, it's a whole new world. Women have welcomed me in like it's some sort of honesty club *Where We Can Finally Be Who We Want to Be*.*

I can tell you from The Land of 50 that honesty is both fierce and comforting to me. And honesty propels every word on Betterafter50.com. This is a site where you'll never hear that 50 is the new 30 or even the new 40. Fifty is fifty, and that's wonderful all by itself.

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