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If I didn't get it then, I get it now

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The death of Betty Friedan propelled me into an encounter group of one as I tried once again, and hopefully for the last time, to reconcile a feminist mind-set with a lack of participation in the women's movement. Part of the sisterhood of women who came of age in the '60s, I read *The Feminine Mystique* when it came out in 1963 and discussed its meaning over tea and bridge at an all-female college.

I did not then get Friedan's articulation of a female angst, "the problem that has no name -- which is simply the fact that American women are kept from growing to their full human capacities." Full of my sense of self and nurtured by professors who told me that I could be anything I wanted to be, I lacked understanding and sympathy for those without my support system.

It was years before I became a stay-at-home mom. By the time I arrived there -- the suburban lifestyle that had trapped the women about whom Friedan wrote -- I had had a stint as a working professional and was in "time-out" mode, fully expecting that I would rejoin the workforce at my own time and at a competitive wage.

In a let-it-all-hang-out honesty, I have to admit that my alienation was not just from the Feminist Revolution. I sat out rather than marched in the Vietnam protests and Civil Rights movement, committed as I was to the causes. I kept silent on my disagreement with the Equal Rights Amendment as an unnecessary addition to a Constitution that I felt already protected me.

My own disengagement was of such magnitude that I did not challenge the discrimination I experienced and did not think for a moment of organizing with other women to storm the barricades. Those experiences included:

- A rejection by a top-ranked law school for one of the 5 percent of their slots designated for women.
- A boss who deferred my promotion while recognizing I had earned it because it would put me a pay step ahead of a female secretary 25 years my senior but without my credentials -- a standard that he did not apply to men.
- A U.S. State Department that did not have a place for dual career Foreign Service couples and relegated me to making cookies rather than the planning memos I had written in Foggy Bottom just a few years before.

On a sparkling October day in 1979 I joined legions of women assembled at the State House in Boston for a Nine to Five Convention, drawn there by the star power of Gloria Steinman and Jane Fonda. Beverly Phillips, then a county commissioner and CEO of the YWCA, my employer, had tasked me with designing a Miami conference on women's issues. Nine to Five was a woman's organization formed by young activists from the feminist movement to organize the previously unorganized office workers.

Jane and Gloria rallied the troops around an agenda of pay commensurate with job responsibilities and day care. Just a year later, Fonda starred with Lily Tomlin and Dolly Parton in the movie *Nine to Five*, the same feminist manifesto but this time disguised as satire, using laughter as a force to promote recognition and broaden the base for the causes she espoused that day.

I spoke out in a session on day care asking why this group was demanding day care to work in the traditional nine to five jobs designed by men rather than redefining how work could be organized to benefit women and their children. Their dead silence seemed to me a lack of vision. How insensitive I was to the reality of their trap: needing immediate relief to support themselves and their children in the here and now.

I might have been insensitive that October day, but something in the air of the historic State House got me. Within a few years I was in the mainstream, working through feminist political groups such as Emily's List to help elect women to office and traditional political parties to elect men with a feminist agenda. My volunteer involvement focused on economic justice for women. My colleagues were many of those women who came on line because of Friedan and the

organizations she helped found -- the National Organization for Women, the National Women's Political Caucus, NARAL.

Now that I am mellowing into my senior years, Friedan is speaking to me. She told us 'aging is not `lost youth' but a new stage of opportunity and strength." This time I can relate and I am riding the rising tide of the post-feminist age. Thanks, Betty, for once again pointing the way when I am mature and sensitive enough to get it. Thanks for bringing along a set of amazing resilient sisters to be partners on the journey.

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