

Resourcing It Out

Recently I was invited to speak to a class on "Serving Gay and Lesbian Families." I shared my story as a mother who came out later in life, after a heterosexual marriage. I answered questions, one from a gentleman who asked about the resources available to me as I went through my own "very intense experience." I told him, "There weren't any at the time, but there are some now!"

When I came out, I was positive that I was the absolute only woman who'd ever left a ten-year marriage for a lesbian life. I soon discovered, through the magic of the Internet, that I was hardly alone. Now, according to an article in April's *Oprah* magazine, the number of women who leave their husbands for other women is on the rise.

The author, Mary A. Fischer, cites various reasons for this, including research on sexual fluidity and how the cultural taboo has diminished in many areas of the country. A progressive city like Portland, with an already large lesbian population, seems a perfect place to take the plunge into newfound lesbianism. And given the numerous emails I've received, many women are doing just that. As a queer community, how will we welcome this expected influx of latebians?

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LIVING OUT LOUD

by Kathryn Martini

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also true of women who come out later in life. I recall hearing how I was considered "dangerous territory;" I couldn't be trusted not to run back to men after getting my "bi- on." Many, including my former husband, were

convinced I would date a few women simply to make a point and return to men. Another obstacle we face is that, if we do find a partner, our new girlfriend is sure we'll eventually leave to sleep with random women. After all, we have a lot of catching up to do after all of those years of bad hetero sex!

I admit to wondering about my college days had I realized I liked girls. Still, I've never felt a burning desire to revisit being a hyper-sexed teenager – no more than a warm desire, anyway. It's a conundrum: In order to be accepted in the community, we need to have several intimate relationships with women. But because we're so scary, we can't find anyone with whom to have those relationships! From the sheer volume of email and comments I receive on my blog, I know this to be true for many new, late-in-life lezzies. It's time to give them the support they deserve.

Joanne Fleisher, LCSW, authored the book *Living Two Lives* and appeared on the *Oprah* episode entitled "Gay Wives Confess." She hosts a website called "Lavender Visions" (lavendervisions.com) and conducts classes for married women attracted to other women. Her popular message board, "Ask Joanne," features posts by women in various stages of their journeys.

Some are still married and living with their husbands but also have girlfriends. Others are in the process of leaving their hetero existences and coming out as lesbians; most of them are struggling with their double lives.

Joy, a Portland lesbian, runs a website called "QueerL" (queerl.net) with blog posts and a forum for other late-in-life lesbians to connect with each other. A weekly support group is also being planned.

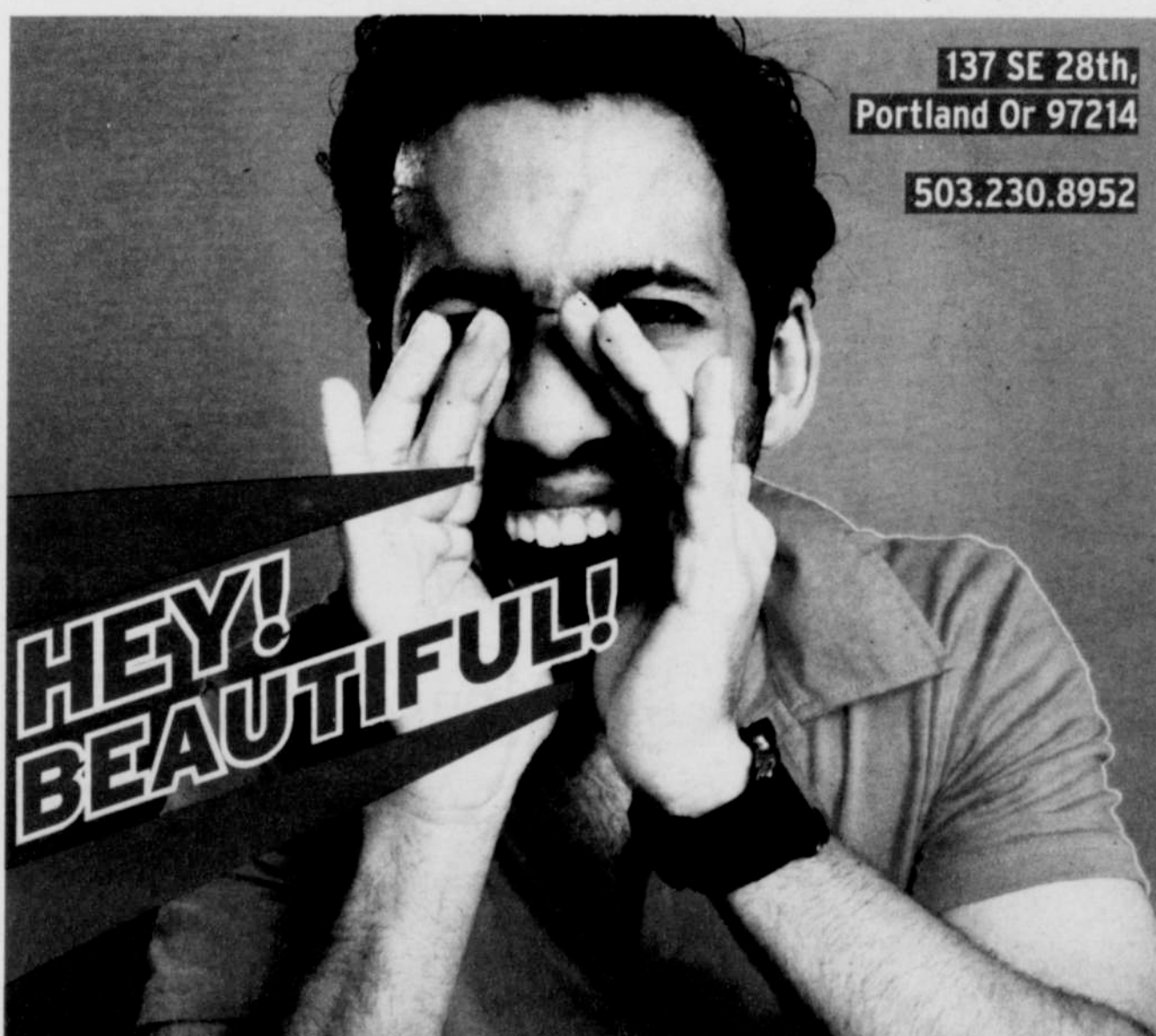
Once a month, Q Center offers a support network called "Late Awakenings." The group is for women, typically between the ages of 35-65, who question their sexual orientation or began identifying as a lesbian later in life. The next meeting is Tuesday, May 19 at 7 p.m.

Such resources weren't available to me, but I'm thrilled they're available now. More than anything, these women need to feel accepted into a new world filled with rules, customs, and traditions so different from their previous, hetero lives. As a community, let's roll out the welcome mat and embrace them for being queer. JO

KATHRYN MARTINI is a freelance writer and blogger. She can be reached at kathryn@recoveringstraightgirl.com.

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