

JANNY

I came from a well-to-do background. My father was the vice-president of Mc Call's Magazine. He was always hoisting a scotch and soda. He was gentle, ^{I was his} FAVORITE but I adored her. indulgent. My mother thought he was God - and she inferior. We were "Malcolm's children" - always on display. ^{MAMA would} She'd bring us out when there was company to perform; to sing. I used to write songs when I was a kid. I'd sing off the back of a truck for Roosevelt. My voice is better now than it was then.

I'm sixty-two. I never was married. I'm pretty sure I've been gay all my life; I just didn't know it. I remember the first little girl I fell in love with, when I was nine. She looked just like Elizabeth Taylor. I slept with a hundred guys starting at the age of fourteen. Then when I was in my twenties I came out here to California. Shortly after I met Edie - my lover. We've been together for thirty-five years. ^{I love her. We were always be together} In the 1940's I was writing songs for the communist party, performing at the San Francisco Labor Theatre. Those people all persecuted Edie and me. There were a lot of guys around who were curious because we had a house and were doing for ourselves. We always denied we were lesbians. But somebody in the party said they saw me at some gay place. I'd never gone there, but somebody testified they saw me there. We always denied that we were lesbians, but I got thrown out of the party for it anyway. I stopped writing music and started drinking.

I've been sober since I was fifty-seven. When I came out of alcoholism, I thought, "Screw it, I've paid my dues . I'm not(Next page)

going to go around with a big balloon saying I'm a lesbian, but I'm not going to hide anymore.' I've always believed in what I thought whether society believed it or not. It was something I was proud of. I was proud of our love. I just wasn't going to hide it anymore.

Evie and I had some gay friends that we met about ten or twelve years ago. We'd go bowling with them, or to parties. But they weren't politically aware. I was always politically aware. I thought they were reactionary... these lesbian bowlers. A lot of lesbians then didn't want to identify themselves with anything political. They were persecuted enough. They would divert themselves in other ways, but they were not political. So I didn't have any close ^{lesbian} friends.

I hadn't written a song since I got thrown out of the communist party. Now I write for the women's movement, for the peace movement. I have a song about homosexuality that I wrote. I've written about being an alcoholic, about vulnerability... But for all those years, I didn't write at all.

I never thought about aging till my fifty-seventh birthday. The thought of aging and turning sixty bothered me. Evie thinks about it; she says, "Don't tell people how long we've lived together; they'll think we're old."

I started going to SOL--Slightly Older Lesbians. I was always the oldest one. When I went to AA, it was a bunch of little kids. They kind of thought of me as a colleague, but I always felt like I was on the outside looking in. I felt lonely. And I felt old. I was old.

I was pretty active then, but I was tired all the time. I didn't know that I was sick. My body had started to break down. *I had the flu, I had pneumonia, and I got cancer.* Now when people see me, they say "You look wonderful." My color is good. I've lost quite a bit of weight, but I'm not underweight. So I must have had cancer for quite a while before they found it.

For most people when they're aging, their accomplishments are in the past. But for me, having come out of an alcoholic fog, I'm now becoming more successful in the field I should have been in all my life. My aging is unusual. I'm better looking now than I've been in the last twenty years. I was fat. Then I got hypertension. Then I got sick and lost weight and kept it off. It's only been very recently that I've been taking good care of myself... trying to get enough rest.

How old people are treated makes me mad though. One time in front of Rainbow Grocery, there were some young women getting signatures and they bypassed me. They were looking for young people to sign their petition. They didn't even see me.

I have a show now on aging. I say that I was a communist. The communist party told me to get rid of Evie or they'd kick me out. I told them to go screw themselves. I was a rebel. Someone was always telling me I was doing wrong--the communists or ~~the~~ *my* ~~lesbians~~ *FAMILY* lesbians. The communist party is down the drain and we're still here!

When I came out of the alcohol fog, I saw the women's movement. I saw these wonderful young lesbians who were militant. Just like I always have, they said what they thought politically. That's what my show is about. I come on the stage and I say, "I'm

Janny and I write about what I believe in. I believe in women."

The song I wrote says that aging is a fact of life, and dying is part of life. I always pray to my higher power. And I have said to my higher power, "I know you gave me cancer. You must have given it to me for a reason." I know it's to help me deal with my stress, to deal with my "co" behavior... I'm always taking care of somebody else. It's really hard for me to do what's good for me. In the last year, not a week's gone by where I didn't have to see some doctor. I was afraid I was going to die until the last week... when I passed the test. So I prayed.

I remember when I first saw the press photo that went out announcing my show. There were all these wrinkles in my neck. That was kind of a shock to me for a few minutes and then I chose to ignore it. I sometimes have a hard time seeing that my body has changed. I used to have arms. Before I had cancer, I was a big, strong woman. Now I feel I look diminished. You see this arm? That's like my mother's arm looked. It used to be a big arm. Now look... it's a skinny thing. It makes me mad to look at it. It's all dried up, too. My body looks like my mother's body looked when she was old. I look frail; I don't like to look frail.

Evie denies her homosexuality. It's so stupid. She says, "Are you going to sing that song in your show--the one about homosexuality?" I said, "I'm singing everything, Evie. I'm singing about what I believe in." And she said, "Well, I'm not coming." *That's Evie for you. Of course she came anyway - she's my biggest fan*
I think this is one of the best times in my life... or it's

starting to be. I had thought I would be dead in the next six months, but I don't think I'm going to be now. I'm doing my own show and it's very successful. I remember before my first show saying to my higher power, "Just please give me a sign that I won't lose my voice, that I'm going to get through this." Just then the phone rang and the club said, "It's so crowded--would you consider doing a second show?" Now is that a sign or what?!

AGING IS NOT FOR SISSIES

by Janny

Aging is not for sissies
Aging is not for faint of heart
Aging is living's second part
Not for the quitter

Aging is for the fighter
Knowing just who and what you are
Courage will be your guiding star
Fear turns you bitter

Reach out to all
We love you too
Aging will call
On me--on you

Aging is not for sissies
Time's passage may diminish you
But you'll see the finish through
No fuss or glitter

You're born to do your bit
Aging is part of it
You're just a passing guest
And when you're gone
We'll know you did your best
AND YOU WERE STRONG.