

## STORYTELLING and ACTIVISM:

There is the traditional image of a community, union, religious, or environmental activist as a highly charismatic being whose energy, vision, and leadership skills draw unrelated people together in a commitment to the same objective. What if you simply are not the type of person who can get strangers out of their homes and into a meeting hall, or lead unifying chants during a strike, or convince 20 people to tie themselves into ancient cedars and sleep in them for a month with TV cameras rolling? Does this mean that you have no ability to activate around the issues that you feel are profoundly important? Heavens no! We are storytellers. We activate and change our world one story, one telling, and one listening at a time.

The great political/community organizer, Saul Alinsky, always advised that one not go to their first meeting at the Jewish Community Center with a ham and cheese sandwich in hand. Let us agree that to activate around an issue or goal is to infuse people with the desire and ability to effect social, political, economic, and/or environmental change in their world. Alinsky, like all good storytellers knew that you don't take anyone to a new destination unless you begin where they are. To do that you must first be a good listener and then have the ability to engage both their heads and hearts in the journey. We must be listeners before we are talkers. Once we understand the intersection of people's needs and our objectives we can create stories that are a mirror of our listeners and windows into new ways of thinking and looking at our world.

For about 30 years I have been running about like a headless chicken crying "We're all going to die. We're all going to die! We're creating substances that don't occur in nature. We're taking drugs to manipulate nature's plan. We're eating and despoiling the planet we live on... We're all going to die!" This has been as effective of an environmental organizing technique as bringing an evangelical preacher to the Unitarian Universalism's annual meeting and having him cry out "You're all damned to Hell. All damned to Hell." Back to the drawing board. If I really want to share what is true about human being's negative impact on the planet and it's critters then the information must engage folks where they stand, they must see themselves in the characters and issues, and, to begin with, be empowered around a specific issue. We can act on the specific. We can only take **Zoloft** in response to the general.

Since our best stories are about what we know or what we want to know, I decided to begin with the 'menopause industry.' Every stage of life these days

seems to be nothing but a potential market for the industries that so profoundly influence our political systems and life. The 'menopause industry' includes everything from anti-wrinkle creams to cosmetic surgery to antidepressants; so much to lampoon, so much to change, so little time. As I read more and more about the history of hormone replacement therapy it became clear that, contrary to nature's plans, the continued infusion of hormones into women, is ultimately hazardous. Tests conducted prior to W.W.II showed this and yet these treatments saturate the market place today. The combination of large pharmaceutical companies influencing govt. and medical policy and our own endless fascination with Ponce De Leon's fountain has made a self-destructive practice, policy for most American women. Now bla bla bla. No one wants to hear me rant on about this. It's boring, self righteous and ineffective. So, I did what all storytellers do, created a show that offers a mirror for women (ages 45-60), makes the issues accessible, funny, and a plum to be picked, examined, and hopefully tossed into the compost by the women of this generation.

The Fading Scent: A Seditious Comedy About Women and Aging is a storyteller's meditation in 3 rants, 3 stories, and a song on the change. One issue that comes up again and again is HRT (hormone replacement therapy). It's hazards and both the deep desire and absurdity of staying sexy at 60 (at any cost) is played with, amplified, and examined seriously. Through the story of Snow White's Mother we experience the difficulty losing one's sexual allure. Queen Crone offers a model for powerful, natural, outrageous aging. The Queen's New Cloths gives the listener an opportunity to live through and emerge from the emotional malaise, which can swallow women at this time of life. The show is an activist's tool. Through humor and human journey, it calls out for women to reclaim their bodies and minds and use the last part of their lives in vibrant acts of love and activism. Stories are our tools, and their power can resonate further than even we could imagine.

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