

age Is NoThing

Nancy O'Reilly is helping women speak out about getting older

BY CHRIS DEROSIER

Nancy O'Reilly is a woman on a mission. For her manifesto, you need look no further than the ambience in her office. Elegance abounds, evident in the wood decoration and the warm yellow glow. The wall behind her desk features paintings of wispy women who look like they just stepped out of a Jane Austen novel: strong but graceful, independent but never lacking in class. In many respects, she is such a woman herself. And if all goes well, there will be many more like her to come.

Like all worthy missions, Nancy's is both daunting and time-consuming. At the moment, it also takes up a lot of space on her desk. Manila folders stack and teeter everywhere. But then, WomenSpeak is no small project. It is the culmination of years of research by Nancy and other contributors, all with the same goal in mind: getting women to help each other understand what they go through as they get older by relating personal experiences and fears. Nancy has received thousands of responses already at womenspeak.com, from women all over the United States and from five other countries.

The success of WomenSpeak is actually rooted in failure, namely Nancy's inability to find literature to help her deal with turning 50. "I went to Barnes & Noble just like everybody else," she says. "I went to look for information about what kind of research people were doing as far as women and their own perception of aging. There was nothing. It was glib, or funny, or cute."

When Nancy took matters into her own hands, she was surprised by what she found. Not only were women worried about aging, they were more concerned about getting older than about death itself. She also discovered that they were completely ignoring their own health concerns while becoming increasingly

Nancy O'Reilly discovered that women were more worried about aging than about death itself. And they were ignoring their health while trying to look younger.

mean, we all use role models and we use mentors to learn and to know what to expect in the future. So if women aren't talking about it, and they're not sharing it

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consumed by the need to look younger. They needed people they could turn to for advice on how to prepare for and embrace the changes that come with age rather than run from them. "Their mothers really didn't talk about it, their grandmothers didn't really talk about it," Nancy says. "I

and they don't have any role models, then it's hard to go through a process."

Nancy has used WomenSpeak, along with journal articles and an upcoming book, to show women that they are each other's best role models and mentors.

"Women of all ages need to continue to pursue their rights as far as in the professional world and in the spiritual world and wherever they choose to go," she says. By knowing what those rights are and how best to pursue them, perhaps in time women can grow to be comfortable with who they are and with what lies ahead, no matter what their age. Jane Austen would be proud. ¶