

Upper Westside1



Fairway Market

April 2015

Self-image

Members brought pictures of themselves from the past.

It was interesting to look at them in light of how we felt about ourselves at the time and how we now feel about how we looked then. Recent photos enabled us to discuss how we feel with regard to how our looks/bodies have changed over the years.

- One member shared beautiful pictures from a tumultuous, yet fascinating life lived in Europe, New York, and Israel. We saw no evidence of the awkwardness and low self-esteem she says she suffered as a young girl.
- We were all surprised with a member's story of obesity in high school and early motherhood. She lost weight when she had her first child and began to work out in earnest at age 35. Her self-image has improved steadily over a lifetime of achievement.
- Another member began her narrative with the last family trip with her three children and husband in 1978. She was married at 25 and lived in various states. In addition to being a mother and full time nurse, she was a long distance marathon runner. Her husband died in 2000, and she recently moved into Manhattan from Long Island to recreate her active life.
- One member's pictures illustrated her ugly duckling story of personal transformation from pudgy little girl to glamorous young woman - we were all persuaded! Today, at 68, with no husband or children, she feels she has begun to "get" who she really is.
- High school graduation in 1960 was the start of another member's photo history. She also shared pictures from a family life with two daughters and a son. She too was married young, and is still good friends with her bridesmaid. A career as



a professor and administrator has rounded out a rich life in which another chapter has begun with her moving to the city.

May 2015

Self-Image...continuation

Members again brought in pictures to continue our discussion of self-image – then and now, and how we feel/felt about ourselves in the past, and how our self-image has changed as we age. This topic is certainly very rich, and looking at the photos brings up all kinds of issues.

- Photos showed an era-appropriate sojourn in the world of beaded hair and communal living.
- One member shared her discomfort with the female beauty imperative, noting that she felt better in Vermont where women didn't wear makeup.
- As we age, our body changes and how futile it seems to imagine we can remedy the inevitable.
- Another member shared a chronological series of face shots that documented her own "changing body." In this case, a face and neck that have "fallen."
- Can we really blend in better with a younger group if one has a face-lift? There was definite agreement in the group about the oppressiveness of our culture's worship of youth and insistence that a woman's value as a human being is tied to her attractiveness.
- One member found herself yearning to correct the downward pull of too full cheeks whose muscle tone has loosened. Although she would love to join Gloria Steinem in her celebration of the natural beauty of the older woman, she feels that in her case, nature could be improved upon, and she would feel better for it.
- Are we getting "better" with age? Or do we feel we are becoming invisible? Is it just that youth is so very visible? Can we hide our necks with scarfs? Just maintain a smiling face?
- One member reminded us that as we get older we are winding down; we have less of a future than a past. This makes every day more poignant because you know you are on a path in a certain direction.

June 2015

Changing Self-Image – Again

This topic, along with individual member photos, has proven very ripe for discussion. Two members shared their experiences with the group.

- As one member prepared for her photo presentation, she realized that the images often gave a false picture of reality. In many of her photos she felt she



looked happy or content when the fact was that sickness or great turmoil was often about to descend.

Despite that caveat, she shared a rich documentation of a life lived, despite great obstacles, to a large extent, “her way.” She went to college in her forties and got her degree to teach in her early fifties, which was one the great joys of her life. She taught until retiring.

- Another member discussed how the birth of triplet siblings when she was 11 dramatically changed things at home. Her mother told her she now had to take care of herself...a daunting comment to one so young! She remembers feeling that she had become middle-aged and overweight and brought pictures of herself in baggy sweaters. Now she sees that she didn't look as bad as she thought at the time.

When they were in their twenties her triplet siblings all became schizophrenic. She and her brother have been involved in their care ever since. Widowed almost ten years ago, she has recreated her life.