

Activist Has Lived Life Always Speaking Her Mind

We are sitting at a Starbucks in Nob Hill, the only one Merrilee Dolan has ever frequented, and it becomes quickly apparent that she is not one for such cutesy caffeine chatter.

She orders coffee “with all that foamy stuff in the medium size that you call something else,” and somehow the barista knows that what she means is a grande latte.

But this is the only time Dolan is obtuse.

The place is busy and noisy this late morning, but Dolan’s ebullient way of speaking — her words like brass bells chiming, her arms gesturing widely and



UPFRONT

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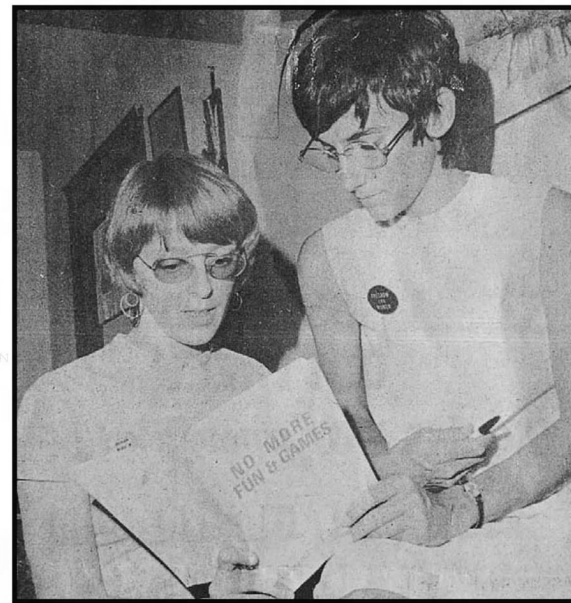
that smile, always that frisky smile — is at times the only thing anyone notices.

Dolan does not mince words, and I suspect she never has in all of her 66 (67 on Saturday) years, much of which she has spent speaking her mind as one of the pioneers of the women’s movement and affirmative action in Albuquerque.

So today she is more than ready to make mincemeat of Sarah Palin and the world at large.

“Sarah Palin is a disgrace,” she says with a smile as if she has just said something sweet about the woman she believes is undeserving of having a crack at the highest, hardest glass ceiling. “Then again, we have the right to be as awful as a man, I guess.”

Dolan’s comments are interesting, given



COURTESY OF HARD TIMES

Merrilee Dolan, left, in 1971 with Catherine Albright, then president of the Albuquerque chapter of NOW.

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her role in those early bra-burning, abortion-rights promoting years of pushing the message of the National Organization for Women: that women have just as much right as men to equal pay, equal jobs, equal chances.

She remembers a time in 1969 when she, a University of New Mexico graduate with a master's degree in political science, a bachelor's in Spanish and a minor in botany, was told to use the back door of an Albuquerque employment agency and fill out an application different from the men's version.

"You had to write down your typing skills, office skills, things like that," she says. "There was not a space on the form for your higher education."

In those days, women became nurses, secretaries, teachers, waitresses or nuns, if they joined the work force at all.

"Women were expected to get married and take care of the home," says Dolan, whose own marital status past and present she coyly describes as being "single for the record."

"Before the war, women had made big strides," she says. "But after World War II was over, it was back to the home. Women were kicked out of their factory jobs and sent home."

Dolan says she had no choice but to take a job as a filing clerk for a janitorial service, where even the owners wondered what a nice, intelligent, overqualified girl like her was doing in a place like that.

"I was so furious," she says.

Dolan's experience inspired her to contact a new national organization called NOW, which she had read about in a newspaper.

She eventually became a member of its national board of directors and headed the organization's task force on women in poverty.

She also got a better job



COURTESY OF
MERRILLEE DOLAN

Merrilee Dolan remains a feminist. These days, she likes flamenco.

with the state helping to convince businesses to recruit women and minority workers.

She helped energize the fledgling Albuquerque NOW group, still encumbered by at least one member's belief that demonstrations were not "ladylike."

That soon changed. In 1971, the local chapter held a rally in which they burned aprons, hair curlers, nude photos of women, marriage licenses and voter registrations — the latter, they explained, a symbol of how ineffective the women's right to vote had been in a male-dominated society.

"Oh, we were so radical then," she says with a laugh.

You might have expected, then, that having a woman to vote for on a vice presidential ticket would have made veteran feminists like Dolan beam with pride.

But Dolan isn't fooled.

Palin, she contends, is dangerously deceptive and utterly unqualified to be vice president, despite her ovaries.

"We have minds, we have hearts, we have histories," says Dolan, who also did not support Hillary Clinton ("I just didn't like the lies"). "Women don't vote for women just because they are women."

And so she won't.

She wonders, though, where those heady days of revolution and rage have gone and considers that perhaps now, more than ever, in the face of a crumbling economy and a crazy election, it's time for them to rise again.

These days, Dolan keeps too busy with her technical writing, her flamenco dancing and her cats to be out there changing the world.

But in her own way, she already has.

For the record:

I'll give Bernalillo County Sheriff Darren White the benefit of the doubt and assume that his response Monday to my Sept. 26 column on a North Valley family who sued his department and four of his deputies for excessive use of force was written for purely political purposes and not to deliberately mislead readers.

In truth, I did not miss a second of the testimony on the deputies' side of the case, and I researched hundreds of pages of records and documents presented by both sides — far more than what the jury got to see.

To have requested comment from the Sheriff's Department while the case was ongoing would have been inappropriate, unnecessary and likely to only produce the ubiquitous "we cannot comment on pending litigation" quote. White knows this.

I also did not "laugh and talk" with the family, though I did have a chuckle with the deputies in the court elevator.

I have no problem with those who disagree with me, but if you're going to insult my credibility for political purposes, it's always nice to have the facts straight.

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