

# Veterans of Feminist Wars

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## How the Idea for "Veterans of Feminist Wars" Came About

By Jacqui Ceballos

In early 1990, after years of a very private and introspective life in New Orleans, I began to wonder about all those women I'd worked so closely with in the feminist movement from 1967 to 1977 and I yearned to see them again. In February of that year, I happened to be in Coral Gables, Fla., and I realized that Roxcy Bolton, the founder of Florida NOW (who had stopped the naming of hurricanes after just women) lived nearby. She was listed in the telephone directory and soon we were chatting over tea in her living room, catching up after 20 years. Roxcy said she hoped we'd all get an invitation to the 25th anniversary of NOW in 1991; I said that since most of the old guard, including Betty Friedan, were no longer active in NOW, it wasn't likely that any of us would be invited.

### Feminism in the Air

But something was in the air, for soon Roxcy and I were reuniting with Snowbirds Betty Berry, Mary Jean Tully and Barbara Seaman from New York City and Gene Boyer of Beaver Dam, Wisconsin. "We [the NOW founders] had our own 15th anniversary reunion," Gene Boyer told Roxcy. "Don't count on receiving an invitation to the 25th." "We'll have our own reunion then," was Roxcy's reply, "and we'll organize a network of pioneer feminists. If no one will honor us, then we will honor ourselves."

We began planning a reunion in Florida. Nikki Beare started looking for a

hotel near the beach for the event. Our plans floundered because there was really no money and none of us are experienced fund raisers, but wouldn't it have been lovely? We had hoped that feminists would come from all over the country for a joyous reunion and it would then become an ongoing network. And we, the "old guard" of the feminist movement, would have our own voice again.

### Schlesinger Project

Later that year, Mary Jean Tully invited me to New York to interview key women for Harvard's Schlesinger Library History of NOW project. I decided I would also interview as many other pioneer feminists as I could, not only from NOW but also from independent or radical groups, and give the tapes to the library's History of Women department so that their contributions would be documented.

Soon I was back to the scene of my early activism in New York, interviewing Kate Millett, Muriel Fox, Ti-Grace Atkinson, Flo Kennedy and scores of others. The memories, the exhilaration they evoked, was almost overwhelming. Kate Millett and I laughed so hard at our early actions—the misunderstandings and in-fights—that I'm told the tape is barely understandable.

August 26, 1970

*We took to the street like a river  
flowing into history. Women.  
Women who have borne the  
world's children.  
Women who are jailed for  
whoring and for loving.  
Women who will not be fouled,  
fooled, or frightened anymore.  
Women from the Grecian urn:  
truth and beauty made flesh.  
Women like tribal queens.  
Women from the sounds of  
silence  
from the sun's first beam  
from the wind's hot advances  
and the sea's murmuring.*

*Women out of the earth's very  
beginning  
arose and walked arm in arm  
past stunned and jeering  
faces,  
and we will not know today  
nor yet in the blue  
tomorrow's wake  
what churned behind those  
faces.  
It was enough, being a woman,  
to be there,  
Demanding, by our numbers,  
Our rightful place to make a  
better world.*

Anne Hazlewood-Brady

### Mailbox

*"...I believe we have made enormous progress. Women are taken seriously today... True, we have a ways to go still... I see a great opportunity to complete the task in the third wave of feminism..."*

*—Barbara Hoberman Levine  
Fairfield, Conn.*

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Most of the early feminists I interviewed had been inactive after those historic, turbulent years, living very private lives. But many were rested and eager to reunite again. For the most part, all the hurt and pain caused by the differences and dissonances had healed, and their mood was like that of soldiers who had fought side by side in a war. During my interview with Ti-Grace Atkinson, she was one of the first who suggested that we pioneer feminists start our own organization or network.

## 'Womandate' to Organize

When in August 1991, I decided to move to Phoenix to help my daughter through a domestic crisis, Barbara Seaman and Dorothy Senercia threw an impromptu "send-off" party for me. Eighteen feminists showed up, some of whom had not seen each other in 22 years. There was a nostalgic atmosphere at that meeting; some women said they remembered those early feminist activist years as the best years of their lives. The group gave me a "womandate" to plan a reunion, and I left for sunny Phoenix with a project to work on that excited me.

Thus was born the Veterans of Feminist Wars the following May in New York City. The name came about when I explained, with some passion, to the women who came to an organizing meeting that we were like "soldiers who had fought a war together—the depth of feeling was that deep," and Barbara Seaman declared, "Well, we, too, are veterans; we are veterans of the feminist wars."

## Pros & Cons on Name

The name has caused much comment, pro and con. Suzanne Benton suggested "Veteran Feminist Warriors." Others wanted to stay with Pioneer Femi-

nists. We decided to go with Veterans of Feminist Wars unless there were tremendous objections. There have been a few negative comments, mostly about the maleness of the name, but the majority love it.

## Tremendous Response

I sent out about 50 test letters to pioneer feminists whose address I had. There was a tremendous response. There were calls and letters and checks for \$25. Women copied the letter and mailed it to others. Some pioneers heard about it from others. A young friend, Peter Boccaccio, came by to visit us in Phoenix and when I told him about VFW, he said, "Wow, my mother was one of you. She was the creator of the 'Fuck Housework' poster and my early years are filled with memories of demonstrations." (Shirley Boccaccio, who now lives on a ranch in Mexico, has become a member.)

So that's our herstory to date. Some of the women who were at my send-off party make up the steering committee. I agreed to take the helm for a while, but it was easy to convince me to stay on as chief organizer until most of the estimated 10,000 pioneers are with us.

Right now we are operating on membership dues and a few small contributions. Meanwhile, we are looking for foundation or corporation funding. In early spring, we hope to "go public" and hopefully, all those pioneer feminists that we haven't heard from will come out of the woodwork.

## Harmony & Cooperation

We want to keep VFW a network rather than a formal organization because while we can still work on issues, a network is more likely to foster the harmony and cooperation we need to sustain us in our "age of wisdom." The Third Wave of feminism is on, and we, the veterans of

the Second Wave, have the experience and wisdom to offer in the new or revived struggles. Each one serves where she best can and apparently, my talent is getting women together. So, if it is the womandate of the founders and the membership of this, our great pioneer feminist army, that I do, then Goddess willing, I will.

*Jacqui Ceballos, an activist in the feminist movement since 1967, was the president of the National Organization for Women in 1971 and regional director in 1972. She currently lives at 510 W. Mariposa St., Phoenix, Ariz. 85013. Phone: (602) 279-2935.*

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## Women Advise Clinton

In what the *New York Times* called "a watershed feminist event," 50 women met in Vermont the weekend of December 5-6 to develop an economic plan for the Clinton administration that would have some bearing on women's issues. Among those present were pioneer feminists Betty Friedan, Bella Abzug and Carol Bellamy. The proposals the women outlined include flexible work schedules, equal pay, more entrepreneurial opportunities for women, a rethinking of welfare and a redefinition of "infrastructure" to include people and communities.

"It was the best meeting I've been to in 20 years," said Betty Friedan, who was one of the group's organizers, to the *Times*. "The women's movement has roared back in the last couple of years from a political coma," commented the *Times*.

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## Membership List to Date

*Please keep this list and share it with other women who are interested in the VFW. We will add to the list as membership grows.*

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## The Mailbox

"What a wonderful idea...I'd love to do whatever I can to make this a success...Something must be in the air: I just set up a four-hour mini-series at Warner Bros. TV on the women's movement...It's all very exciting!"

—Brenda Feigen  
Beverly Hills, Calif.

"...The project sounds interesting and you can count me in on it as a founding member."

—Betty Friedan  
New York

"Have placards, perspicacity, will travel!"

—Judy Pickering  
Hartford, Conn.