



Conscious Aging: A Celebration of Life

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Cedar Crest College



Aging and Caring

- ◆ Teaching case example



Conscious Aging

- ◆ Is a new way of looking at aging beyond cultural stereotypes
- ◆ Quote from Alex Haley:
“The death of an older person is like burning a library



New Paradigms

- ◆ Radiance and Beauty
- ◆ Letting Go of Ego Structures
- ◆ Rebirth of the Soul
- ◆ Defining Self in Flexible Ways
- ◆ Letting Go Lightly of Life Long Roles that No Longer Fit or Interest Us
- ◆ Eldering
- ◆ Gender Issues



Erik Erickson:

- ◆ “lacking a culturally viable ideal of aging, our civilization does not really have a concept of the whole life cycle. We can live and die, psychologically and spiritually incomplete because we do not embrace old age as a natural part of life.”



Elderly are living in a world designed for the young:

- ◆ Rushed Dr. appointments in managed care
- ◆ Small print forms
- ◆ High tech. medical care prolongs life
- ◆ No access to custodial (non-skilled) care
- ◆ Some must choose between medication or food
- ◆ Out live their support systems, cognitive powers and bank accounts



Existential Questions:

- ◆ Did my life matter?
- ◆ Was my time well spent?
- ◆ What did I mean to other?
- ◆ What can I look back to with pride?
- ◆ Did I love well enough?

The elderly think about the meaning of life
with both sorrow and self-acceptance

Integrity-Dignity-Acceptance-Serenity



Existential Issues

Role Reversal

- ◆ “The old often die by inches”- difficult to watch the mother who gave birth to you slip away
- ◆ Children walk a fine line between beginning neglectful or overbearing
- ◆ When elderly call us home to care for them it can be a time of great healing
- ◆ This gives the young a chance to grow up & truly be an adult



Existential Issues:

- ◆ If there is baggage in the past there will trouble in the future
- ◆ Different life stages puts us at odds with the elderly
- ◆ Crisis-makes everyone more of who they really are, rigidly locked in roles become more pronounced (son who always forgot his homework still can't do any thing right)



Existential Issues

- ◆ Old roles are hard to let go of
- ◆ Gender roles also die hard
 - Son should manage finances
 - Daughter should do care giving
 - Parents may not see children as adults

Examples

- Son returns home to take the car keys away
- Grandmother in consistent pain is at odds with granddaughter who is self-absorbed



Social Learning Theory

◆ Marshmallow Test

<https://www.ignitermedia.com/products>



Social Learning Theory

- ◆ Delayed Gratification
- ◆ By old age our parents have “over mastered” this skill
- ◆ Example: Can’t buy a new dryer because I don’t know how long I will be here...
- ◆ as she walks clothing basket full of heavy wet wash down cement steps to the basement to hang on the line.



- ◆ Where does this delayed gratification come from?
- ◆ Women more socialized to not want anything for themselves
- ◆ They spend a lifetime perfecting this skill
- ◆ In old age they can't spend the money or social capital to take care of themselves



Existential Enterprise of Working With the Elderly

- ◆ What is the difference in working with unwed mothers, alcoholics or patients on renal dialysis?
- ◆ Working with the elderly is unique because it makes us develop an image of our own old age, mortality and impending losses

Social Learning



- ◆ We Become More of Who WE Are As We Age



Intergenerational Sources of Misunderstanding

- ◆ Deep Structure vs. Surface Structure-
difference between a small town coffee shop vs. a food court at the mall

Meaning of Food: food =love, has cultural significance, did not have enough of during the depression, Sunday dinners, giant meals

Expression of Feelings: “buck up”, men don’t cry or hug, women don’t state their needs, both not comfortable with openness, emotionally constricted



Intergenerational Sources of Misunderstanding

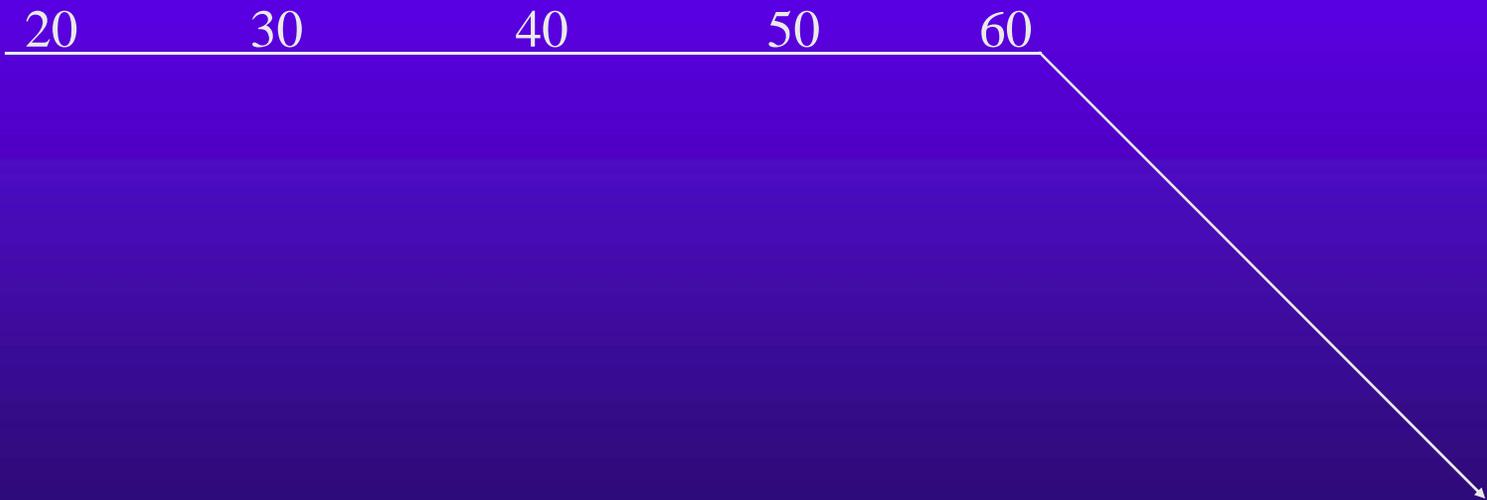
- ◆ Women don't get angry, swear or express dissatisfaction
- ◆ Gender roles
 - good father = good provider
 - good mother = good nurturer (emotionally physically present)
 - women defined to serve others



Other Sources of Misunderstanding

- ◆ Attitudes about:
- ◆ Pregnancy- pregnancy should be hidden
- ◆ Dress and appearance(hair done, dressed)
- ◆ Manners- respect, written thank you notes
- ◆ Money- forbidden topic, rude to discuss it
- ◆ Child Rearing -seen not heard, physical punishment, don't brag about children, humility valued, honesty better than flattery
- ◆ Mental Health- superstition and prejudice

Cultural Ideals



Growing old has become less
and less a linear process or a
coherent time line.





What Role Models Do WE Have?

- ◆ John Glen
- ◆ Pope John Paul
- ◆ Elizabeth Taylor



Baby Boomers

- ◆ See old age as an endless middle age
- ◆ They have no road map to the future



Ego Integrity vs. Despair

- ◆ Life Review
- ◆ How to Plan for Life After Retirement
- ◆ How to Gain New Experiences
- ◆ How to Gain a Deeper Spirituality
- ◆ How to Add to a Sense of Purpose
- ◆ Role Flexibility



Example of Ego Integrity vs Despair

- ◆ To Care or Not To Care
- ◆ Memory Bank

Ego Integrity vs. Despair



- ◆ Wisdom and Inner Authority
- ◆ Become More of Who We Are
- ◆ “Feels Like Coming Home to Yourself
- ◆ Wisdom
 - Practical/intellectual
 - Spiritual
 - Intuitive or psychic



Losses

◆ Loss Exercise

- The four most important aspects of your life



C.G. Jung

- ◆ Archetypes and collective unconscious
- ◆ Archetypes in women over fifty
- ◆ You become a deeper choice maker
- ◆ You see yourself in the role of protagonist in your own life
- ◆ Jung saw the inherent potentials in the psyche when an active archetype rather than external expectation is the basis of ones role.

Archetypes





Carol Gilligan- 3 levels of Moral Development

- ◆ Care of Self
- ◆ Care of Others
- ◆ Balance between 1 and 2



Mass Media

How the mass media constructs identities for the elderly



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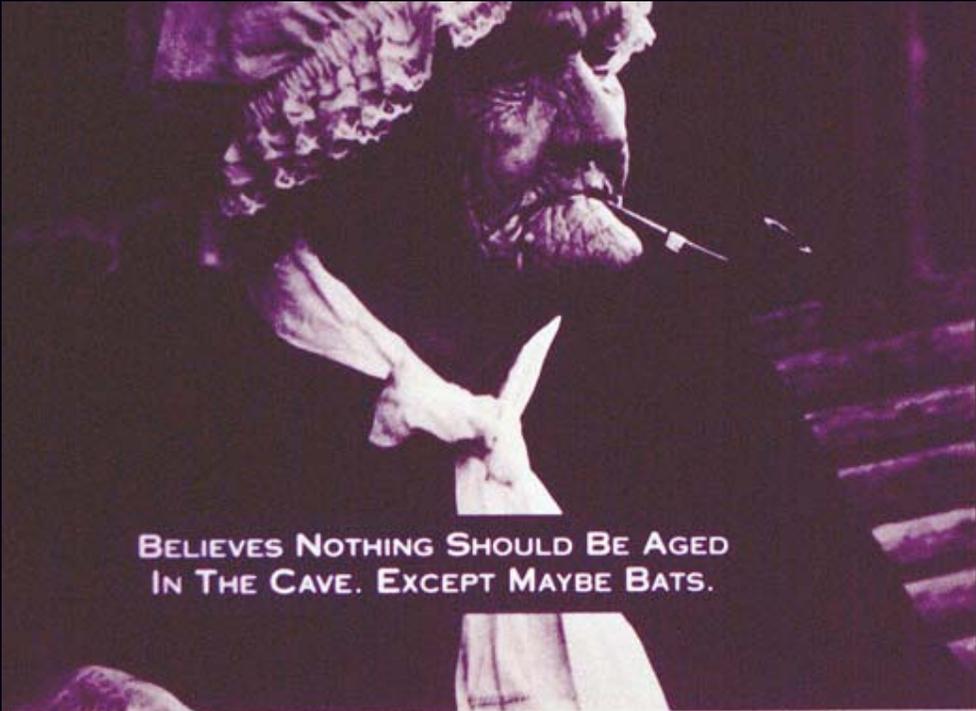
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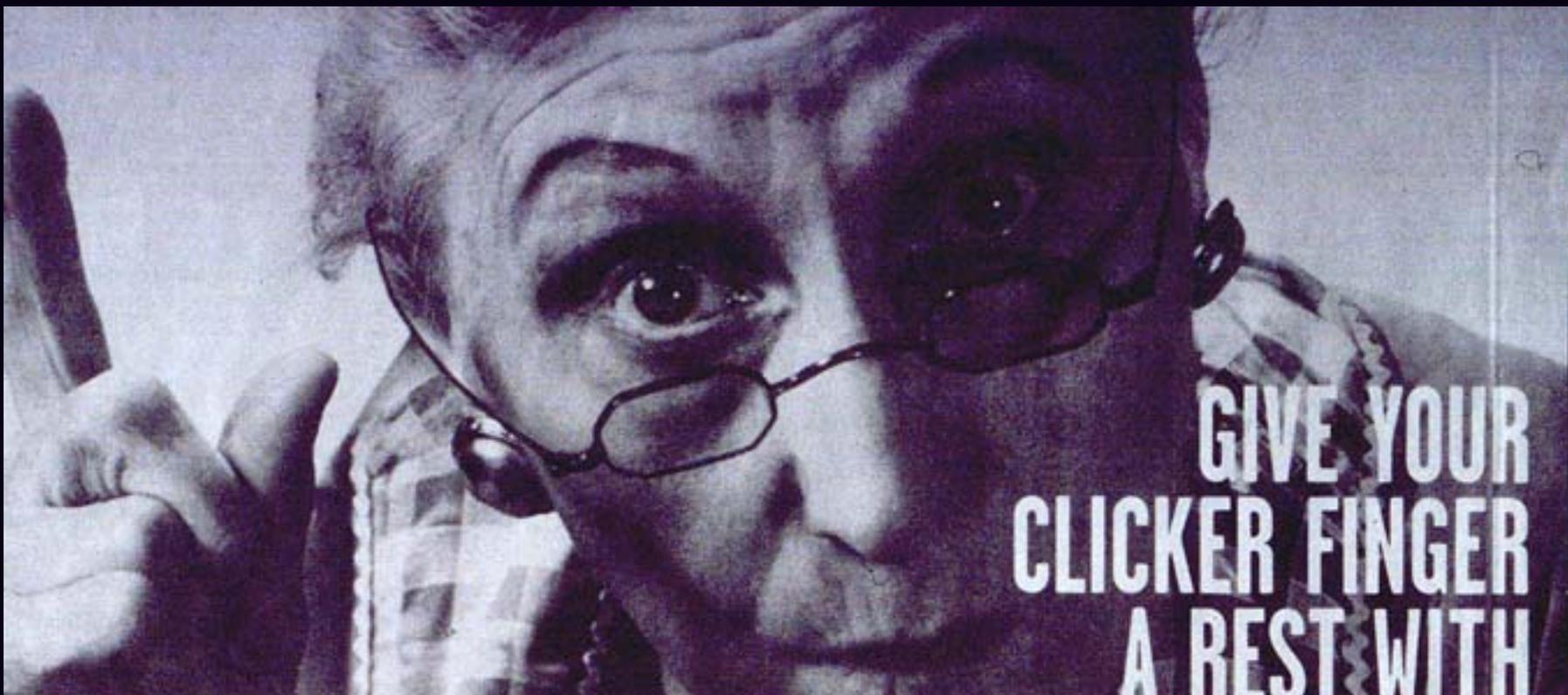
A black and white photograph of a man with a beard, wearing a ruffled collar, smoking a pipe. He is looking down and to the right. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

BELIEVES NOTHING SHOULD BE AGED
IN THE CAVE. EXCEPT MAYBE BATS.

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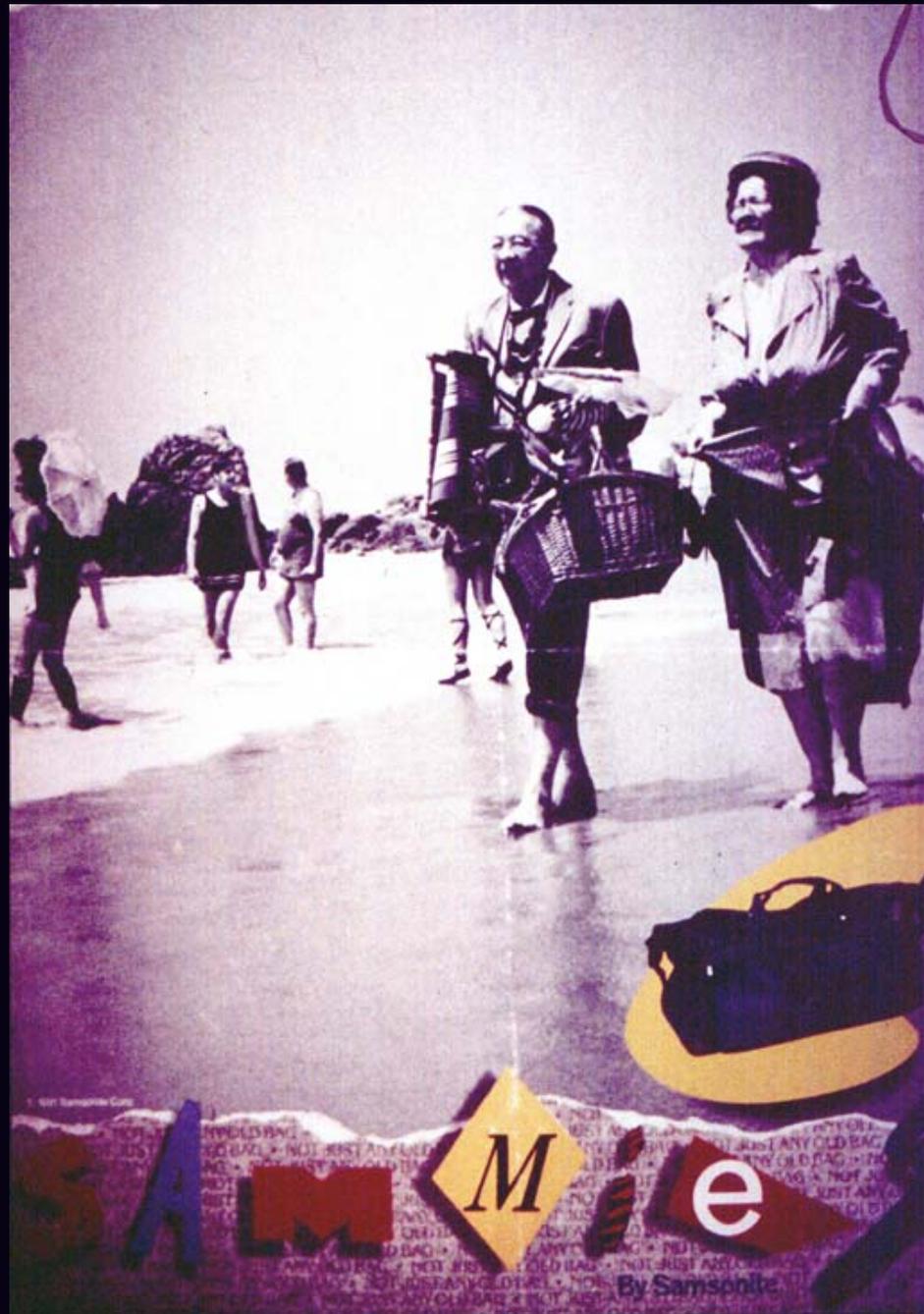


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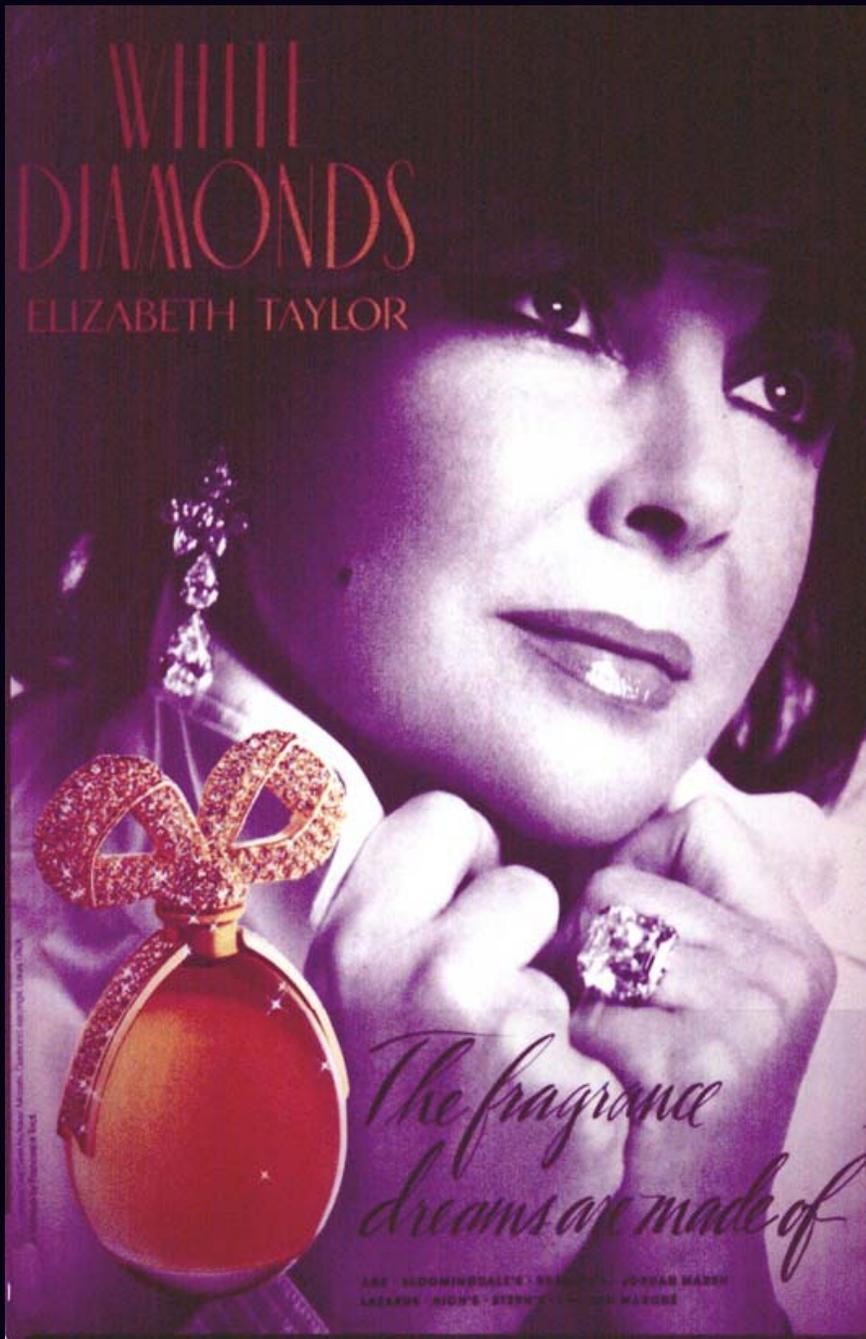


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*Sunday taste.
Tuesday effort.*

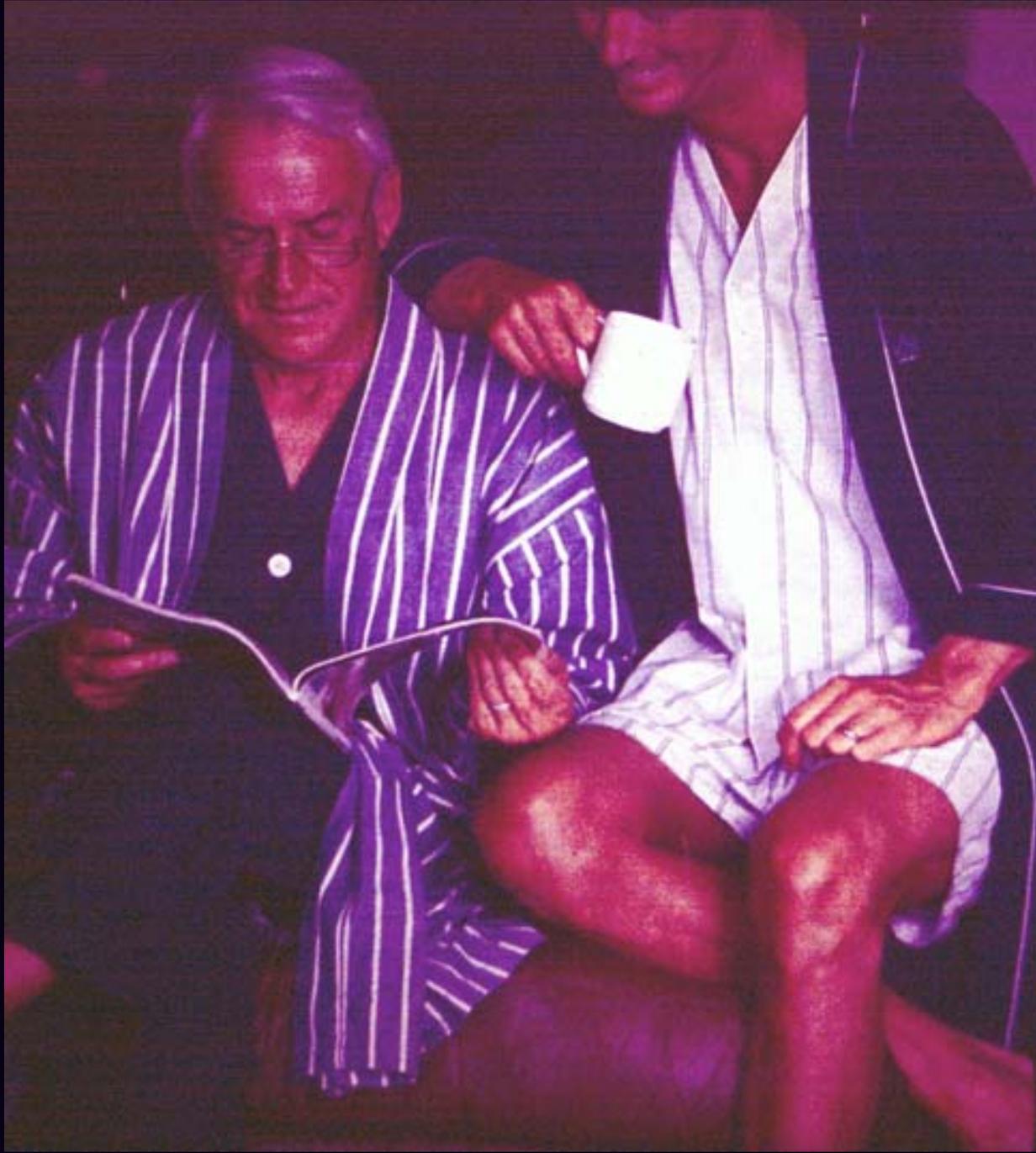
WHITE DIAMONDS

ELIZABETH TAYLOR

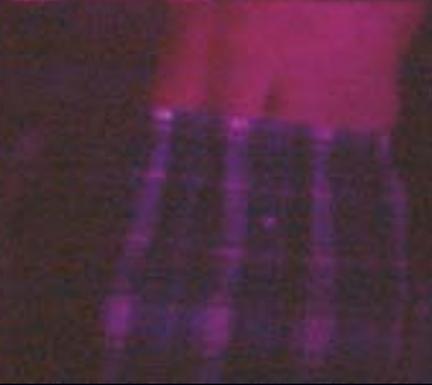


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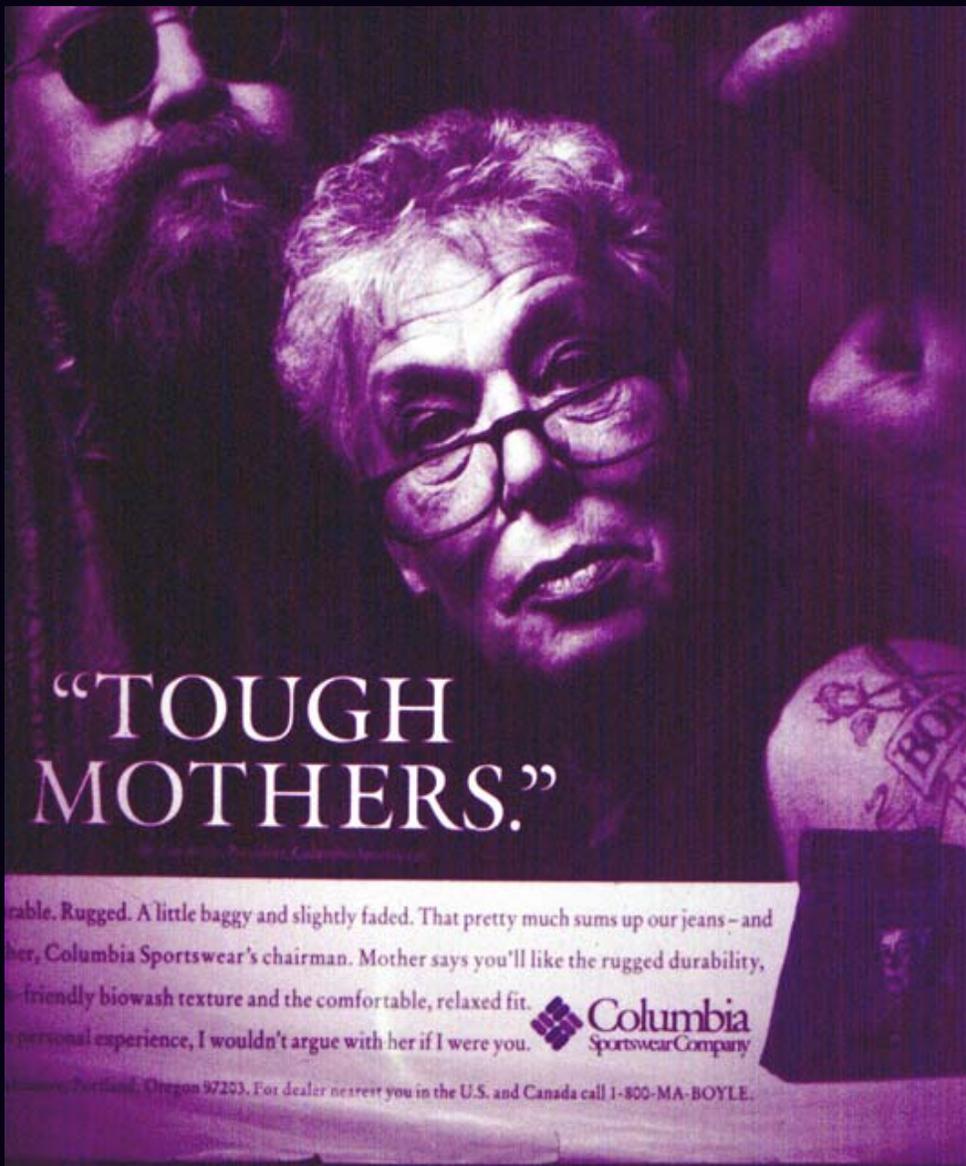
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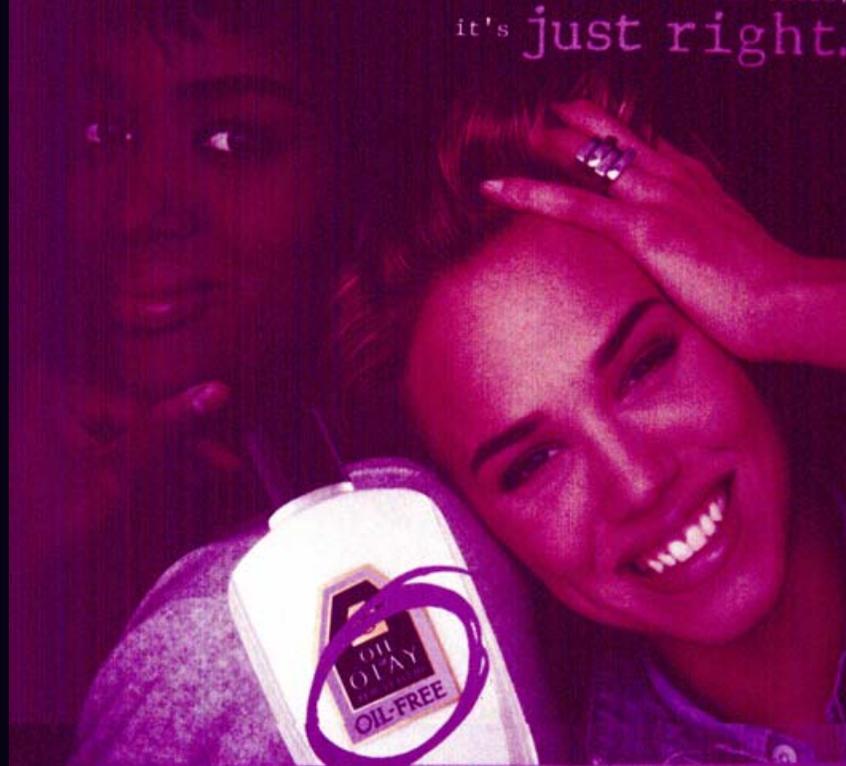
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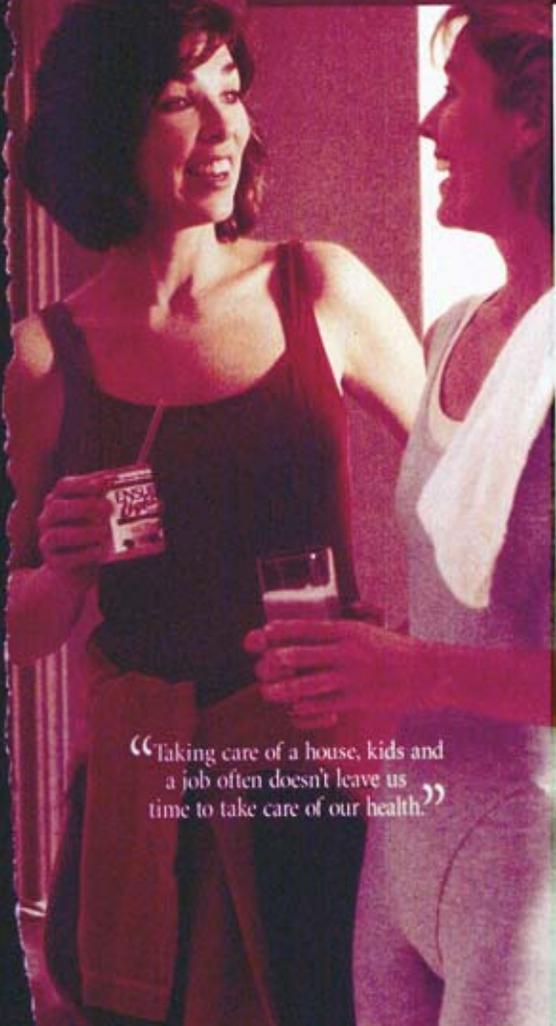


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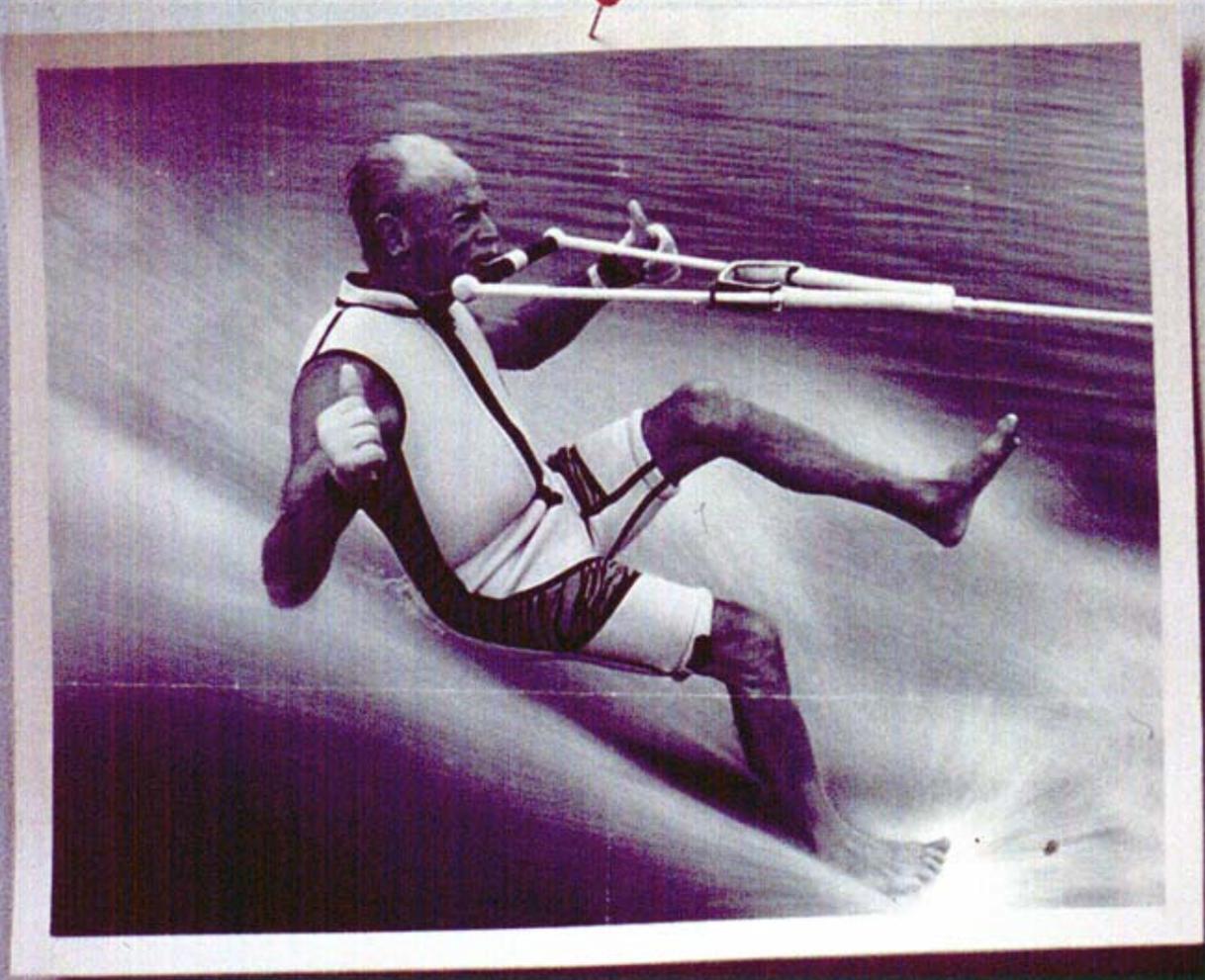
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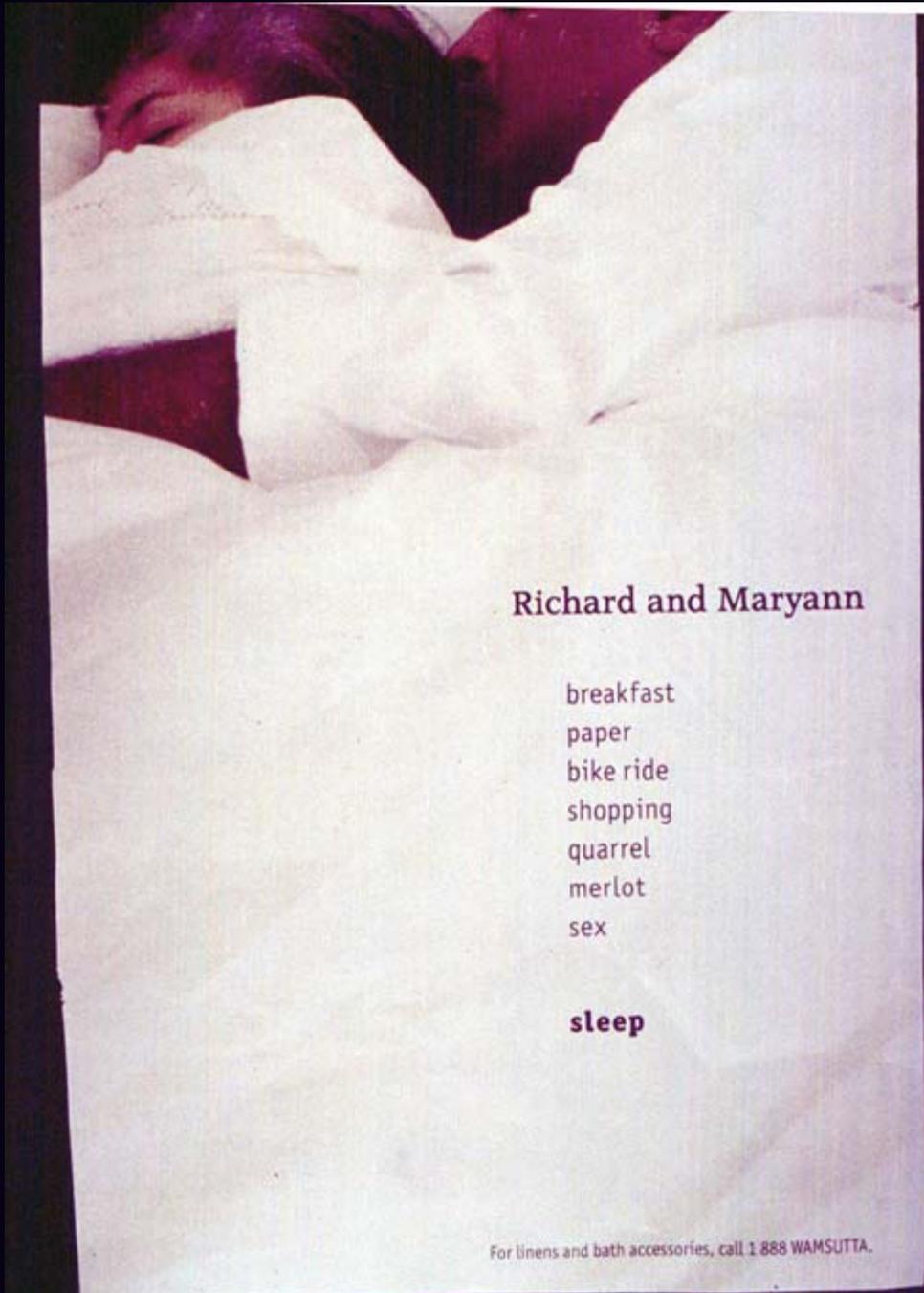
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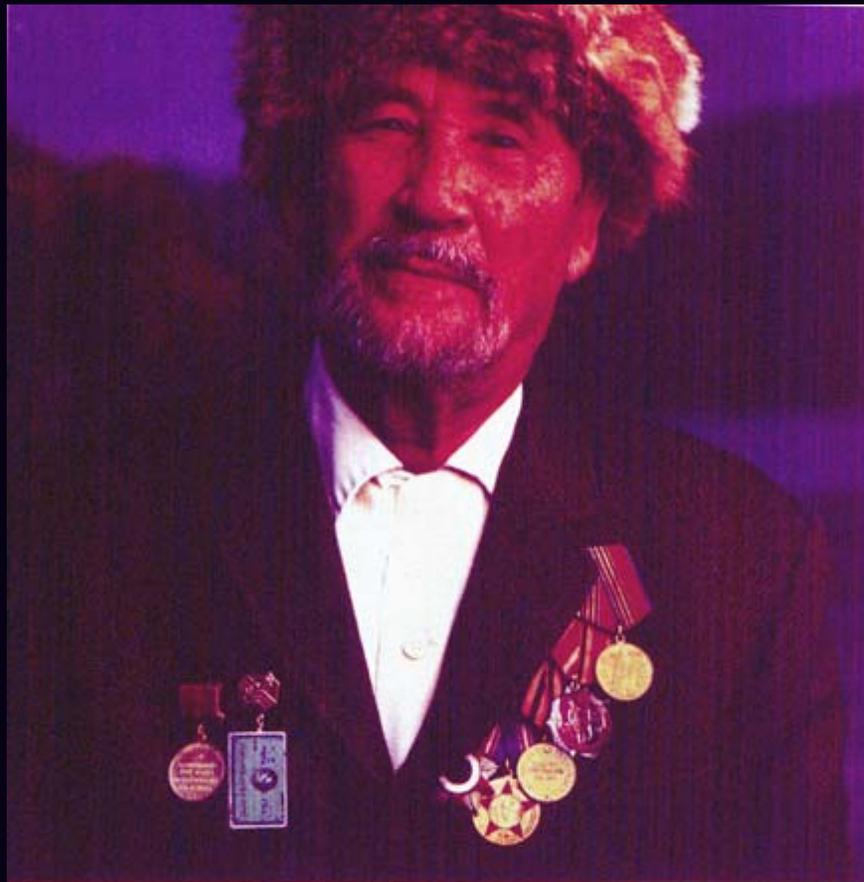


Richard and Maryann

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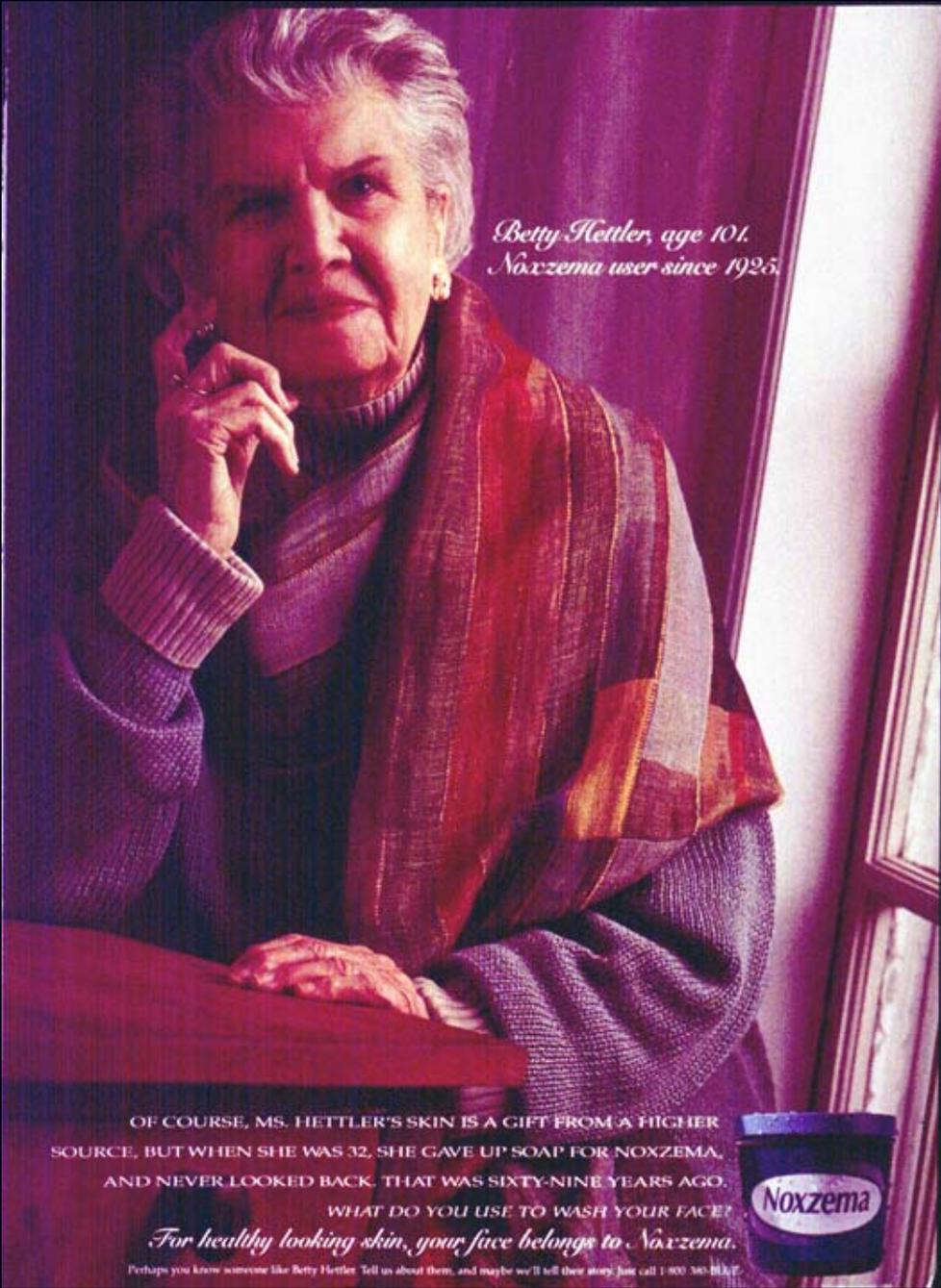
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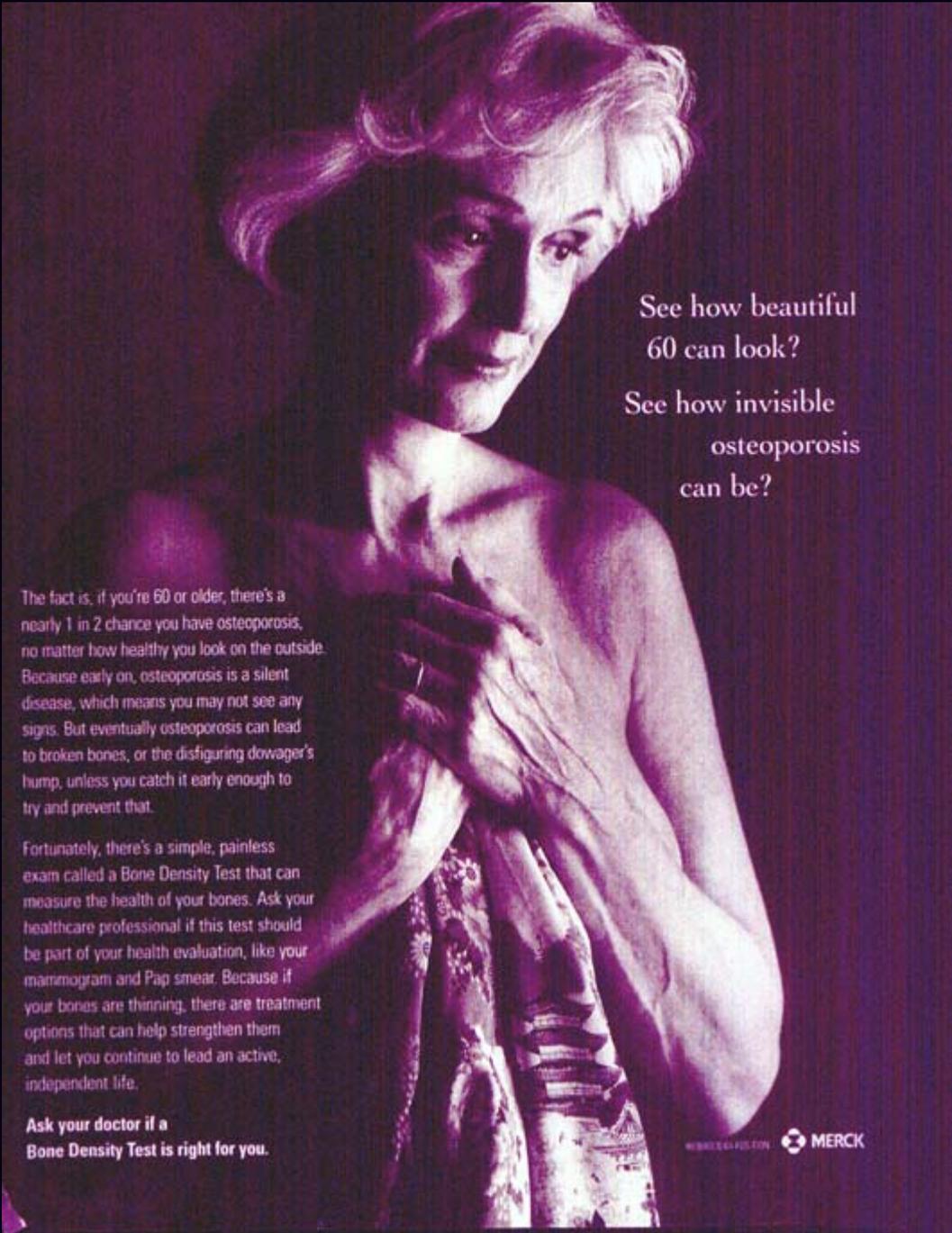
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Wendy Cladfeller
Gloria's Daughter

Chandelle Curtis
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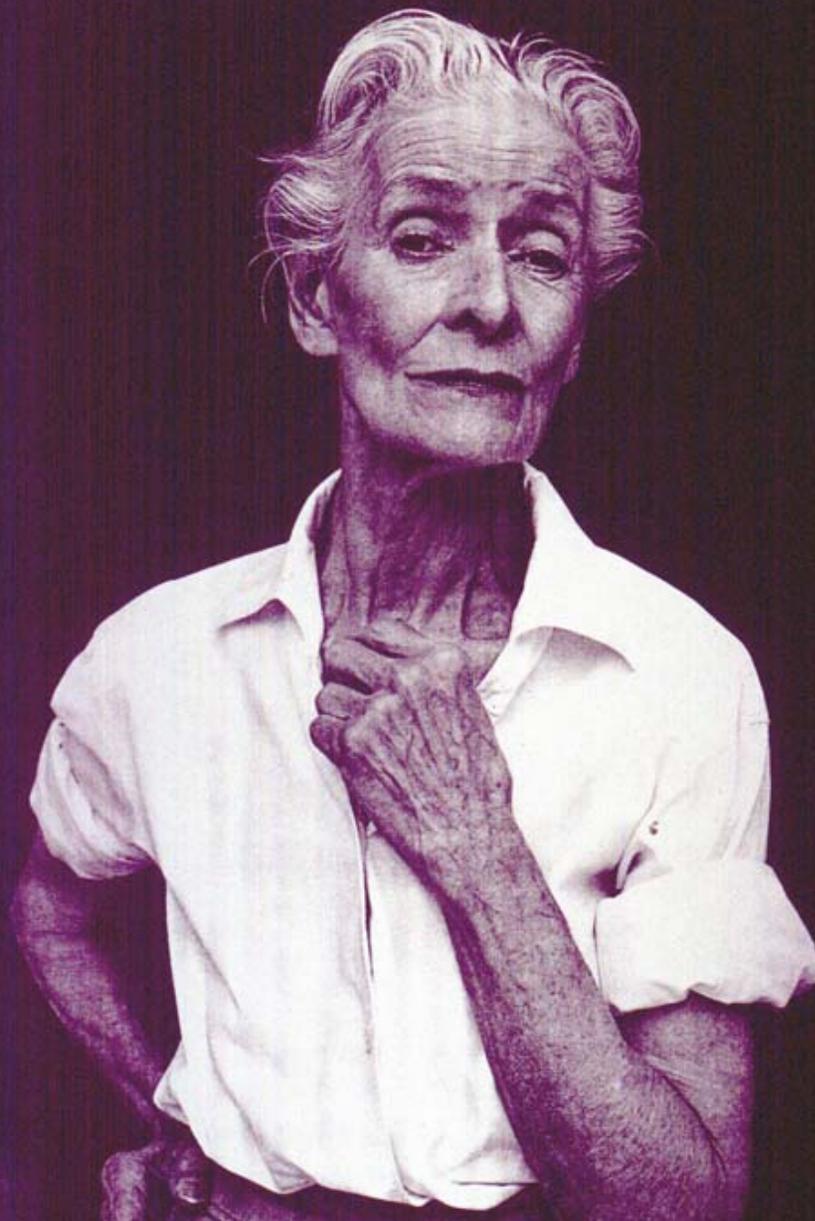
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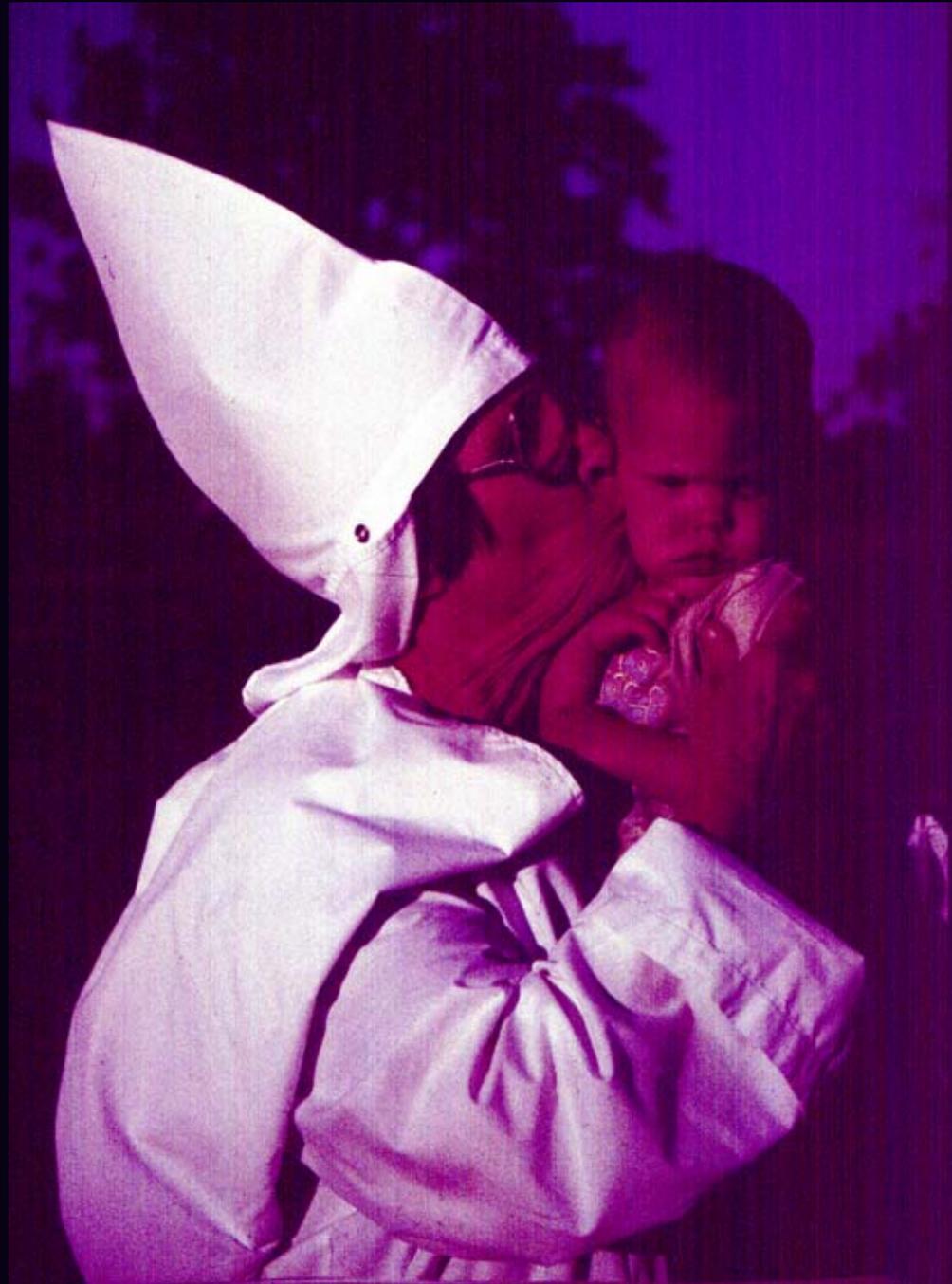














Closing Thoughts:

- ◆ Occupations, by Bonnie Michael Pratt
- ◆ Post Humus, by Patti Tana
- ◆ Beautiful Women, author unknown

- ◆ “The God I know is not interested in my wrinkles, pores or diet failures”