

THE OYS & JOYS

MARCIA FELDT

Need It... Desire It... Bubble Bath List It!



I remember...

Rolling off the couch to change TV channels (no remote, not many channels and the shows were mostly in black and white)

Running and playing in our neighborhood without fear of strangers

Rotary phones, loved my pink Princess

Sandra Dee and Tab Hunter, Saturday matinees cost a quarter and drive-in theatres

No air conditioning in school and we survived the brutal Texas heat

The Cold War and the Cuban missile crisis

The assassination of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King

The Vietnam War, protests against the War, and soldiers being spit on for serving their country

I remember a lot of things because I'm a baby boomer, born in 1949. My father started his real estate business in Houston, Texas that same year and my mother—like many women of her generation—stayed home to raise the kids, which in our family included my brother and me.

In 1971, I graduated with a degree in psychology from UCLA, then lived a year in Guadalajara, Mexico and three years in Albany, NY before returning to Houston. Somewhere within that period of time, I figured out psychology wasn't the right career path for me but discovered the comfort of balancing a general ledger. So, I walked through Albany's sleet and snow to attend Russell Sage College, worked in public accounting and passed the CPA exam. When my entrepreneurial spirit took flight, I founded my own business, Feldt Personal Consultants where I assisted candidates with new career opportunities.

After selling my business, I dabbled in real estate, built a lake house and started to write. And write and write. Usually for my own personal enjoyment but do have two suspense thrillers tucked away in boxes--perhaps one day I'll pull them out to see the light of day. Then three events shattered our lives and eventually, after several years, I started writing again, as much for therapy as for enjoyment. The Oys & Joys started to sing to me and the ladies insisted I write their story. And the name sounds melodic, suits them and feels sort of like...fate.



Peaks & Valleys, Rain & Rainbows, Oys* & Joys. *That's life!*

Meet Lizzie, Sassie, Grace and Ruby

Boomers reaching for the moon. Until decades of old baggage flood their lives—and not like a hurricane. Like a tsunami.

A story of unlocking truth. Of defeating regret. Of the power of steel-laced friendships. Until these friends are forced to confront a decades-old betrayal, and the tragic consequences threatening to sever the trust between them.

Four women, who step into the crossroads between choosing action or forever facing regret—and define their moment by revisiting their past to embrace their future. Their journey, seasoned with their hearts and souls and hey, an abundance of humor, includes attempted murder (*oops*), DNA surprises (*who knew?*), boatless boat slips (*damn, he got the boat*), and sexual awakenings (*yes, at their age*). Oh, and then there's the pole dancing for seniors.

But sometimes, the back side of middle age shoves the past, and the secrets it harbors, into the present. *And secrets never die quietly.*

Sassie's Wine List, Ruby's Italian Feast recipes, and Lizzie's Heart to Heart picture (*Love. Only for a moment. Only for an eternity.*) can be found at www.marciafeldt.com.

***Oy or Oy vey:**

Terms to express exasperation, dismay, calamity or any other sense of woe. Yiddish origin but so widely used, now integrated into American colloquialisms, and in dictionaries around the world.

*“Brilliantly voiced and inspiring, *The Oys & Joys* defines challenges facing boomers through the eyes of four unforgettable women. The current electrifying every page is that everyone, at any age, has the power to change her life.”*

— **Gloria Feldt**, *Take the Lead*, author, *No Excuses: 9 Ways Women Can Change How We Think About Power*.

“Life's tapestry woven with pain and joy, passion and heartbreak. Readers will adore this excellent debut novel. Not to be missed.” — **Chris Rogers**, author, *The Dixie Flannigan* suspense series.

“These characters are both intimately familiar and impossible to forget. A truly complex and celebratory novel.”

— **Carol Dawson**, author of *Miles and Miles of Texas*, *Body of Knowledge*, and *The Mother-In-Law Diaries*

Genre: Baby Boomer, Chick-Lit, Women's Fiction, LGBT Fiction

Subject: Coming of Age, Bucket List, Friendship, Humor, Mid-life crisis, Menopause, Adoption, Spousal Death

Awards: Houston Writers Guild award winner in Romance/Women's Fiction

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1 — Lizzie

On my sixty-third birthday, my husband packed his bags, golf clubs, leather recliner and fifty-inch man-cave TV into our pontoon boat. And used it as a moving van. A twenty-two foot, six-inch pontoon holds a boatload of memories. Convenient, too. Since it was docked behind our Lake Conroe townhome.

He puttered away, and I waved . . . and waved . . . and waved goodbye.

A pontoon does not allow for a speedy getaway.

But who needs speedy, especially at our age? Might be worth savoring the spurt of adrenaline, the false sense of freedom, the illusion of erasing wasted years. I should have packed my bags after our son had graduated from high school. From college. From law school. However, uncorking unhappiness and spilling the lies required courage, of which I am in short supply.

“I’m so sorry.” The words, cinders whispered in the wind, only ignited my guilt. I tried. I wanted to. I thought I could. But no. No resurrection, no redirection of the love I’d buried within my fiancé’s grave for over forty years.

How sad was that? Pretty damn sad.

“Lizzieee.” Sassie’s voice sounded husky and spicy, ready to lead the parade. Very Sassie-like.

I’d left the door unlocked but she didn’t even knock. Nothing fazes Sassie. Not leaving a friend on the steps of an abortion clinic, not cremating a husband, and not fading from international modeling fame. She sashayed across the threshold waving two bottles of Pinot Grigio high into the air. I mean the sashay part quite literally, a special swing of her hips impossible to duplicate.

And picture this: Sassie still wears sleeveless tops tied at the waist, capris and Neiman’s high-heeled sandals *without* looking like an aging slut. An apropos description with no tackiness intended. Besides, I’ve said the same thing to her face. She smiled, her left eyebrow doing its signature rising thing.

Grace arrived a few minutes later, holding a glass bowl of chocolate cheesecake trifle. She always brings dessert, tends to tip-toe *over* the tulips, and adores long, multi-syllable words starting with an “s”. Like serendipity and synchronicity. We met the day my husband and I moved three townhouses down from her and Rusty—by way of my Shadow and her Joy humping on my virgin driveway. Then sealed the deal when Joy gave birth to our six grand puppies.

This afternoon, Joy practically hugged Grace’s right ankle.

I bit my tongue. But not for long.

“What did Mr. Sloshed do today?” Picking up Joy, I kissed her nose and whispered into her ear, “Hope your daddy didn’t kick you again, *Little Miss*.”

“Rusty doesn’t kick.” Grace shoved her dessert onto the refrigerator’s top shelf. “Tripped over her, that’s all.”

But Grace’s downcast look and her normally relaxed demeanor, now robotic stiff, said otherwise.

Sassie gently raised Grace’s chin until their eyes met. “One of these days you’re going to need a whole lot more than a ten pound dachshund to protect you.”

For a moment, we all froze because the truth often creates speed bumps. Then we all moved at once.

Joy squirmed out of my arms, Sassie took the hummus and avocado dip out of the refrigerator, and Grace grabbed the baked, low-salt pita chips from the counter.

Sassie and Grace have maintained their thin, long-legged beauty while I cannot conceal a single pudgy molecule on my barely five-foot frame. Plus, my butt remains flabby, and no matter what exercise of the month I attempted, it falls closer to the center of the earth every year.

“Hellooo.” Ruby knocked before entering.

She’s more polite than any of us, in a subtle legal guru sort-of-way. Also, she possesses a soothing spirit. I know, a trait usually defying the legal profession, but go with it because it’s true. Ruby’s cooking hobby delights our palates, yet somehow

she only carries about fifteen extra pounds between her neck and knees. Today, she showcased her Italian heritage with a scrumptious antipasto and pasta salad.

“Sorry I’m late. For some reason, Mel lingered this morning.” She placed the bowl on the table. “Mel never lingers. Usually, he pulls his charmingly uptight butt out of bed at the crack of dawn, and as soon as both feet hit the ground, billable time kicks-in.”

Mel’s a founding partner in the firm where Ruby works. A precarious coupling if you ask me. So far though, their take-it-or-leave-it relationship seems to work for them.

As for me, I shed my CPA skin for a realtor’s life soon after relocating eleven years ago to the lake. I’ve attempted, really I have, to be less anal, more relaxed. My daily *To-Do List* addiction manages to comfort me. Four things a day at the very least, usually not over six. The satisfaction of drawing a line through each completed item makes my day.

Our little group has been going strong for almost six years and we’ve managed to poke, pry, and prod most all of the scabby stuff from our lives. Except for the secrets we keep cloaked from the world. And from ourselves.

But here we all were on this sunny Sunday afternoon. In my kitchen, ready to grill salmon, asparagus, and fingerling potatoes seasoned to perfection.

To celebrate my birthday.

On the lake.

In the boat. *Oops.*

Sassie poured each of us a glass of wine. And since my news required multi-glass courage, I gulped down the drink and poured myself another. “Eh, did anyone—”

“You need to get rid of this, don’t you think?” Grace held up an almost empty bag of dog chow from my pantry.

“Yes.” *Thank you, I bow to you in thankfulness.* “Give all of it to Joy.” Taking two bowls from the cabinet, I gave one to Grace and filled the other one with water. “There’s not much left. Please, just do it.” Every time I attempted to discard those silver-aged nuggets, I could feel Shadow licking my hand as lightly as a feather. But he stopped licking a few months ago, forever.

“Listen up.” I began again. “Did anyone, by any chance, happen to bring along a *boat* today?”

Startling how a noisy, hectic kitchen can go from women chirping to a sudden silence so profound, we heard the clock ticking from across the room. Tick . . . tick . . . tick—

“Joy.”

I heard the panic sliver through Grace’s voice.

And no wonder. Joy’s little paws clawed at her ears. She twisted her bloated neck, her long body moving in barracuda ripples. Staccato squeals squeezed out of her throat.

“*OhmyGod.*” Grace scooped Joy up, wrapped an arm around her belly, pointed her head toward the floor, shook her pint-sized body, and slapped her back.

Joy’s squeals thickened, deepened as if a piece of chow dislodged allowing air to drum a different death march.

“Come on, girl.” Ruby massaged Joy’s back and neck with the palm of her hand like she was thinning pizza dough. “Get it out.”

Joy’s squeals morphed into a squeak so grating, so penetrating—

“*OhmyGodohmyGodohmyGod.*” Grace’s pale face turned ashen.

I ran over, touched her arm, saw the fear flood her eyes. “Hold Joy up in front of me. *Now.* Put her back against my chest. *Now.*”

Grace wobbled, and I thought she might faint but finally flipped the limp dog around, feet dangling in front of my nose.

“*Lower, damn it.*” I pressed Joy’s miniature diaphragm until I couldn’t feel her ribs. Then, jabbed my fingers inward and upward, praying this Heimlich maneuver for dogs might work.

Joy sputtered a raspy snort . . . and nothing else.

Ruby started barking orders, her fingers straight, stiff and sharp. “I’ll count to three, and push from this side for extra thrust power. One. Two. Three. *Jab.*”

We jabbed.

Another snort. Nothing else.

Joy’s muscles went flaccid. Her little head drooped onto her chest.

“*Again.*” Grace yelled.

“Let me try.” Sassie shoved Ruby out of the way. “One. Two. Three.”

We both jabbed.

Chunks of dog chow soared from Joy’s throat straight into Sassie’s twin peaks cleavage. Not that her breasts are oversized but perfectly formed, and enhanced with a push-up bra.

“*Joy.*” Sassie stuck her hand down her bra and picked out the gooey chunks. “*Oy*, what a mess.”

Joy scampered out of my arms, ran over to the water bowl, and slurped the liquid like swigging whiskey after a near death experience.

Sassie centered the spotlight back on herself. Not an unusual occurrence, except for the dripping dog chow she held in both her hands stretched out wide, like an emcee at a comedy club. She raised her head in her modeling way, backbone straight, shoulders back.

We’d been tossing out names ever since we formalized our twice-monthly get-togethers. Nothing tickled the proper places. Nothing captured our moods. And guess what. Certainly not a stretch. With four post-menopausal women, our moods swung as high as the Milky Way and as low as the hot-flash devil.

But *The Oys & Joys* suited us. Why not? That’s life, no denying it.

Then Grace, an absolute gem in the know-it-all weird facts arena, topped off Sassie’s announcement by reciting a snippet of a *New York Times* article about a Sister Madeline from some monastery somewhere. It seems they’d experienced a series of mechanical deaths during the year—a lawn mower, refrigerator, washer, dryer *and* van all went kaput. How did the Sister respond? “*Oy!*” she had said.

Don’t know why that quote rose to a *Times* newsworthy event. A nun expressing herself in this manner isn’t surprising to me, and not because I’m the only Jewish member of our group.

Because an *Oy*’s an *Oy*. A universal word. A word entwined with laughter and with sorrow. Sometimes a tiny blip. Sometimes a wrenching heartache. But always the perfect word.

Why even last night—boom, an *Oy* moment. Happened when I updated #1 on my *Bubble Bath List*. That’s our need it or desire it lists. Could be both—need it and desire it. Either way, we are the architects-of-our-dreams. Statistically speaking, if we write it, they will come. Well, the probably increases anyway. I introduced the idea, my personal theory, to the girls last year.

Not always easy dipping deep into the inkwell of our souls. Translating into finite words can be a bitch. And watch out, the truth can bruise.

Last night wasn’t easy for me. I had picked up a pen, hesitated . . . *Oy, I’d wasted so many years. Way . . . way . . . way too many years.* My eyes filled with tears. My teeth pinched my lower lip. My hand trembled.

I wrote: It’s time. *FIND D.*

