

(02/2007)

**A wonderful lady, Marlena Gutierrez** died on Valentine's Day. Marlena was one of the major forces behind the success of We Insist On Natural Shapes (WINS). Though her prolonged severe illness side-lined her from our day-to-day activities, she remained one of our most enthusiastic supporters until the end. She could find something positive to say about anyone and anything. I'll always miss her "Oh, Dr Gerhardt, It's so good to hear from you!!" and her sincere love that she shared with all her many friends and family.

I've reprinted one of her articles published in the 1998 WINS newsletter, as it reflects so much of who she was and, perhaps, what would be good for others of us to become.

### **I AM 66, I'M A WOMAN & I'M BEAUTIFUL!** *by Marlena Gutierrez*

A funny thing happened to me on the way to old age. I became beautiful.

All my life I got the message that I was not pretty, and (shame on me!), I believed it. And according to the very narrow and prejudiced definition of beauty in our society, it is true: I am not beautiful. Because of our "Stepford Wives" mentality, every woman, whatever her age, is expected to conform to one standard of beauty. "Be thin and look young" is the media's mantra. Hence the billion-dollar industry of anti-wrinkle creams, diets, exercise gimmicks and body-altering surgeries.

Nature has a lot to teach us. For everything there is a season: The beauty of spring is not the loveliness of winter, summer or autumn. Each season has its own beauty, its own purpose, its own joy. What is beautiful and natural for the spring of adolescence is not normal for the autumn or the winter of a long-lived life. Nothing is sadder than an adult woman still caught up in adolescent fantasies. Even so, a society that seems to prefer infantile-adolescent beauty does not recognize the beauty of maturity.

What I have come to realize is that we are each unique and different, that beauty comes in many shapes, sizes and colors. We need to change our ideas of what beauty really is. As an older woman, my beauty is more complicated than that of a twenty-year-old. I've been around the block a few times. I've had more experiences. Because of these, I'm more capable, competent, savvy. My body is a map of where I've been. Every wrinkle, every sag has a story to tell – my story.

Today I choose to see myself as attractive. I have come to appreciate the light in my eyes, the warmth of my smile, but even more, my loving nature and compassionate heart. I've

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Written by Ann Gerhardt, MD

come to accept and love my humanness – my mistakes, foibles, idiosyncrasies. I love the parts of me that sag, the parts that have expanded. I love them because they are me. When I don't compare myself to you, I am happy. When I am content with my self, I see my inner beauty and sometimes others get a glimpse of it, too. Because I see beauty in myself, I can see it in you.

So when I see yet another wrinkle, I know it's not a curse but a coming of age – a rite of passage to empowerment, freedom, wisdom, if I choose to make it that. As an older woman, I don't take things at face value. I know that sometimes I have to dig deeper to find the pearl, to find the prize. So I choose to see beyond the superficial to a more genuine kind of beauty. I have come of age: another passage, another season, another adventure, another me.

Something funny happened to me on my way to old age. I found myself. I found how powerful and valuable and beautiful I really am.

*(and during that process, she helped so many others to do the same. We will miss her.)*