

EYEWITNESS Getting Out, Getting On



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Betty Friedan, 74, author of The Feminine Mystique, is widely regarded as the mother of modern feminism. Her latest book, The Fountain of Age, is about growing older.

When I graduated from Smith College, I'd never used the word "feminist." It was a dirty word, and so was "career woman." I didn't have any sense of who I wanted to be. I loved being the editor of the Smith paper. But at that time, the only job really open to women who were good at writing was as a researcher for *Time*,

LIFE or *Newsweek*. And the most a woman who was hired as a researcher could aspire to was chief researcher. I interviewed for such a job, but I couldn't stomach doing all the work for which somebody else would get the byline.

So I moved to Greenwich Village and got a job at a small news agency, covering the labor movement. I was also thinking of going to medical school. Then the war ended, and a GI came back and took my job.

You see, there was a law that veterans were entitled to the jobs they'd had before the war. So a lot of women lost their jobs almost immediately and then went home and began to have babies.

The feminine mystique was spreading through the land. Women who hadn't had babies during the Depression and war started having them. The war industry needed women to be housewives, to sell them appliances to take the place of the war matériel. Freudian thought had also hit these shores and provided a sophisticated gloss to the notion that "a woman's place is in the home." Women like me felt guilty. We were supposedly losing our femininity, undermining our husbands' masculinity and neglecting children that were thought to need 24-hour attention.

So I didn't go to medical school. I got married, and a year later I started having babies. Soon I got another newspaper job, but I got fired for being pregnant with my second child. I went to the union and said, "Nobody's ever questioned my job performance." They told me it was my fault for getting pregnant. Even though my paycheck was needed—my husband was in the theater—I was made to feel guilty about working, as we all were. We were not even supposed to notice if we were paid less than the guys and passed over for promotions. So I became a housewife.

But for years I couldn't quite get rid of the itch. I freelanced for women's magazines. It was like a vice, like secret drinking. At that time, I was the only mommy in my suburb who worked. Some years later, I began to see through the image of women that I had been writing about in the women's magazines. That's when I wrote *The Feminine Mystique*.