

# Midlife MENTOR

*Madame Ovary wants women, men to  
laugh their way through menopause*

BY RICK NATHANSON  
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**W**omen, are you going through the so-called “changes” in life? Hot flashes? Mood swings? Depression?

Men, are you confused by the odd behavior of your significant other? Are you being supportive or does her behavior seem like a personal attack on you?

Heck, can you even talk about it with each other?

Madame Ovary says you should talk about it, and laugh about it, too.

Madame Ovary is the alter ego of Gail Larsen, owner of Real Speaking, a Santa Fe business that teaches public speaking skills. She is also a lecturer, author and a “seeker on the path who occasionally finds a pearl, but just as often steps in something with its own recognizable shine,” according to her Web site.

“We all have personalities inside of us. Madame Ovary is just one of my personalities — my festive, irreverent one,” said Larsen.

Some of her speaking engagements, seminars and workshops are done as Gail Larsen, while others are done as Madame Ovary, who dresses in bright red Victorian garb and swishes a real feather to encourage people to “tickle their own fancy.”

Her talks address such  
*(continues on back)*



MARLA BROSE/JOURNAL

Gail Larsen chats with women at a luncheon at the Tanoan Country Club. Larsen is also Madame Ovary, a persona she created as a speaker about midlife issues.



Gail Larsen as Madame Ovary wears bright Victorian garb when she speaks to women and men about approaching “midlife as an artform.”

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things as negotiating midlife, exploring where people are in their life journeys and speaking out as a way to stand out.

Regardless of the venue, the topic, the audience or if Larsen or Madame Ovary is delivering the message, all of the talks contain heavy doses of information, inspiration and humor.

"Laughter is the shortest distance between two people," she said. "Madame Ovary talks about the things that embarrass us so we can get them out of the closet and have a good laugh together about the human condition. It opens the conversation and helps us realize we're not alone."

According to Diane Furie, a professional meeting and event coordinator, Larsen is "a wonderful presenter and she brings in real information and a bit of light chatter," she said. "It seems like she's speaking off the cuff, but she obviously put a great deal of time into the preparation. Everybody was just listening to every word."

Including her husband, who was one of the few men attending a recent presentation.

"I was enthralled with her; her presentation is really universal," said Ed Furie, a retired human resources director. "She delivers a unique balance between humor and message, and she's very fluid when she changes the subject matter, always staying on track with her message."

And one of those messages stayed with him: "There's not a great deal of difference in the thought processes or women and men," he said. "We may approach a subject from different perspectives, but we often wind up with the same conclusions."



PHOTO COURTESY GAIL LARSEN

As part of her Madame Ovary persona, Gail Larsen models an "instant perfect-10 bikini body T-shirt," what she calls a must-have item for women in their "midlife" years.

Alan Austin, president of New Mexico Bank and Trust in Santa Fe, has brought in Madame Ovary for a couple of presentations. "She's got a good message for men and women: enjoy life, live it to the fullest, keep your perspective and be yourself."

Oddly, Larsen was doing none of those things about a dozen years ago when she went through premature

menopause at age 42. That experience gave birth to her Madame Ovary persona.

"I sort of lost my sense of humor for several years. People always loved that about me, but I was constantly depressed and miserable. It seemed like I was having a lot of health challenges. My doctor was in denial. He said I was way too young for menopause."

Larsen, who was living in Phoenix at the time, said the doctor asked her if she was having hot flashes. "I said, 'How would I know, it's 120 degrees outside.'"

The apparent absence of those hot flashes led the doctor to conclude that Larsen's mood swings and depression were a

result of stress. For three years he dismissed the possibility of menopause, during which time, "I was just feeling worse and worse, and getting no support," Larsen said.

Her "significant other" of five years didn't understand what was going on in her life, either. "It was kind of a wild ride for both of us," she said.

Finally, a simple blood test confirmed that Larsen was postmenopausal, but by this time she and her gentleman friend had gone their separate ways.

Larsen was treated with hormone replacement therapy, and later holistic therapies. And she had "the self-realization that it was a new time of life and I wasn't going back."

Neither was she able to get back her sense of humor — not until she related her experience to a friend, "who thought it was the funniest thing she'd ever heard," Larsen said. "I was in tears and she was laughing. She was in the publishing business and said I should write about it — but write funny. That's what caused me to get my sense of humor back. It shape-shifted the experience so I could look at it in an entirely new way."

Larsen started writing the next day, embracing the Madame Ovary persona as a way to separate her identity as a serious professional.

She moved to Santa Fe seven years ago, and in 2001 she chronicled her experiences in a self-published book, "Madame Ovary: Midlife as an Art Form," a collection of 19 true stories intended to "add magic and meaning to the second half of life," she said. The book nearly sold out through her Web site and at speaking engagements, and now she is shopping it to publishers for nationwide distribution.

## Madame Ovary says:

- Age is just a number, and mine is unlisted.
- Be who you are — everyone else is taken!
- If you're treading water, roll over and float. It's a whole new view.
- Kids laugh 400 times a day. Adults laugh 15. Remember when we used to laugh so hard we wet our pants? Now we call it incontinence!
- Most of us suffer from PDD — Passion Deficit Disorder. You're old only when your memories take more space than your dreams.
- Ever read the label on a can of WD-40? "Stops Squeaks. Frees rusted parts. Loosens sticky mechanisms." Yes, ladies, it is a lubricant! And it's the best one on the market because men understand it!
- Life at its best is at least 85% maintenance.
- It's not late, it's now.