

Model shapes new lease, makes mid-life meaningful

By Marie McGee
staff writer

MOVE OVER, Joan Collins. You too, Linda Evans. Women in the over-50 age bracket have a new champion.

She is strikingly beautiful and dynamic Kaylan Pickford, who at 55 is one of the country's top models.

Pickford feels that women in midlife are getting a bum deal from advertising and fashion moguls. "That was the message she had for the audience attending the Livonia Town Hall lecture series recently at the Malibu theater in Livonia."

The views are based on first-hand experiences that eventually ended in success, but not before a do-or-die struggle.

The hardships have also prompted her to pick up the challenge to speak to the underclass that she believes is having some far-reaching ramifications.

"Women in midlife are being completely ignored. It's as if we don't exist," she said.

"We're being punished in advertising circles," she said. "The idea of aging is unacceptable to them."

"AGING IS A dirty word," she said. "We're made to appear unlovable."

Her blue eyes fairly blazed as she added: "Advertising has no interest" in the woman over 30.

"It's as if a magic line has been drawn," she said. "It's as if everything has to be accomplished by age 30 or it's all over. No wonder so many young people feel defeated and insecure. How many can accomplish their life goals by age 30?"

As a result of the "brainwashing" that is occurring via television and the print media, she said women in midlife are being forced into a role of always having to appear young and "having to be someone other than who they really are."

The result is massive cases of insecurity — not only being felt by midlife women, but also the male population.

'Women in mid-life are being forced into a role of always having to appear young and having to be someone other than who they really are.'

— Kaylan Pickford
fashion model

SHE THINKS it's time for the age discrimination nonsense to stop.

For Pickford, the traumatic learning experience of what it is like to be literally "over the hill" began shortly after age 40 when her husband died of cancer, leaving her with two children.

"There I was 40 and alone — really alone — with no idea who I was," she said. "My only identification was that of wife and mother and now that role had been taken away from me."

After several years of "floundering," coupled with a time "when all the money was going out and no money was coming in, something whispered in my ear to go to New York and try modeling as a means of earning a living."

By this time, she was 43 and admittedly naive on how to go about cracking the world of high fashion modeling. A natural tendency of shyness didn't help, she admitted.

AN INKING of how little she knew came, she said, when she took a class on commercials. There she learned the words "agents, agencies, glossies and head shots."

"It was expensive to put together a resume," she recalled, only to learn that nobody wanted her. "I'd go out every day and 50 times a day I was told 'no'."

Eileen Ford of the prestigious New York modeling firm bearing her name, took her on for awhile, Pickford said, but dropped her. "There just wasn't any work for a model my age."

What Pickford finally landed were spots in commercials.

"YOU KNOW THE kind — hemorrhoid medication, laxatives, dentures

— things like that," she said with a wry smile.

"They were the only jobs available to a midlife model."

While the commercials paid well, Pickford said she became increasingly angry with the derogatory treatment of the over-50 age bracket. She made a personal decision not to do anymore commercials that put older women in a demeaning light.

As a result of her pluck and perseverance, Pickford has become one of the top models in the midlife category. Her face and figure have been seen in numerous advertisements in print and on TV representing "glamour products" usually reserved for youthful models.

To get a positive message across to women in their 50s, Pickford turned to writing and the lecture circuit. She has authored two books so far, "Always a Woman" and "Always Beautiful." A third is in the offing, she said.

"WE HAVE ALMOST no physical representation in the marketplace. We have to begin to see more beautiful images of women in midlife," she said.

Pickford is a perfect example.

Her natural beauty is complemented by short, naturally curly, gray hair framing a complexion not without "character" lines and with no overwhelming attempt to hide them.

For her Town Hall appearance, she was fashionably dressed in contrasting wool tweeds — a midcalf, full, gathered skirt topped with a short jacket, the collar of which was jauntily turned up.

She spoke with ease and confidence that underscored a maturity that came from mastery of some traumatic life experiences.

ASKED HER OPINION of the effect television stars Joan Collins and Linda Evans are having as older role models, she replied: "Fabulous. They are projecting strong and beautiful pictures of women in midlife."

"They are saying there is life after 35," she quipped.



ART EMANUELE/staff photographer

Women in mid-life have hardly any representation in the marketplace because advertising moguls think "aging is a dirty word" says fashion model Kaylan Pickford.

Another good example, she said, is Angela Lansbury in the popular Sunday night TV show, "Murder She Wrote."

"Not only is she in a role traditionally given to men, but she's being allowed to look like herself."

It's possible to bring some changes in

the way older women are being depicted, she said.

"ADVERTISING can't exist without clients. And clients only get what they ask for. Make your wants known," she said.

"What you can do is to write (postcards) to the places where you spend your money. Tell them you want some representation," she urged.

"One age doesn't make any sense at all."

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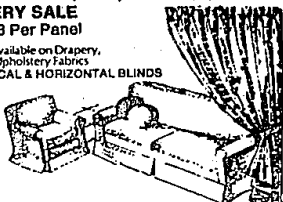
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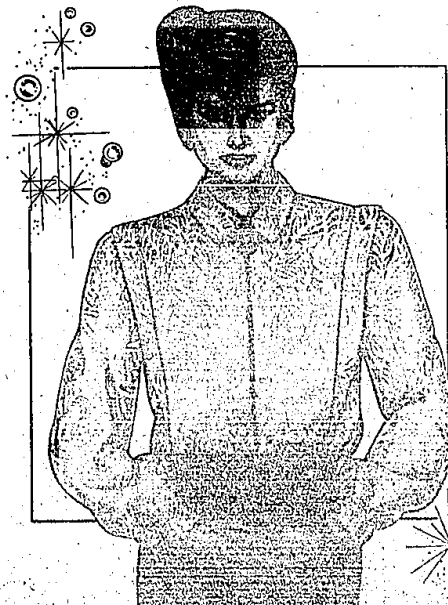
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