

**Remarks by**

**Dr. Jean Marmoreo**

**Family physician, author, columnist  
and founder of JeansMarines**

**To the**

**Canadian Club of Toronto**

***“CHANGING WOMEN:  
Whatever you thought, think again.”***

**Fairmont Royal York Hotel**

**Monday, October 24, 2005**

When I told my speech-writer husband, Bob Ramsay that I was going to speak to you about women, he wanted to know how I was going to keep the other half of the audience, you men, engaged . . . and away from your Blackberries. So, gentlemen, let me say right here that I will be talking about sex in the afternoon. Soon.

Then I told him my remarks were mainly about women over 40, and then he wanted to know how I would entertain the other half of the half -- all you women under forty. After all, you're not set in concrete yet. You can change a lot still. You may not think you will ever need to. Not true. As William Safire said when he retired from the New York Times: "When you're through changing, you're through".

And change we must, if only because women have always lived longer than men. If you were born a girl in Tokyo this morning, there's a one in two chance you will live to be 100.

Joanne Thomas Yaccato refers to Canada's midlife women as "The 80% Minority" in her seminal book of the same name. It underscores the great disconnection between the group of Canadians that controls 80% of consumer purchases yet is treated as a marginalized minority in the eyes of marketers, companies and, dare I say, men.

I'm here to tell you that that's all about to change. Midlife women may not be mad as hell. But we're sure not going to take it anymore. I believe profoundly that midlife women are going to move from the back of the bus in a very short time to driving it.

In fact, being a woman well into my 60s gives me a real advantage because I can look back and realize that the most eventful, productive and transformative ten years of my life occurred after what I thought was my best before date.

Thirty years of practicing family medicine, tells me this view isn't uniquely mine. I see it every day in my patients who I know are aging right along side with me.

The largest demographic group in North America by far is baby boomers. Indeed since 1998 in North America, a boomer has been turning 50 every 7.5 seconds.

So big is this boom that whole areas of our lives are in for a seismic shift. I believe five of these areas will be driven by women in general and midlife women in particular.

One – our health. Women make up more than three quarters of the users of our health care system in the primary care setting. Yet many of the benchmarks of good health have been designed by men, for men. This will change.

Two – our purchases. Women make 80% of the consumer buying decisions in Canada, and midlife women have never been wealthier. Yet most marketing is targeted to youth and men. This will change.

Three – our life after work. Millions of women get pensioned off or packaged out at 55 and even 50. What are they going to do with their next 30 years? Whatever it is, it too will change.

Four – our vitality. Most Canadians over 40 gain two pounds a year, year after year. Most Canadian women over 40 don't exercise. So if you'd rather live your next 40 years on your feet rather than on the couch..... this will change too.

And my fifth belief about changing women concerns – our ability to change so that life after 40 is ....well, so you can truly say, you're not getting older, you're getting better.

### **Let me begin with our health.....**

Women are not a smaller version of men. At least not to the world of medicine. This is, surprisingly, still a relatively startling concept in Canada in 2005.

For years, it was assumed there were no differences between men and women with regard to the effects of drugs, their dosage, adverse outcomes or side effects. We now know this is patently false.

Until two months ago, all cardiac stress testing – the familiar treadmill test known as the Bruce Protocol - was also based on tests and guidelines plotted with men. So if you're a woman who's taken a stress ECG, that test is already rigged against you.

Two months ago, a Canadian doctor, a young woman by the name of Kulfirstname Goleti produced an exercise protocol specific to women that was hailed in the New England Journal of Medicine. Despite this, don't expect the Bruce Protocol to go away soon.

And speaking of that, I want to introduce you to term that is often bypassed in reporting cardiac treadmill testing. I know this will be of interest to the men here as well. So let's do mets before sex. Mets or metabolic equivalents are a measure of work achieved by doing that running on a treadmill.

Let's say the average mets for a 55 year old woman doing the Bruce for 8 minutes is 7. That turns out to be pretty much the norm and for a 55 year old man it is 9. So on the treadmill, men seem able to do more work than women. But for a marathoner the average mets achieved will be more than 3X that – it will be 12.

So imagine being 55 and being able to work to 12 mets.

Luckily, we don't have to imagine it at all.

Can I ask all the JeansMarines who are here today to please stand up.

Do they look like lean, mean endurance athletes?

They are, every single one of them.

Because this is what extremely fit looks like.

As I said, when it comes to changing women, whatever you thought – think again.

Despite the fact that women's health has progressed from being a political concept to a clinical one, the money spent on 'women's health represents less than 10% of the health care dollars. This will change as aging women move to demand more and sooner from governments and pharma companies in prevention and research.

Seismic shift number two – how and what women buy.

Again, Joanne Thomas Yaccato is my guide here. . . . today, the percentage of wealthy women is growing faster than the percentage of wealthy men. Women control most consumer spending . . . Single women are buying more houses than single men . . . Women buy most of the drugs and half the computers and sports equipment – yes, sporting goods – sold in Canada today. Women do most househunting, decide which household goods to buy, plan the holiday destinations, choose cable and internet services, decide which is the best vehicle for the family.

And all before the fall collections appear or the purse sale starts.

Just as with health, women are different from men when it comes to what they buy. I'm not talking about women's only products. But all products. And the women with the money to spend, are midlife women. In the first ten months of last year alone, the value of what JeansMarines spent at Sporting Life, one of our sponsors, was in the six figures – just on running gear.

Now I come to the third big change that women are driving – our life after work.

We are told that our children will have an average of five careers in their lifetime, but I am already seeing that this is a reality for us as well.

I have a new definition of retirees in my practice- they are consultants

When I wrote *The New Middle Ages* in 2002 I told of the retired college professor who was seconded into Bosnia as an Aid worker. She was the grey-haired relief worker – the one who the grannies felt safe with. So she was able to coax them out of their barns and basements and into the aid centres. It helped them all reinvent a different kind of social network as decimated families who no longer had men at the centre.

The myth of the retired woman as slightly dotty, worn down and waiting for the end will change and we're just seeing the tip of the contribution they are going to deliver in the next twenty years.

**Seismic shift number 4 concerns our vitality.**

We Canadians love our universal access to health care. But we haven't handled our universal access to calories well at all.

One in every two Canadians is overweight. In other words, not you of course, but the person on your left or right. Of the half of adult Canadians who are overweight, 30% are obese, and 12% of them are morbidly obese, which generally means you're five foot four – man or woman – and you weigh . . . 275 pounds.

Worse still, in the last 10 years, there has been no change at all in the proportion of adult Canadians who are both sedentary and inactive. Despite many many millions of dollars spent on urging Canadians to exercise, that message isn't getting through. In the meantime, we're eating more than ever.

No surprise, we're getting fatter than ever, faster than ever. As I said, Canadian women in their 40s gain 2 pounds a year. So by their 50s, of course they look matronly. Add to that the shift in metabolism after menopause that suddenly makes little square bricks of us all, and my patients are appalled that they have put on ten more pounds on top of the first.

The fact that Queen's Park has just established a provincial Ministry of Health Promotion gives me hope that governments are getting serious about promoting health and not just preventing illness, or alleviating it.

But when I ask my patients what they're doing to stay in shape, they often look at me like I'm crazy, and I don't blame them. They have no time for fitness.

The kinder, gentler way appears to be taking a pill like Lipitor to reduce cholesterol levels rather than doing the hard work of exercise.

The only cure for inactivity, it seems, is ....activity.

So what else makes for a healthy life?

You guessed it: Sex.

Oh sorry, you didn't guess that it was Sex.

Well, that may be because Sex for millions of midlife Canadians has become as frequent as an ice storm in October – and about as much fun.

The cliché about midlife sex has women less interested because of more time pressure and the responsibility for caring for everyone else in the family. And to their unending credit or their stoicism, women have for the most part shouldered the responsibility and the guilt for the great decline in the frequency of having sex.

Then five years ago, that pattern of guilt and silence and No Sex suddenly all changed.

Within 6 months of its launch in Canada, Viagra was a \$600 million golden egg and that revenue geyser hasn't slowed even with the entry of two more competitors. The proposition currently being floated is that a similar drug can be marketed for women. But the really good thing about Viagra's success is that such demand highlights that men too, have a part in those long dry spells of intermittent or no sex.

I am reminded of Germaine Greer's comment about the number of women who in mid-life don't have attractive men in their beds and who have found little to pique their interest in what they had there. As she noted, the days of semen that 'runs like water' were long gone.

Because here are the questions that I get in the office from women. Do I think there is a place for the drug for their mate? How do they get him to see someone? Can they get some to take home?

I have a diabetic patient, a Portuguese contractor. I mention diabetic because I think it allowed him to disclose his erectile dysfunction and I happily gave him some samples of Viagra. Recently he was in with his wife and asked if I had any more of those pills, although he lamented the fact that his wife, now a grandmother, had no time for him anymore.

Way too many people in the house on the weekends now. My counter to this was to suggest that they tell everyone that the two of them would be having sex on Saturday afternoon -- a statement that I was sure would guarantee the house would clear out.

In many ways, women should feel enormous relief since they are officially off the hook as the source of the problem. Simply providing estrogen has never in itself been the whole answer for most of my patients. Indeed, the advent of Viagra has permitted dysfunction that has been closeted for centuries to be addressed almost instantly.

And all it takes is a little talk . . . a little pill . . . and a little time.

Now there is a language . . . a descriptive . . . and a prescriptive.

All right...I've talked about midlife women in the context of our health, our buying habits, our next careers, our vitality, and now I want to shift gears by talking about the ability of midlife women to change. Not only change their lives, but change the definition of what it means to be in midlife.

To do that, I want to first show you a brief video about JeansMarines. Why a video in the sagging middle of a speech rather than the perky beginning? And what does a running group have to do with all these trends I've been discussing?

Everything, it seems. We certainly didn't know this when my husband and I said it would be a good idea to invite some friends to join us at the 2002 Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, D.C.

But JeansMarines is both a catalyst for the new definition of midlife women – one filled with possibilities, a supermarket, not a waiting room – and a perpetual research study for the very things I've been discussing – the need to take control of our health, to empower ourselves as consumers, to redefine the meaning of retirement, to reach a level of vitality we never thought possible, and last but far from least, to do that most difficult thing of all in life – change.

This video is called “Tempted” because it's one of the tools we've used to entice the 600 Toronto women who are JeansMarines, and the thousand women we hope to have join us next year. That's right. A thousand women. An audacious, risky goal. But just watch.....

***[Roll Video].***

We didn't know it then -- we thought we were a running group, but we know it now - JeansMarines is a change organization.

We have seen the change in how women think about their strength and physical capacity. When women come out in January, many are wearing 20 year old canvas sneakers and are dressed like the Michelin Man. One kilometre later, they are dripping and stripping and exalting in their accomplishment.

We've seen the change in how they view the idea of "time for themselves."

When they start in January many are adamant that they don't need new friends. They haven't the time for the ones they have already. Yet we have seen bonds that sink deep and are abiding- these groups of women go on afterward to stay together, play together, look out for each other. You see them all over town, meeting at Starbucks at six or seven in the morning to run – roving packs of red-capped women.

After a while what happens out there on the trail – when as Christie Blatchford says, you are too deep in the run to edit your comments anymore, what comes out are stories, feelings, troubles, brave acts, wonderful support – for life.

Very quickly, we had to adopt an understanding that what is said on the trail remains on the trail. One of our runners whose group saw her through the whole sad demise of her marriage, and who at one critical point took the offered refuge of a safe house from one of her group members never knew until a year later that she had been staying with one of Canada's top litigators.

Out there on the road, it doesn't matter what you do. Or who you are. There are JeansMarines who are blind. JeansMarines who are mentally challenged. JeansMarines who have CP.

It is this kind of community that last year put together a daily driving team for five weeks to pick up one of its members when she was having radiation treatments for her recurring brain tumour.

In times of deep trouble and need we can and we do call on our families and friends. But these efforts come unbidden, they are gifts ahead of the 'ask', ahead even of knowing there was a need.

In the dark of winter, you will muster yourself and get out of bed for a fellow JeansMarine when you would never do it for yourself alone.

Two JeansMarines, who shared the same pace and lived in the same part of town, met each other every Friday at 6 a.m. on the corner. They grew to be great friends. But they never gave each other their home phone number for fear one of them would use it to call the night before and cancel.

After four years, we've learned some lessons.

We know it's not just the running; it's the talking.

We know it's not just the marathon, it's the change.

Women who join for whatever reason, will often share that the real reasons weren't apparent 'til after the race was done.

One of our runners hadn't had anyone to her home for the three years since her husband had left until she asked her platoon mates to dinner. It was, as she said, her re-entry into life.

Others are very clear that running is their therapy, their means to control depression or manage their stress.

Yet even these women comment that the great surprise in the platoon system is that they will partner with a woman who goes at their pace and lives nearby, that they will grow that capacity together, that they become the strongest support for each other and the greatest source of cheer.

So just imagine the cheer when a forty + native woman whose career to date has been in computer programming, has to decide which of the three Medical schools in Canada who have accepted her, will actually get her.

We know it's not an easy road- this marathon training. But often anything less than a marathon wouldn't even get a rise from a busy mid-life woman. It's a magical distance ....sorry, Royal York.....the 42KM from The Four Seasons in Yorkville, to the..... Ford Assembly Plant in Oakville.

Yes, it's inconceivable at the start, as it is to many of you here and now. The program is 39 weeks and we know it works: we also know it's tough. It requires determination and discipline and courage.

I give a talk about half way through the year called “Bowels, Bladder, Blood and Boobs.” I don’t do it too early. It would frighten the horses.

We have a sexual assault police officer talk about running safety as the runs get longer and women may find themselves out there alone. We don’t do that one too early either.

We have seen a profound change in how our women view their community.

If you are running from one end of the city to the other and in and out of 20 or so neighbourhoods, you begin to have a lot to say about how your city works. You become a loud mouth about the waterfront and drinking fountains and lord help the city workers who don’t get those public bathrooms open by eight in the morning when you’ve started your run at six.

We also think a lot about green spaces and parks and linkages from neighbourhood to neighbourhood.

And speaking of links, one of our great links is our connection to the US Marine Corps. Why the U.S. Marines you ask? After all, there are few more politically incorrect organizations we could ally ourselves with these days.

No-- it began because we knew that the Marine Corps Marathon is one of the best organized of all the marathons we had done. So when you need to know that your people will be well looked after, the Marine Corps Marathon is a natural model. And in the course of our involvement with the Marines, one man in particular became more than a liaison for us, he became a friend.

One of the many inspirational gifts that we have received from Major Dan O'Connor – you saw him at the finish line hugging Betty Lou -- is an understanding of what it means to look after the guy on your left and right.

Indeed, backbone Marine training has enormous application to how the platoon system works for JeansMarines. Groups of five or six, bigger groups of 50 or 60. Biggest groups of 500 or 600.

But the kind of women's leadership we have come to appreciate and advocate is different than what you see in most Canadian companies, and certainly different from the military.

It is more web-like than hierarchical.

It rises from grass roots and builds from there.

It's supportive rather than competitive, nurturing rather than nagging.

We know that as the strength of the bonds in the group evolve during the year, finishing the race arm in arm with your platoon mate means as much as finishing the race at all.

For one of our runners, it meant not finishing at all because she had to find transportation for her injured buddy at the 16 Kilometre mark and she did this by commandeering in turn- a golf cart . . . a garbage truck . . . a school bus . . . and finally an ambulance. It's as tough to hold down a mid-life broad as it is a Marine.

It's only natural that the charity of choice for JeansMarines -- Give Girls A Chance -- is also about changing women, specifically by educating girls around the world and at home.

Most of our women can't even think about asking their friends to support them until they feel confident that they can achieve their own goal. But when they do ask, they are amazed at how much their efforts are acknowledged by friends, families and coworkers. One of our slowest but steadiest of runners raised over \$17,000 in contributions for Give Girls A Chance. But we are clear that it's the woman's goal that proceeds the fundraising. They are too used to doing all the work and getting none of the rewards.

Speaking of which we do have men in JeansMarines. They're not full-fledged members, though they can and do the full program including the marathon. They're members of the Gentlemen's Auxiliary. And the 10 of them do what Ladies Auxiliaries have done forever -- they serve the coffee and raise the money.

Something happened with JeansMarines this year. I think we grew up. We became a non-profit organization. We created a board, hired a staff, and started to look to the future. One thing is now very clear in our fourth year.

There now exists something we call The JeansMarines Way. It's a way of training for sure – our program is the longest marathon training program anywhere, mainly because we're taking midlife women off the couch, who aren't in shape at all, and nine months later sending them into the arms of a Marine in Washington.

But The JeansMarines Way is also an attitude and a standard of care that we think will let us expand and reproduce the program .....next year beyond Toronto, in 2007 throughout Ontario, in 2008 across Canada and who knows? ..... having just returned on Thanksgiving Weekend from the Chicago Marathon where 65 JeansMarines Alumnae ran what was for many their best race ever, I know we will soon fashion a JeansMarines beach-head in Chicago, Toronto's sister city.

Along the way, we'll send more and more women – hundreds and hundreds – to races – 5Ks, 10Ks, half marathons and marathons, here in Toronto and wherever in Canada races are held.

From our own runners we have evolved a hugely committed group of Mentors, or as their tee-shirts say, “Tormentors,” alumnae who volunteer to support the “Newbies”. They are the people that let us assure every participant that they will not be out there alone. We are only as good as the last person crossing the finish line and like the U.S. Marines, we look out for our own.

Believe me when I tell you this whole wild idea would have remained just that were it not for our sponsors. Our founding partner, Scotiabank, a bank that took a risk, provided the seed money to begin and has been a major supporter since.

Our new partnership with the YMCA of Greater Toronto has let us expand our training venues, and as we go forward with the Y with a shared vision and goals in community service, we will evolve this program for the women of Ontario – and beyond.

There is a cost to being a JeansMarines. It's \$225 for the full program. About a dollar a day. Still, we knew that many women would not be able to afford the cost of joining, let alone gearing up.

And so last year, Franklin Templeton stepped in to offer a bursary program so that women of limited means could join. Last year, they donated \$5,000 in bursaries. This year, they donated \$10,000.

Today, I'm thrilled to announce that in 2006 Franklin Templeton will be giving \$20,000 – to provide up to forty \$500 bursaries for women who need help to make it to the start line.

Our sponsors, and there are many, share our goals, and that is the basis of an intensely personal relationship that underscores our pride in putting their logos next to ours.

This weekend, we'll be taking hundreds of JeansMarines and their families to Washington. There, they will join 30,000 other endurance athletes from over 40 countries in the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Marine Corps Marathon. When they return on Monday, they will be changed forever. They might never do another marathon again. But they will never go back to who they were.

In the months to come, we will be taking JeansMarines and The JeansMarines Way to Governments and foundations. We'll be telling them: "Hey, we've got something here. It works. It can be reproduced. It doesn't cost much. And it does wonders for the community because it does wonders for women and their families."

I said earlier that JM was a change organization I was only half right: it is a revolutionary organization.

Common knowledge tells us that, the older you get, the less able you are. JeansMarines tells us we have no idea what we're capable of until we test our own limits. As T.S. Eliot once said: "Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far they can go."

Common knowledge says that most marketing should be directed mainly to 19 to 35 year olds. JeansMarines teaches us to direct your marketing to the people who have the money and the interest in buying your product. Oh, and maybe change that product to suit the needs of those midlife women with buying power.

Common knowledge tells us we aren't going to be employable after 55 or 60.

JeansMarines tells us that all kinds of new doors can open when the old ones close. If you think of consulting and teaching and volunteering, those opportunities will open wide.

Common knowledge says that sex fades after menopause. JeansMarines teaches us that while sex falls off in your 30s because of kids and in your 40s because of job pressures, it can return hale and hearty – at least that's what we hear on the trail.

Common knowledge tells us that by the time we reach middle age, most of our dreams have either happened or won't. Dreaming is for the young. JeansMarines teaches us that new dreams happen for yourself.

How do I know this?

Because at the bottom of the very first invitation we sent out in December of 2001 inviting our women friends to join us in a frankly impossible adventure of training to run the world's most storied distance, the final words of that invitation were these:

“Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.”

But I have my own invitation for you today.

These words sum up the new meaning of midlife for Canadian women, and the new hope for all us that the second half of our lives can be more meaningful, more thrilling and yes, more peaceful than the first.

“Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well-preserved body. But rather, skidding in broadside . . . in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up . . . . totally worn out . . . . martini in hand . . . proclaiming: “Wow, what a ride!”

Thank you -- and we've been expecting you.