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## California Dreamin' Keynote

Good afternoon.

I thought about what I might say today. I thought perhaps I should speak about global warming and how vegetarianism and a karmic approach to the animal kingdom is the surest way to happiness and stability on earth. I thought I should comment on the recent ENDA exclusion of transsexuals and how we should all write our congresspersons and how voting democratic this fall is so important in changing the world's view of America and I thought about commentary about Thomas, the pregnant man and how that issue might politicize transexualism still further and how his issue might affect the 'Real ID' act and possibly interfere with transsexual's ability to change their respective birth certificates. Or I even considered sharing with you some of my experiences in the Green Room with Oprah or on the set of CSI when I landed a small part in one of their shows, their 100<sup>th</sup> episode, in 2004. Or I thought about offering you sage medical advice, complete with charts and numbers from studies, sure to make you impressed with how smart I was. Nah, that just seemed too darned boring. And if there's one thing potentially boring, it's a lunchtime keynote from a doctor. So instead, I've chosen to talk about fear in my life, opening myself up to a bit of your scrutiny, Marci Bowers' life, never boring.

I've been an Ob/Gyn doctor for 22 years. During that time, I've spoken with lots of patients, as you can imagine. I've delivered something well in excess of 2000 live births. I've been drenched in blood or amniotic fluid many times, feeling the squish of fluid in my socks and shoes, marching without complaint as my days went onward. On one memorable experience, I was called emergently to perform a hysterectomy on a Christmas Eve one year, the patient having lost 18 units of blood, teetering on the

verge of death. I was the only capable obstetrician available and I simply went forward, without fear. Once I thought to myself, "My God, here I am, with my arm up to my elbow, in the vagina and uterus of the most beautiful woman I had ever known, with her life, literally, in my hands, extracting a recalcitrant placenta. I once performed a cesarean section by candlelight when the power went out in a particularly violent Seattle storm and another under local anesthetic while the anesthesiologist drove in from a mountain top known as 'Cougar Mountain', delivered babies feet first, sideways or in pairs, 100 sets of twins, 4 sets of triplets and even a set of quads, babies delivered through amniotic fluid that looked more like guacamole than the sweet smelling waste water it started out as, moms that looked more like children and fathers that looked more like crack dealers, preemies that came out so gnarly, they looked as though they might smoke or swear. Babies are beautiful but try handing to mom a baby that looks like uncle Fester or who asks 'what color is it'? A baby with a cleft lip or palate. Clubbed feet. I once nursed a patient through the last trimester of pregnancy, comatose as the mother was due to a Motor Vehicle Accident through pneumonia, diabetes and preterm labor, only to cringe as my attending, Dr. Benedetti, stood at the podium in an interview with CNN, claiming credit for our travails. And in 1997, I delivered the first baby of the year, exactly at 12:01 AM, finding myself with microphones and television cameras in my face, the first time I had ever been on TV. But not the last. And I've offered medical advice to family when solicited, to friends who inquired and to patients who paid me.

And I've had my share of love interests over the years. I've somehow remained married to a .....woman, yes, I've confused people when they say.....to a man? What operation DID you have anyway? Over 22 years from the day we were married on a hot June day in 1985 when the temperature in St. Paul, Minnesota reached 102 degrees. 3 kids and a thousand crises later, my spouse and I are still best friends, as the day we married. She's tolerated a lot from me and yet somehow, on a recent vacation with she and my son, she told me that she'd like to be the one who traveled with me when I retired one day. Meanwhile, she has tolerated my dalliances into romance of seemingly every kind. I lived with a crazed Vietnam vet for a year and a half, 100% disabled as a result of PTSD, who'd accompanied me through surgery but who at times would scream at me and make me announce myself when entering a dark room or he'd choke me like a Vietcong Chihuahua. I had never been the subject of a domestic violence call

by the Seattle Police Department but he enlightened me with 3 of those types of visits from our men in uniform. Only later, after I'd gone, he'd come to me with his acknowledgment that his gender issues had become too strong, that these were the excuses for his aberrant behavior and that he too, though battling it all his life, was now a woman and came to me as a patient one day, determined to be my 4<sup>th</sup> reassignment victim. I say victim because I was only learning my trade in those days, changing it from the days of Dr. Biber and his consistent, though as yet unrefined reassignment surgery. My romantic interests spanned more milestones when I became involved with an RN at my local hospital who 'fell in love with me over a circumcision'. A former stripper and nightclub performer, a paid dominatrix at times, seemingly ultra femme but with an interior like barbed wire she had put herself through nursing school while removing her clothes for the famous citizenry of Detroit, Michigan. She told wild tales of famous athletes and businessmen who pined after her sultry figure only to be slapped into submission by her zingy one-liners and loathing of those who most craved her body. I dated butch women and straight men, married men and single women. And I lived with a man, bless his heart, who was once a woman and whose hysterectomy I had performed shortly after our first meeting years ago. He is a father for my son now, who in so many ways, looks up to him as though he were a dad, my son knowing me only as a woman and he only as a man. Tom will now carry this ring of marriage in a wedding this summer. Finally, for my ex, he has found someone compatible which will seal their commitment to one another. And I am happy for them.

But I must say, I had never quite had a friend or patient come to me with a story quite like this. It seems, a woman friend, menopausal, much like me, came to me and said, "Marcí, the strangest thing happened to me while peeing the other day. While straining, I noticed a quarter that came out of me, sure as I am sitting here. "Hmmm" I said, that is really odd". I had heard of pica, where patients eat all sorts of things or appendectomies where money is sometimes found to be blocking the small dead end portion of the large intestine, but never this. I told her that she must have dropped it in the toilet or some such thing but that, if it happened again, she needed to come in. When a dime fell out the next day she called me and I told her, "Come to my office and let me have a urine sample from you". So she did and in doing so, out came another nickel. Still scratching my head I told her that we needed to run some tests. After about a half hour I came back and reported to her that I had an answer. She said,

'Marcí, please, what could it be?' and of course, I told her that she was 'going through the change'.

So in January, I hit the magic age of 50. I have to say 50 has been the toughest birthday yet. I don't know why, one day I was in my 40's and the next day I was 50. I didn't appear that much older. I looked in the mirror and though aged, a few wrinkles, I didn't see anyone that much older. I still recognized myself as who I am. I can't really explain it, it just seemed as though I'd entered a new zone and it has really put me in a funk. Fear. I think that if I were a man, it wouldn't have been quite the same. You know, 50 for a man just seems to be that age where the combination of wealth, wisdom and maturity makes a man rich, like creamy chocolate or fine wine, better with age. A man is treasured for his gray hairs and grizzly exterior. For a woman, the signs of age, particularly at 50, mark the inevitable decline that comes with aging, a fact that all of us face, even men. But I find it little comfort that women outlive men. Castrated males live an average of 13 years longer than their non-castrated, virile counterparts, a fact I also found of little comfort. For what am I? I'm a woman, to be sure, but in my 40's, I was a lovely thing, pretty to look at but with a little secret. I do not consider myself transsexual and have not since 10 years ago when I went under the life changing process of sex reassignment surgery in Portland, Oregon. For a woman, I remember thinking before entering the transition process, that age is not anything that enhances your value to society. Is THAT what I aspire to be? An aging transsexual with a not quite perfect body in a society that values, fairly or unfairly, a woman by her looks or esteemed beauty. For a time, I felt like the chicken on the grocer's shelf whose pull date had been reached, or like flowers in the vase where the leaves had begun to curl, signaling their inevitable exit to the trashcan, or yesterday's salad, once crispy and fresh, delicious even while wilted but now mushy, just shy of rotten. Receiving my first copy of the AARP Magazine did not help my mood in any way. I wouldn't have cared if the membership dues were waived, it was bad timing.

So am I ready for the Bingo parlor of my golden years, the yellowed coffee shop of my dreams, the moldy cheese of my visions, the faded jeans of my aspirations, the fashionable outfit that really isn't fashionable any more? Is this the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of my sexual life? Do I throw the bread out or do I make croutons? These were the big questions I was pondering last week while planning my trip here to San Jose. So I

thought about it for awhile and then, like a Concorde jet lifting into the air, I was able to rise up, lift my hands into the air and my head to the sky and do like any other sensible woman does at this age: I went to the salon and colored my hair. So that is what I did and from there, "California Dreamin', here I come!". I was simply not ready to go down easily. I still was 'Miss Marci Bowers'. I am still 'missed' by most, not 'ma'amed' I am still on my two feet, not yet wheelchair bound. Still a fox when the lights are low. Still sexy when wined, dined, lubricated, the laundry is done, and the dishes are put away. I am ready to fight. And I am ready to be the sexiest senior citizen, AARP card carrying, shoot-my-age in golf bad-ass woman God meant me to be. And personally, I don't even feel like I have yet reached half time. So I hope that all of you feel the same way. Thank you very much.