



THE OPRAH
MAGAZINE

HOW TO DIVE HAPPILY INTO LIFE!

LETTING GO OF
THE STUFF THAT
WEIGHS YOU DOWN

SELF-CONSCIOUS?

MARTHA BECK'S
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The Sense of Being Stared At

The world-famous 87-year-old architect sketched unclothed 20-somethings. So why did 62-year-old **MARGIE GOLDSMITH** go halfway across the country to subject herself to his analytical eye? She can explain.

May I have the privilege of kissing your nipples?" Paolo Soleri asked as I lay sprawled naked on his bed. I could feel myself turn crimson. What was I doing here? Why hadn't I listened to my friends who wondered why I'd model naked for an artist? All artists were womanizers, they insisted, even though I had argued that this man was 87, too old to be a lecher. Besides, this was the world-famous Paolo Soleri, who'd won the National Design Lifetime Achievement Award and had created Arcosanti, a prototype urban habitat 65 miles north of Phoenix, where I was right now, prone on his flowered sheets.

If only I hadn't paid attention to the notice I'd seen next to the wind chimes at Soleri's other studio-foundry, Cosanti, near Scottsdale. I've collected Soleri's famous bells for years, hanging them curtainlike in the windows of my Manhattan apartment. When I was in Scottsdale a year ago, I went to Cosanti to buy a new wind chime, and that's when I'd seen the announcement:

Modeling for Paolo Soleri

Women age over 21, interested in modeling for one or two sittings with paolo soleri will get one sketch of themselves free. If interested, please contact paolo soleri in person or via telephone.

I try to make myself do something at least once a year that terrifies me. I've summited Mount Rainier, paddled the huge rapids of the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon, and climbed to advanced base camp on the north face of Everest, so cold my water bottle froze. I've run the New York City Marathon, done an international triathlon in Cuba, even driven a racecar on the track in Lime Rock Park—but I'd never posed nude for an artist. That was about the scariest thing I could possibly think of—except skydiving, which I have no desire to do.

I've always been ashamed of my naked body, even though I've never had a weight problem and I'm toned from years of sports. It's been more than 40 years since high school, but I can still remember Miss Oswald's beady eyes glued to me when I stepped into the girls' locker room shower. I'm still embarrassed when nude at my gym, and I swath myself in towels before going into the steam room. When I'm trying on bras or bathing suits, I cover myself before the salesperson enters the dressing room. I'd love to be liberated like soccer star Brandi Chastain, who posed nude (except for soccer cleats) in 1999 for the British guys' magazine *Gear* and said, "Hey, I ran my ass off for this body, I'm proud of it." But that's not me. I just don't feel comfortable in front of other people without my clothes on.

I thought if I modeled unclad for an artist, I'd stop being so self-conscious about my nakedness. My girlfriends thought I was crazy. "Soleri only takes models 21 years old," one said. "What's going to happen when he finds out your age?" My body doesn't look a day over 40, but I'm north of 50.

Soleri seemed flattered when I called—until I explained I was older than 21. How much, he wanted to know. A little more than double, I lied. There was silence. I expected him to say, "Please come anyway." Instead he said, "Usually I take only young women."

"You're no spring chicken yourself," I blurted out.

"But I am the artist," he said.

I don't take rejection easily, and I'd already told all my friends I was going to do this. It would be humiliating if I had to admit I'd been turned down. I pleaded with Soleri, "Look, you won't be disappointed. I'm willing to fly out all the way from New York just for you."

There was silence. Finally, he said, "Okay, for you I will make an exception."

But by the time I flew out to Scottsdale and drove to Arcosanti, my elation had turned to fear. As I was ushered in to meet the great artist, I was almost shaking. Paolo Soleri introduced himself and led me into his sun-filled loft, a combination studio and living quarters. He was short with a smooth pink face, aquiline nose, and thin lips. Though bald on top, white hair covered his temples like Picasso, only Soleri was thinner with a smaller face and less intense eyes.

A light breeze blew through enormous round windows, which looked out onto the Arizona desert. His desk was cluttered with piles of papers. Nearby was a mattress on the floor covered with a flowered sheet. Mozart played low in the background. "So, shall we start?" he said. This was a man who wasted no time. "You can change here or in the bathroom," he pointed to a door.

Should I pull off my clothes in front of him or change in private? Change into what? My birthday suit? I felt ridiculous. What was I doing? I looked around the room. If I could at least cover myself with a few fig leaves, it might be doable. I shifted from foot to foot, thinking about leaving right now and going back to the airport. But there was no turning back. [CONTINUED ON PAGE 226]



I'd dared myself to do this and I was going to go through with it, no matter what.

I went into the bathroom, slipped out of my clothes, and tried to walk casually toward the bed. I sat down on the mattress, squeezing my legs together tightly, and folding my arms over my chest. Could he tell how nervous I was? Soleri pulled up a chair just a few feet away, balanced a sketch pad on his legs, picked up a charcoal stick, and studied me before asking, "How do you want to be?"

Clothed, I wanted to say. I answered. "How should I be?"

"However you want."

I lay down and nestled into a position in which my arms shielded my breasts. He looked at me—not lasciviously, just thoughtfully. I was praying he wouldn't ask me to move my arms. He said, "Why don't you turn over?"

"You mean, turn away from you?"

"Yes."

What? Was I so hideous that he couldn't bear to sketch me from the front? I turned and faced the wall feeling my face burning, glad he couldn't see it.

His charcoal scratched at the paper. What part of me was he doing now? I was too nervous to remain silent, so I asked, "How often do you sketch models?"

"About twice a month."

"And how come you only like your models 21?"

"I really can't hear," he said.

Selective hearing, I thought. I reminded myself what a girlfriend had said to me: A perfect body [CONTINUED ON PAGE 228]

doesn't necessarily make for an interesting drawing. I was about to tell him that when I suddenly remembered that stuck to my left buttock was a thumbnail-size estrogen patch. I'd forgotten to remove it. Would he know what it was? Would he think it was a birth control patch?

I tried not to think about it. The sun was warm on my body and I lay staring at the wall, thinking of making love with my boyfriend, Michael. About 20 minutes went by.

"Okay," Paolo said, "finished."

I turned. He was holding the sketch. "Do you like it?" he asked.

Thank God there was no estrogen patch in the drawing. My butt looked on the soft side, but I guess I've never seen my naked body lying down. "It's nice," I said. What was I supposed to say? Make my butt tighter?

"Now, we will do another one," he said. "Face me." I lay back down on the bed and crossed my arms over my breasts protectively. "Can you put one arm behind your head?" he asked.

I did, unhappily. One breast was now exposed.

"And put one arm behind your back?"

Full frontal nudity? I moved the other arm to my back. He was sitting so close I could hear his heart beating. Or was that mine? He drew an outline of my head and then noticed me staring at the drawing. "I don't do hands or faces well," he said almost apologetically. He made two dashes for my eyes, two dots for my nose, and drew curly hair with lots of shading. I looked 20 years old. This was good.

He sketched my shoulder, erased it with his finger, then drew it again. Any minute he would get to my breasts. I stared at his bare feet. He had a corn on his left foot. I studied his long, thin hands. The breasts he drew looked exactly like his bronze bells, only upside down. Then he shaded in my nipples—did he think of them as clappers?

He drew my torso. Thank God my stomach looked flat. I began to relax. *It's only a body*, I told myself. This wasn't sex—it was art. He finished the sketch, then looked at me and said, "May I have the privilege of kissing your nipples?"

"No!"

I bolted up from the bed, raced into the bathroom, and fumbled into my underwear as quickly as I could. "Don't you want to do another drawing?" he called from the other room.

"No!" I pulled on my jeans, then my T-shirt. What was so horrible about his making a pass? It wasn't as though some sleazebag

had pawed me—he'd actually asked for the privilege! By the time I reappeared in his room fully dressed, I felt calmer.

Both drawings were on the floor. I pointed to the one I wanted. "Do you have a cardboard roll so it won't get crumpled?" I asked.

"You can't take it now. I have to finish it," he said.

I reached for my camera. "May I take a picture?" He nodded. I turned on my camera, but the battery was dead. I didn't have a spare.

He smiled. "You see? It's because you wouldn't let me kiss your nipples."

I was still chuckling as I drove back toward Phoenix. Jagged mountains were everywhere in the distance, but I'd been so nervous before that I hadn't noticed them. Nor had I seen that clumps of sagebrush polka-dotted the desert wherever I looked. I had the same feeling I do when I finish a race—I was so proud of myself, I was almost gloating. I'd done it! And I wasn't even ashamed of what he'd drawn.

I thought about how much of my life I've been self-conscious because I was never rail thin or perfectly toned. I remembered something I'd once heard: The mirror is not you—the mirror is you looking at yourself. And I could choose how I wanted to see myself. At that moment, Billy Joel came on the radio singing, *I love you just the way you are*, and I sang along at the top of my lungs. Modeling naked wasn't something I'd ever do again—there was no reason to—but at least it was no longer the most terrifying thing in the world. And for the first time in my life, I didn't feel ashamed or embarrassed about my body. It was just me. Maybe the next time I went to the gym, I'd even allow myself to walk naked from my locker to the steam room. **Q**



▲ In "Posing Nude for Paolo Soleri" (page 183), Margie Goldsmith writes about continuing her 12-year campaign to conquer her greatest fears. This time she came away with a tangible reward: a portrait of herself by the famed artist and architect. Not that anyone will see it. "It's my personal souvenir, and I'm keeping it hidden," says Goldsmith. Her next challenge? Swimming the Hudson for the New York City Triathlon: "It's a very fast-moving river, and I'm not looking forward to getting in it, but I will." An award-winning travel writer, she has been to 96 countries and is a contributing editor for *Elite Traveler* and a contributing writer for *Executive Traveler*. She lives in New York City. **Q**