

**NEWS**

# Kelso: Aralyn Hughes is Austin's Queen of Weird

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Aralyn Hughes, known around Austin as the Queen of Weird, just might be Dan Patrick's worst nightmare.

It's not her art car or choice in pets that would make his skin itch. The '88 Oldsmobile Aralyn bought for \$500 is covered with pig figurines. Back when the pig car was running, Aralyn would drive around town selling real estate with her pet pig Ara riding shotgun.

"Lots of people who bought from me wanted to ride in the pig car, and the pig to go along," Aralyn said. "If I lived in Waco or Lubbock, they'd think I was a lunatic. But here in Austin they just wave."

So what would ruffle some folks' shorts? Aralyn, who started Austin's first abortion clinic when she arrived in town in the mid-1970s, has put together a book called "Kid Me Not." It's an anthology of thoughtful stories told by 15 women in their 60s who survived the 1960s and decided not to become mothers for various reasons.

There's the pain of childbirth, the lifelong commitment, pursuing a career instead of a crib, and some women simply aren't cut out to be Mom. You've heard the expression, "When mamma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy." That includes the children.

The stories are well told by some successful women, among them CK Carman, who worked as a bartender, a crop duster and finally a radio and TV broadcaster; Austin writer and horse rancher Lin Sutherland; and Aralyn, who can tap dance, paint and make you laugh.

Aralyn has done nine solo performances that include, among other things, a straightforward marching order: Gals, you're the boss of your own life, so do what you want and get after it.

Of course, announcing that you're not fixing to raise a family sometimes brings the look that asks, "What's your problem?" In her book, Aralyn writes about a friend she helped through childbirth twice. Later, the friend dropped Aralyn like a bad habit.

"When I asked why, she said, 'Because you don't have children and don't want to have children,'" Aralyn writes. "My feelings were hurt beyond measure."

Some folks won't appreciate Aralyn's outrageous humor. There's the dominatrix outfit she wears in her movie "Love in the Sixties." And she's known around town for her costume parties. She once dressed as a pregnant Girl Scout. The pork and beans ensemble was benign by comparison. The pig went as the pork, while Aralyn filled in as the beans.

"People say, 'You're going to ruin your reputation,'" she said. "I'm 68 years old. Do you really think I have to worry about my reputation now?"

Aralyn sees herself as a pioneer. She remembers when "the pill" came along and gave women a choice. Aralyn wants young women today to realize who got the ball rolling for them a half century ago.

"I was told if I wanted to go to college that was fine," Aralyn said. But there was a caveat. "I was also told I was going for an MRS degree, because all the men I wanted to be married to were in college."

So Aralyn attended Oklahoma State and got a degree — in home economics. "For gosh sakes, I thought I was going to be the stitch and stir woman," she said. "I'm also known around town as the stain queen. I can get a stain out of anything."

Aralyn's background certainly wasn't radical. She grew up in Elk City, Okla., an oil town on Route 66 she describes as "a peek and plum town. Take a peek and you're plum out of town."

But Elk City wasn't a hotbed of activism.

“When the church bells tolled, everybody was there,” she said.

Aralyn was a cheerleader in high school and was president of the Tri Delta sorority at Oklahoma State. She married a Navy man, and nine years later, she split the sheets. He wanted kids; she didn't. She was flamboyant. Apparently he wasn't.

“He said it looked as if somebody from the circus lived here because my side of the closet was colorful hats and scarfs,” she said. “And I just kind of joked that the circus came to town and I just left with it.”

Aralyn jumped into real estate. Then in 2008, when the housing market went sour, she switched gears and took to the stage. She put together nine monologues. “I just got up and told my story.”

Last year, one of her shows made it to New York for a major solo theater festival.

“I'm a person who gives people permission to do what they want, even if they're getting along in years,” Aralyn said. “How often do you hear people say, ‘I'm saving for a rainy day?’ Folks, I say the rainy day is here. You're in your 60s. Get with it.”