



# Rosalyn Baxandall

## *Pioneer*

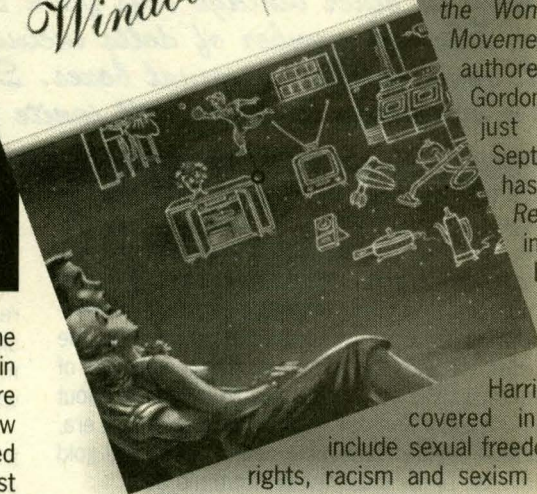
by Jan Kelly

Professor Rosalyn Baxandall was one of the founders of the Women's Liberation Movement in the late 60's, participating in building occupations to make day care possible, testifying before government panels to make abortions legal, and forcing the New York Times to desegregate their want-ads. She participated actively in Red Stockings, WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell), No More Nice Girl and CARASA (Coalition for Abortion and Against Sterilization Abuse). She chairs and is professor in the American Studies Program at SUNY, Old Westbury...and she is an author.

ROSALYN BAXANDALL and ELIZABETH EWEN

*Picture  
Windows*

HOW THE  
SUBURBS  
HAPPENED



Among her most recent books we find *Picture Windows, How The Suburbs Happened*, co-authored with Elizabeth Ewen; *America's Working Women*, a documentary history co-authored with Linda Gordon; and *Dear Sisters, Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement*, also co-authored with Linda Gordon and published just this past September. Baxandall has also published *Rebel Pen*, the writings of Provincetown's own Mary Heaton Vorse, edited by Dee Harrison. The topics covered in *Dear Sisters* include sexual freedom and women's rights, racism and sexism in suburbia, the Women's Liberation Party of the late 60's and 70's, sexuality from the 60's to the 90's and a history of day care.



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The book itself came about in a combination of necessity and creativity. No course of study nor textbook, no compiled study exists on the history of the Women's Movement. In order for her to teach such a course, Rosalyn Baxandall needed to build the teaching course and actually perform the research. She literally wrote the book. In tandem with teaching, serving as chair, troubleshooting, and lecturing internationally, Baxandall wrote copious forward-thinking articles and numerous book reviews.

**"I consider my greatest contribution to be as a teacher. The students are the center of my scholarship and college activism. Even if the rewards are not as great as with publishing books and articles, I take great pain and pleasure in seeing students stretch and learn. I set high standards but I also help the students in and out of the classroom to reach those standards.**

*Dear Sisters* confronts major misconceptions surrounding the Women's Movement—considered the largest social movement in the history of the United States—and illuminates its influence in schools, playing fields, the media, law and the workplace. Her book offers objective criticism and praise in an attempt to clarify this great social movement. Even before publication, *Dear Sisters* was received favorably by *Publishers' Weekly* and *Marie Claire*.

This past August (2000) Baxandall fans had the opportunity to hear her along with Elizabeth Ewen speak on the book *Picture*

*Windows: How The Suburbs Happened*. Besides providing a very interesting history of the pioneer suburbs of Levittown, Freeport and Roosevelt, the audience was informed of the attempts at controlling the working class neighborhoods and how those creative first residents balked and formed their own living space which could serve them as individuals (by adding garages, gardens and porches) and as a group (by adding day care centers, libraries and community centers). Interestingly enough, Baxandall and

Ewen began their study with the stereotypical views of suburbia—its sameness and excessive boredom. Because many of their students were themselves products of suburbia, and because both professors worked closely with their students, their views changed and the vitality as well as the working purpose of suburbia emerged.

*Picture Windows* provides a highly informative study and, in a true sense, a highly readable work. Even prior to publication *Picture Windows* was reviewed on the front page of the *New York Times*. From there the mainstream media picked it up: *The Washington Post*, *the Boston Globe*, *the Los Angeles Times*, *the San Francisco Chronicle*, *Newsday*, *Salon*, and even the *Cape Cod Times*. Major radio and television talk shows interviewed the authors. Borders has sponsored two book signings. What impressed the media most was the fact that these two professors from SUNY, Old Westbury were willing to learn from their students.

In January 2000, Professors Baxandall and Gordon each



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received a Rockefeller Foundation and Spencer Foundation grants enabling them to hold an international conference on the history of the women's movements at the Rockefeller Conference Center in Lake Bellagio, Italy. The Conference took place between April 16-20, 2000 with the participation of 25 women from India, China, Russia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Uganda, Australia, Peru, Mexico and others. The Conference was incredibly successful leading to the creation of a bibliography, a web site, a network, further grant applications, and eventually a book to be published.

Baxandall also belongs to a prestigious speakers bureau, "Speak Out," which arranges an impressive schedule for her. So far this year she has spoken at Washington University on "The Politics of Abortion, at Columbia University on "Day Care: Who Cares?", at the SUNY Graduate Center on "The Origins of the International Women's Day," and at Williams College on "Revisioning The Women's Liberation Movement."

When Baxandall begins speaking about her department and teaching, she gets really animated. She requires physical space for she is passionate and not to be deterred. "I am steadfast in my stewardship of our program," she says. "The American Studies and Media and Communications have grown both as majors and in faculty size due to her efforts. "Besides equipment use and classroom conditions, I have confronted the president on securing leaves and sabbaticals for members of our program as well as for other faculty member. I see my job as that of an ombudsman serving between the faculty and the administration since I dare to confront the administration when others cannot."

When we spoke about teaching, the passion and the tone got deeper, more personal. "I consider my greatest contribution to be as a teacher. The students are the center of my scholarship and college activism. Even if the rewards are not as great as with publishing books and articles, I take great pain and pleasure in seeing students stretch and learn. I set high standards but I also help the students in and out of the classroom to reach those standards. I encourage them to write for the college newspaper, to take on internships and other challenging activities. I advise far too many students, constantly trying to solve all kinds of problems with them from working out their financial aid to academic concerns, to personal issues. As one of the most productive faculty members, I do not understand why I always receive the smallest merit raises."

Rosalyn always amazes me. Where others see her greatest contributions as an international lecturer bonding with the world, disseminating crucial information to improve women's lives or as a fact-finding author illuminating vital fiery topics of working class and women's issues, she sees herself as a teacher committed first to her students and to helping them find fulfillment through scholarship and college activities.

I see my dear friend Rosalyn Baxandall as a fearless hovering peregrine falcon. A peregrine falcon swoops down at up to 200 miles per hour to get its prey, a bit of nature that demands great respect. A ranked intellectual, a ranked tennis player, runner and cyclist, Ros also receives the utmost respect. A humanitarian and a soldier and a record breaker, she turns to a turtle dove when she spies her year old grandson, Julian Lee Baxandall.

Rosalyn's books can be found in the bookstores and at the Provincetown Public Library. Rosalyn Baxandall resides in Truro, in Greenwich Village and the world.