

# Ovarian Voice: Pause to Listen

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## ABSTRACT

In 1999, over half a million American and Canadian women experienced surgical menopause after the removal of their ovaries (NAMS, 2001). This paper focuses on one woman's struggle with this significant life event. Two poems written by this woman receive special emphasis.

## RÉSUMÉ

En 1999, plus d'un million d'Américaines et de Canadiennes ont subi la ménopause causée par intervention chirurgicale après l'ablation de leurs ovaires (NAMS, 2001). Cet article se concentre sur la lutte d'une femme avec cet événement marquant de la vie. Deux poèmes écrits par cette femme reçoivent une attention spéciale.

In 1999, over half a million American and Canadian women experienced surgical menopause after the removal of their ovaries (NAMS 2001). This medical procedure produces extreme physical, cognitive and emotional changes that occur in a matter of hours, days and weeks, rather than gradually over a period of many years (Schumacher 1990). Included below are two poems that present the articulation of one woman's overwhelming and devastating struggle with surgical menopause, caused by the rationalized excision of her first ovary, followed by the untimely and uninformed removal of her second one.

After being told by an ultrasound technician that she has a mass on her left ovary, Malvina (a pseudonym) waits almost two days for an initial diagnosis - a dermoid cyst - a bizarre and usually benign tumor containing a diversity of hair, bone, teeth and thyroid. Claiming that there are no alternatives to an ovariectomy, Malvina's surgeon arranges for the removal of the cyst as well as her ovary. In preparation for the surgery, Malvina undergoes a second ultrasound. During this procedure, she shares a poignant moment with a technician who reveals her deep sense of loss regarding her life without children. In turn, Malvina discloses her own desire to bear another child. At the conclusion of the test, Malvina's surgeon emphasizes that she will have one ovary and a uterus after the necessary excision. In particular, he underscores the fact that her mass is benign. As relief radiates through her body, Malvina prepares both physically and psychologically for the surgical event while, with sorrow, she accepts the fate of her left ovary.

Malvina's story, which has taken a drastic turn, continues in the first poem. More specifically, this piece focuses on the deception and violation that Malvina experiences after waking up from surgery with only a uterus. Discharged from the hospital hours later,

Malvina reels in menopausal symptoms with neither medical support nor a viable explanation for the extraction of her second ovary. Although she has two sons, her medical report describes her as nulliparous - never having had children.

Malvina tries to make sense of her premature condition that includes such side effects as greater susceptibility to osteoporosis, strokes, heart attacks and hot flashes. Too many people, including her surgeon, rationalize that she would have eventually reached this stage anyway. In the second poem, Malvina considers her current state in light of the medical and related pharmaceutical interventions that she has encountered since her surgery.

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## Nulliparous Rape

Under a blanket of ovarian genocide  
 With BLACKNESS all around  
 My life was forever changed  
 By HIS decision to amputate, castrate, incinerate  
 Beneath a wailing and surging PAUSE  
 Screams of sorrow and grief seared my belly  
 Plunging me into a harrowing and horrific abyss  
 Obsessed with death, hemlock and insanity.

For every second of every minute of every hour  
 The clock turned in a process of anguished infinities  
 As the shadows fell into the atrocities of my mind  
 Ravaging my breath  
 Abolishing my voice  
 Excising my spirit  
 Rendering my body a brittle and obsolete container  
 Filled with splintered desires  
 And tentacle realities  
 Of the visions of my unborn child's face.

### Glowing Again

I'm a polyester pantsuit  
In a retro queen  
A mulled black beauty  
One smooth and fluid specimen  
Designed by Vera  
Processed with Trace-E  
Packaged in Silesia  
Manufactured from multiple amalgam  
Appropriately labeled for mass acceptance.

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There is more to Malvina's story as there is more to the stories of other women whose experiences with surgical menopause require acknowledgement, validation and voice. Malvina and these women invite the medical community to pause and listen.

### REFERENCES

NAMS (The North American Menopause Society) (2001). [www.menopause.org](http://www.menopause.org).  
Schumacher, D. "Hidden Death: the Sexual Effects of Hysterectomy," *Journal of Women and Aging*, 2 (1990): 49-66.