Welcome, ladies, to the ad hoc symposium presented to you, the women of Washington in this warm June of ’63.

It could have been in the moment I realised that I’d be having a child and that there was a weighty significance regarding their gender that the state of this existence occurred to me. How bizarre, that it was only when I toyed with the idea of having a boy or a girl, and no longer just a baby, that my child no longer seemed to be just an ideal addition to my life? I’d like to assume that every child is born with malleable possibilities; so that grazed knees, moments of joy, toothless grins and messy tears can shape intricate facets of each little human. It is not so.

I will tell you an hitherto untold story, ladies. My pregnant neighbour came tearing into my house in the stark loneliness of midday two years ago. She squealed through the kitchen and then gathered her spindly limbs into her arms in a small bundle as she cradled herself on my settee.

“I’m going to give birth to a shark. Lois, I’m giving birth to a shark! He’ll circle around in the pond before deciding which fish he wants and he’ll pull her into the suburbs and watch her dehydrate. D’you see Lo? D’you see?”

Then, of course, I did not see. As far as I knew, she was hopelessly neurotic! So I poured her some tea. After we sipped from mugs like timid goldfish for a polite half hour, my neighbour left. After that she blushed a blood red whenever we caught a brief look at each other as we tended to our own front gardens.

Now, of course, I do see.

I was that fish and my shark was a fervent patriot. He tipped off the authorities about suspected communists, he passionately defended the atomic bombing of Japan, and told me that “Maternity is the patriotism of women.” A dream? I’m sure you’ve only whispered it to your own self in complete solitude that you know as well as I do…it is a nightmare.

Did it happen to you too? Were you the anaemic little fish that my neighbour feared her son would devour? Were you heroically whisked to the suburbs to build a masterful house with a Chevrolet Corvette in the driveway?

I was only a few short months into my pregnancy when I began experiencing doubts similar to my neighbour’s. Was I giving birth to a silenced artist, who would squeeze next to me in this cage as we stare at the canvas in sight, but tantalisingly out of reach? Or would I give birth to a possibly not so adroit painter, who will clutch a royal palette in one hand and guard an array of the superior quality canvases in the other? I’m certain that you all could trust me when I say that I tried painting the cage. I tried decorating it Mamie pink. I pinned up the recipes to my husband’s favourite meals. I filled it with the smell of fresh brownies. No escape from my discomfort revealed itself.

My neighbour’s provocative ideas now fuelled my own queries and I could not find answers until I stepped outside. To clarify, I do not mean outside onto the prim lawn with a white washed mail box.

I mean outside my marriage, the suburbs, and the usual way of thinking.

I can tell you, that now I am breathing fresh air. It was at first, invasive and confronting to my thoughts. This oxygen suffocates the Electra Complex in you. It is intense and at first challenging, to breathe with such clarity. But I tell you, I was getting buried alive in the suburbs, in my house, with a modern living area and a portable barbecue and a handsome husband and the promise of a pleasant child.

I now understand that asking “Is this all?” is not a shameful problem secretly rooted within the crevices of my mind. Our society would shame us for our failure comply with the suburban ideal. Now I call on you to join me in shaming a society that tightens such a suffocating noose around its women.

Allow me to tell you, that our problem has a taboo name. I dare not say it in an environment as public as this, for the pitiful fear of having noses turned to the sky and watching those of you that acquiesce to your husbands pack up your pretty little purses and walk on. Betty Friedan’s ‘The Feminine Mystique’ – a great read ladies – is the collective backbone of evidence for our plights.

The death of the icon of femininity, Marilyn Monroe, sent ripples of reactions through the nation last year. The death of an also outwardly sparkling female, the late Sylvia Plath, revealed the crackling rage that burned within her. What a cursed tragedy – that two of our feminine icons elected death over life in this society.

I was done with dating the duster and flirting with the cleaning cupboard. I was going to give birth to a child. A child with very specific anatomy that would dictate splendour, gallant decorum and choices, or a keyless cage, an apron, and “hopefully” a wedding band in the future.

I suppose, in a way, I’m here to try to galvanise you ladies. I want you to see the fresh air through the damp soil being heaved on top of you! I want you to see that it is tangible, enlightening, and I can assure you, there is more to your day than loitering in a spotless house!

This is much more than an ephemeral thrill. Unfortunately it is not unusual for women like ourselves to lay on a chaise lounge in a sterile office and be told by a male psychiatrist that we are suffering a transient stage of dissatisfaction with the life that women of other land’s dream of. “The brief unhappiness will flee soon.”

If I may be so audacious, for this unhappiness to flee, you have to enhance yourselves ideologically and environmentally. Just as our little gendered children are products of their environment, we are too the hybrids of society. Experiencing environments of differing liberties, values and incendiary ideas will not drown you in a bottomless tank. Rather, it will free you into an ocean where you can swim freely.

The taboo nature of women’s issues; menstruation, sexual frigidity, depression post childbirth and menopausal crises are persisting problems in our America. Passivity and subjugation to the ardent patriarchs that women have been bound to by a wedding band for years is no longer a fit societal structure for our America!

I’m calling for the funeral of the Traditional Housewife! It will go down in history something like this...

We painfully remember the familiar figure to billions of people in every outpost of the world. She will be buried alongside Submission and Silence. The Traditional Housewife will be regretfully recalled as a muted human, a spineless submitter and a skilled prisoner. Brutally, there is not a lot else to say for her tedious life. Fortunately, the Traditional Housewife bequeathed a generous gift to her successors! Burning strength, confident sexuality and insightful education are consigned to her heirs.

The growing body of evidence screams for us to realise that women everywhere are silently cursing their place. No longer, can we pretend that our ears are deaf, when there is a desperate roar for so much more!

Now ladies, let’s all meet for tea tomorrow morning and dutifully chew over the outrageous price of bananas and the utter dullness of the weather lately. I’d love to hear how you are all nurturing your herbs in this heat.