

Act like You're Having a Good Time: Essays

Michele Weldon

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Michele Weldon's diverting essays concern womanhood and are written from the vantage of her sixties.

From childhood forward, Weldon discusses her career, friendships, and feelings of invisibility. A cancer survivor, she threads regrets about goals unmet among punchy quips and expressions of passion and abundance. Acknowledging that self-reckoning can sometimes seem indulgent, she measures where she thought she'd end up against the realities of her third act, in which retirement is uncertain, and the fear that her cancer will come back looms. Still, she finds reasons for optimism. Her clear narration binds topics together, as do Catholicism and recurrent cameos from her unflappable parents.

The hilarious "Electric Frying Pan" muses on Weldon's upbringing, which was spearheaded by her stylish, frugal mother, whose habits are recounted via a story about traveling with a cooler and cookware. Elsewhere, Weldon contemplates mortality while swimming, discusses colorful fashions, and expresses that she both craves the limelight and wrestles with impostor syndrome. Entries mix levity with candor and tend toward brevity; they conclude with warmth, lessons, and potent one-liners.

On occasion, the essays have more open-ended conclusions. An essay that examines white privilege through a girlhood fascination with "Soul Train" yields the knowledge that there's no excuse for naiveté, and there's still work to do. The multilayered "Negative Space" stands out, with its focus on art lessons, which inspire new ways to perceive subjects. It wends toward worry and then back to how art absorbs attention. Seeing what others ignore ends up being freeing.

This heartfelt collection is both nostalgic and dialed in to the moment. For all its anxieties, it's also a powerful argument that aging doesn't have to mean losing one's sense of adventure.

KAREN RIGBY (September / October 2020)

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