



Aged to Perfection

Joyce Henricks

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Author and semi-retired professor Joyce Henricks introduces a delightful, engaging cast of characters in her charming new novel, *Aged to Perfection*. From the feisty, good-hearted Hannah Lowenstein, recently widowed and now living with her divorced daughter, Janice, principal of the local high school, to the hesitant Ruby, Hannah's friend from the Senior Center, Henricks creates well-developed characters to whom readers can immediately relate.

From Hannah's first appearance in the book's opening paragraph, where she comments to herself that a certain local building was "clearly designed by someone who wasn't limited by good taste," it is obvious that she is going to be quite a character: Opinionated, for certain, but undoubtedly witty, and dryly funny, as well. The entire novel depends upon her activities, personality, and insights, and Hannah is a strong enough character to carry the weight. Her presence throughout the narrative will simply make readers smile.

Henricks's novel succeeds on many levels. As a simple family tale, it is fun, lighthearted, and sweet, and some may be perfectly satisfied with exactly that. The heartening story of a loving family (a grandmother, her daughter, and the daughter's two adolescent children) is undeniably pleasant; Grandma does most of the cooking, Mom goes off to work every day, and the normal, well-adjusted kids accept guidance from both. Mom and the kids are likable and presented well, with superb detail that brings them all to life. The son's video game obsession and the older daughter's dating woes are decidedly realistic.

The book, however, is far deeper than the surface premise may suggest, as it deals carefully and honestly with a number of contemporary issues. Hannah, at seventy-eight, may be elderly, but she is healthy and strong; some of her friends are not as fortunate. Through Hannah, her friends, and her discovery of abuse and fraud at a local nursing home, Henricks addresses elder care and many of its ongoing problems. Through Janice, Henricks not only depicts the day-to-day stresses of the working mother, but also tackles the subjects of the ex-husband/indifferent father, the effects of divorce on children, and the dating life of a single parent.

Homosexual teens become a topic through the childrens' interactions at their school, and even religion comes to the forefront when Hannah, Jewish but non-observant, discovers that her teenaged granddaughter has never heard of the Holocaust. That Henricks manages to address so many relevant topics, and weave them into one short family story, attests to her ability to delve into what truly goes into making a family work in contemporary society.

Henricks writes very well, with humor and empathy. Some of the small details she interjects, such as Hannah's not-so-secret little crush on Chuck Norris in reruns of *Walker, Texas Ranger*—"eye candy," as she calls him—are positively hilarious. Despite some potentially grim topics, Henricks succeeds at presenting a realistic, inspiring tale that is actually a delight to read. Her characters' lives are far from perfect, but the warmth and love they radiate is hard to resist. These are people who try to understand one another; theirs is a home where family and friends are welcomed with open arms.

Aged to Perfection is easy to enjoy. Particularly for women who appreciate a good, solid, clean story about normal, everyday life, spending an evening with Hannah, Janice, their assorted friends, and the kids will prove to be a heartwarming experience.

CHERYL HIBBARD (November 14, 2012)

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