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Self-Help

Eavesdropping: As Real Women Talk about the Gifts and Challenges of Aging
Kendra T. Brown
Rainbow Books
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Kendra Brown is a psychologist in Florida who meets regularly with accomplished women—whom she calls "The Pages"—who share their wisdom about aging. "In my private practice, I've been amazed to see so many women who are very depressed—despite having adequate resources of money, time, experience and education. It saddens and frustrates me to see how lost they seem," writes Brown.

Late in the book, we meet these real women through their own words. Meanwhile, their dialogue and the book's message are introduced in the voices of six women whose group meetings are anonymously transcribed by an imaginary eavesdropper and narrated by a leader named Eleanor, who emphasizes the importance of forethought and planning: "Even though we have more time than our grandma did, we need to face the fact that lifetimes have limits and that we are in the final years," she says. "It becomes terribly important to take ourselves off automatic pilot—to consider and reconsider who we are now, who we want to be and what attributes and resources we have."

Eschewing a culture of youth that can leave women stuck without a plan in later life, and often without inspiring or useful role models, Brown notes, "I prefer Margaret Meade's attitude: She believed that women about the age of fifty, having finished the nesting stage of their lives, are poised to do some of their best work."

Brown's chapters cover topics such as remaining relevant and solvent, relatives and children, changing relationships, loss of partners, sex and late-life coupling, creating an intentional village, new living situations, and making choices. A thoughtful appendix addresses creating an ethical will.

As Brown points out, "The world we live in today is very different from the one experienced by most of our female mentors. We believe it's very important to share the realities of being an older woman in today's world, because there are thousands of women, like us, who

need new patterns for aging and living well."

Only the contrived format is troubling in this valuable book. Eventually, one hopes to hear more about how to age intentionally from the authentic voices of Kendra Brown and her wise women, with less "eavesdropping" and more direct talk from women who are not only surviving, but thriving.

Pamela Harris Kaiser