



Pearls: Women's Wisdom on Growing Older

Dot Nuechterlein

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Full of positive messages about women and aging, Pearls is an upbeat collection of folk wisdom.

Retired sociologist Dot Nuechterlein's *Pearls* gathers personal testimonies on aging from over eighty women; the book represents over 1000 observations in total.

Drawn from surveys and focus groups that Nuechterlein facilitated, the women's comments concern the social, physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of aging, and are arranged to facilitate jumping between topics of interest. Further, the topics are summarized at the front of their chapters, and this advance contextualization serves as an effective bridge.

Though the book makes room for a number of voices, its general tone is consistent and perky. There's self-deprecating humor about wrinkles and other outward aspects of aging involved, but the general attitude is one that makes the best of circumstances. Both the summaries and testimonies evince this goal. In the process, the book indulges in occasional platitudes, including that "age brings life's experiences, which gives one wisdom."

The contributing women, who are referred to as the Pearls, speak with awareness that their words will be shared with others; their language is conversational, and they forward occasional advice to other women who are aging, colored by a sense that everyone is in the process together. Acknowledging that some women "are terrified of growing older," the book includes voices that "inspire us to face our futures with courage and the confidence that life is worth living at all stages."

However, the book's emphasis on maintaining a positive attitude limits how it addresses the complexities involved in aging internally. Some of this work is trusted to the audience: the book includes questions to prompt deeper audience reflection after the fact. They come after each chapter, and include tough inquiries like "How do you deal with the inevitability of death?"

Nuechterlein acknowledges she was acquainted with most of the focus group participants and survey respondents, who were most often educated, Midwestern, middle-class, heterosexual, Christian, white women. Still, this limited demographic focus narrows the universal elements of the book further; the experiences and perspectives of a huge swath of the population are not as well represented here. Though questions about charged topics like sex and money, which are universal concerns, appeared in the survey, they are reflected most in the book's back matter, not in the covered responses. Menopause, which the book notes as a critical marker in the lives of women, is largely avoided in the book proper, as most of the Pearls did not respond to the question, "What has been your experience with menopause?"

Full of positive messages about women and aging, *Pearls* is an upbeat collection of folk wisdom from a generally Midwestern demographic.

MICHELE SHARPE (July 16, 2021)

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