

The Time of Our Lives: Memories and Fantasies of a Blissful Nonagenarian

Elliot Schubert

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The Time of Our Lives is a unique short story collection embellished with touches of whimsy.

In a charming blend of fact and fiction, Elliot Schubert shares decades of garnered wit and wisdom in *The Time of Our Lives: Memories and Fantasies of a Blissful Nonagenarian*, a nostalgic collection of short stories introducing a pair of skinny-dipping newlyweds, a burlesque queen, a depressed cockatiel, and an invisible grandson, among others.

Now in his nineties, Schubert looks back at life during the Great Depression, World War II, and beyond. He reflects on his boyhood and coming-of-age in Chicago, time spent as an ensign in the navy, and roles as a husband and father. He navigates through the mysteries of faith, family, baseball, and girls—not necessarily in that order.

Organized into more than thirty brief chapters, a clock face is used to show the hands of time, always moving onward, at the opening of every story. Each vignette is thoughtful and entertaining, covering a wide variety of topics and tones. Some of it is humorous, like recalling learning how to kiss (it's "like sucking on a lemon"). Some is health-conscious, as with "Pickles and Bagels." Some issues are weightier, as when the book covers the racial attitudes of the 1960s. Schubert experiences discrimination in "Life as a Jew" and the death of a loved one in "Laid to Rest."

The narrative voice and lighthearted commentary segue seamlessly into moments of introspection and insight. Scenarios flow in loosely chronological order, with occasional jumps forward and backward in time. Stories are fanciful and imaginative. Schubert's family proves to be a delightful mix of traditionally devout and playfully irreverent characters: his fun-loving wife convinces him to visit a strip club after catching a show at the Studebaker Theater, with his prim and proper mother and father in tow.

For the most part, chapters function as independent stories or as a series of related anecdotal musings. Taken collectively, they unfold in the style and tone of a memoir. There are three distinct exceptions, the only tales not narrated by Schubert himself or related to his family. These seem misplaced, though their inclusion is rationalized in the foreword; they clash with the overall harmony of the compilation.

With its diverse assortment of colorful characters and an undeniable appreciation for the joy found in the everyday, this is a unique short story collection embellished with touches of whimsy.

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (February 27, 2018)

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