

Don't Stop Now

Making the Most of the Rest of Your Life

Book Excerpt

Preface

Look over your shoulder. Who do you see? A cool college coed? A successful businesswoman? A meticulous homemaker? A devoted wife? An adoring mother? A respected member of the community?

Now look in the mirror. Are any of those women still there, or is nothing left but their shadows?

Let's be honest here, ladies. We're in the second half of our lives, and it's probably the most confusing era we've ever experienced. We've accomplished a lot to date—much of it sweetly, satisfyingly mundane; some of it dramatically impressive—but where do we go from here?

For years, we've worked hard—in business, at home, as volunteers. We've been contributing members of society throughout our adult lives, and now the questions loom: *What's next? Is that all there is? Have I done enough? Do I have it in me to do more?*

By the age of fifty-five or so, we tumble gracelessly into the category of senior. What does that even mean? In its best iteration, it translates to a 10 percent discount at Ross every Tuesday; ordering off the senior menu at Denny's, which is nothing more than smaller portions; carrying an AARP membership card, demonstrating proof that we're officially old; and getting a free pass to Silver Sneakers if we have the appropriate supplemental insurance. Big whoop.

Our generation was raised on sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, and many of us who survived still have some of that wild energy to burn. Clearly, a mini stack of blueberry pancakes at 5:30 p.m. isn't going to cut it. We want to continue to be involved, excited, and enthusiastic about life in ways that have meaning to us and to our loved ones.

Some women find great satisfaction in helping to raise their grandchildren, but there are others who want that—and more. Remember what it felt like to go to your first rock concert, to see a light show, to backpack through Europe? That person is still buried in there somewhere, and she wants to get out really, really badly. She wants to capture life and enjoy all the time she has left. She wants to leave a mark, letting the world know she has made a difference—however small it might be.

Aging is not for sissies. We can't just sit back and hope that something wonderful will suddenly happen. Gone are the days when fresh, sparkling youth might have opened doors of opportunity. As years pass, we must work harder to find what fulfills us. We're exploring uncharted territory, to be sure, but it still harbors secrets, delights, and promises. It's simply up to us to find them.

As we move into this unknown future, we have choices to make. Will we accept the invisibility that plagues women as age diminishes beauty and disguises character? Will we stop pushing our bodies into fitness because it's starting to hurt too much? Will we give our brains a break from work? Will we simply let go and give up? Or will we continue to figure out ways to grow—bringing vital, creative contributions to our world and expanding the definition of age-appropriate?

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, because the aging process is a different journey for each of us. Some of us have physical conditions that prevent our bodies from moving as we'd like. Others have financial constraints that keep dreams at bay. But life is more about attitude than accounting. It's about seizing what's at our disposal and making it work for us. It's about doing what we love as often as possible until we are forced to stop.

MAKING THE MOST OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

Attitude is one of the few things that is ours alone. When we take control of our attitude, we take control of our life.

As we age, we tend to lose control over many things. We slow down, our reflexes aren't what they used to be, and our bodies begin to fail us. We can't walk as far or stay up as late as we used to. We stop driving at night because our vision isn't very sharp. Memory loss sets in, and we lose names to familiar faces, forget book and movie titles, and repeat ourselves. We begin to complain, and eventually we might complain a lot because we don't feel as good as we want to. We chalk it all up to aging, and some of us are just plain bitter and pissed off at what is simply part of the living process.

So how do we rage against the inevitable? How can we be happy in this stage of our lives given the issues that can't be avoided?

We'll let you in on a little secret we learned from Martha Washington: "The greater part of our happiness or misery depends upon our dispositions, and not upon our circumstances." In other words, cultivate a positive attitude. Stop bitching and complaining and start being curious, enthusiastic, attentive and—how's this for a concept?—interesting! Most important of all, have fun—and not just once in a while. Do something enjoyable. Every. Single. Day.

Take a moment now to think about your idea of fun. Is it an early-morning walk before your neighborhood is awake? Running with your dog in the woods? Linger in bed on Sundays watching Netflix? Enjoying fine dining? Shopping for shoes? Lunching with the girls? Organizing your closet? Spending hours working in the garden? Write down the things that make you happy.

Make a point of experiencing some of life's little pleasures each day. And perhaps once a month, do something special. Maybe it's a weekend of theatre and museums in the closest major city. A visit to a beach town. A trip to wine country. Antiquing. The symphony or a rock concert. Whatever sets your heart aflutter.

DISCOVERING STRATEGIES

To help you find your way through the maze of life after fifty, this book will provide tips, suggestions, and inspiration. We'll share the behaviors that have proved fruitful and steer you away from the ones that are head-bangingly ineffective. We'll introduce you to *real* women who've discovered *real* solutions to the dilemmas that plague us as we make our way through the rest of our lives. They share their stories with a frank openness, demonstrating a sweet sisterhood that links us all together.