

The Beauty of Aging Well

If we put our political opinions to one side, could we agree that Jane Fonda '55 is aging spectacularly? She may have made controversial decisions along the way, but could we focus on who she is in her eighth decade of life?

In May I had the privilege—and it was a privilege—of seeing her star in *33 Variations*, for which she received a Tony nomination as Best Performance by a Leading Actress. After a two-hour, emotional performance during which she transformed herself from a strident, competent intellectual to a terminally ill, bedridden ALS patient, she graciously invited our Emma contingent of alumnae and students to join her on stage for a lively conversation about her life, her plans, and her new body

parts. After flippantly referring to a hip replacement, she smiled broadly, energetically sharing the news that she was off to trek in the Himalayas next year. After eight shows a week, on her day off she flew to Toronto for a speaking engagement at a women's shelter; home in time for the next grueling show the day after. And she finds time to blog at www.janefonda.com. Does this sound like the 70-somethings you know?

What is it that enables some women to exude an aura of wellness, tranquility, and good health, while others of the same age sag and drag? Is it diet, yoga, leg lifts, loving partners, or wealth? Perhaps it is meditation, a successful career, spare parts, or supportive friends. I have read enough shallow articles in women's magazines to know that everyone has an opinion. Eleanor Roosevelt once noted: "In the long run, we shape

our lives and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And the choices we make are ultimately our responsibility." I think she may have been closer to the truth of the matter on well-being than the last *Oprah* article I read about the importance of stimulating the vagus nerve, which lies "in the general vicinity of our cleavage."

Yup, I am sticking with Eleanor and Jane on this one. I believe that the feeling of being in control, of steering the boat, being the captain of your destiny has much to do with the glow of satisfaction that women aging well wear like a crown. And you have to keep steering, keep choosing the adventure. Always. Think about the older—yes, older—women you most admire. What do you notice? It isn't their healthy skin, their perfect teeth, their well-coifed appearance, or their fashion choices—the things we all wanted because an ad campaign convinced us we would be incomplete without them. It is their wise eyes, or their authentic energy, or their sincerity. We feel embraced by their genuine smile, uplifted by their ability to tell a story, heard by their carefully cocked ear. We know they have lived interesting lives because they have made interesting choices. We want to be in their presence. We want to learn from them.

I love my work because I spend much time with joy-filled, amazing women of all ages. I am going to be an interesting old woman because I have learned from them that my choices will make that so. What choices are you making today that will ensure your glow of good health? If you are not quite certain, I urge you to seek out a wrinkled woman with laughing eyes and ask her to tell you a story. Let me know if you think there is a better way to grow old with grace. **e**

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