



Fountain of Age

Betty Friedan

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Struggling to hold on to the illusion of youth, Friedan wrote, we have denied the reality and evaded the new triumphs of growing older. We have seen age only as decline. In this powerful and very personal book, Betty Friedan charted her own voyage of discovery, and that of others, into a different kind of aging.

Friedan found ordinary men and women, moving into their fifties, sixties, seventies, discovering extraordinary new possibilities of intimacy and purpose. In their surprising experiences, Friedan first glimpsed, then embraced, the idea that one can grow and evolve throughout life in a style that dramatically mitigates the expectation of decline and opens the way to a further dimension of "personhood."

The Fountain of Age suggests new possibilities for every one of us, all founded on a solid body of startling but little-known scientific evidence. It demolishes those myths that have constrained us for too long and offers compelling alternatives for living one's age as a unique, exuberant time of life, on its own authentic terms.

Fountain of Age Details

Date : Published August 1st 2006 by Simon Schuster (first published September 1st 1993)

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Author : Betty Friedan

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From Reader Review Fountain of Age for online ebook

Barbara Osterdock says

I own this book

Mary says

Friedan was always ahead of the curve. Her discussion of how difficult it was to find research on aging that did not involve the 'problems.' She included interesting stories from people actually trying to negotiate aging in a society that values youth.

Margaret says

I hate to admit this, but I skimmed most of this book. It is a bit dated, having been published in 2001. I think I would have stopped reading it early in the book, but I kept thinking there would be some momentously sage advice or pronouncement. The narrative style mixed in with the descriptions of Aging and Care of Aged didn't hold my attention. . . until the part where the author went on an Outward Bound excursion. I can relate to Outward Bound because it used to be based in my area, so reading about Betty Friedan rappelling off the side of Table Rock Mountain (which is in my backyard) was very interesting! Too bad the rest of the book wasn't.

Lily says

Okay. Some worthwhile insights from a fully lived life.

Deborah Robinson says

Very relevant today with the ageing population. I may read it again!

Frank says

Listened to this one on tape.

Nice look at what to do about our weird obsession with not dying.

I particularly liked her call for elder care physicians to approach dying less like a disease to be cured or postponed, and more like an eventually to be managed.

Pointed out the cost issue, and the dangers of controlling costs through care, but also the necessity of this. Would like to read more on this particular part of the problem.

Suzanne says

This is a book which, intrigued by the title, I picked up some years ago but didn't read beyond the preface. Now, facing mandatory retirement, I picked it up again and found it inspirational. While carefully researched with many interactions with gerontologists and other "professionals" of age, the book is essentially a personal odyssey, an exploration of dealing with aging and the opening up of a whole new range of possibilities through generativity. The latter term is not a familiar one but essentially involves drawing from the fountain of age to work with and through other generations to build something new and whole. Ms Friedan draws parallels with her work on the feminine mystique emphasizing a similar need to break through barriers but in a less confrontational way.

The book follows a logical progression, initially dealing with issues of denial and fear of aging, the loss of intimacy, hurdles of retirement and death of loved ones. But there is always hope and often discovery and renewal together with an increasing sense of comfort in being oneself. I found her adventures in Going Beyond on an Outward Bound wilderness survival expedition a little extreme for my taste! but could still appreciate why older people wanted to do something like that and the sense of achievement when accomplished. Ms Friedan continuously militates against the perception of age in terms of requirements for care and shows convincingly how greater involvement in the community and mutual looking out for each other by peers can result in a much more satisfying life.

This is not a book to read in a hurry. Each chapter offers much for reflection and should be savoured. Ms Friedan put her findings and the understanding she gained through the research for this book to good use in her own life, remaining active and involved with her work and community into her eighties. We would be well-advised to follow suit and this book can help us on the journey.

Fran Linhart says

thought provoking; now that I'm turning 60, I should read it again.

Amy Hearth says

I was disappointed by this book. It was intended to be groundbreaking but it wasn't. Also, same old elitist point of view from Friedan. (See my review of Feminine Mystique.)

Elizabeth Alford says

Amazing book. A must read for those interested in thoughtful discussion on our youth-obsessed culture

Ellyn Lem says

When I read Atul Gawande's *On Being Mortal* and *What Matters in the End*, I thought it was a life-changing book in that he gave so much insight into how our growing older population should be treated and valued as they make decisions about the remaining part of their lives. Little did I know at the time that Betty Friedan (of legendary Feminine Mystique status) twenty years BEFORE Gawande and brought up some of the very same ideas and more. This book should be required reading for anyone post-fifty as Friedan takes on every facet of aging (from sex to creativity to housing choices to women living eight years longer than men and countless other topics). With incredibly in-depth scholarly research and a seemingly infinite amount of interviews, she challenges so many conventionally held ideas about aging (e.g., losing brain cells as we age) and shows how aging can be freeing of the inner depths of who we are. It is a really long book (almost 650 pages), and it is hard to read it fast since each page contains fascinating material that I have not seen elsewhere. . . so I would advise people to take their time but make it from cover to cover. If you do, this is the gem you will come across by the end: "There will not have to be such dread and denial . . . in living their age if we use our own age in new adventures, breaking the old rules and inhibitions, changing the patterns and possibilities of love and work, learning and play, worship and creation, discovery and political responsibility, and resolving the seeming irreconcilable conflicts between them." I may not be able to go on an Outward Bound rafting trip when I am 65, like Friedan describes going on, but I sure hope that I am still writing book at least have as good as this one around the same age.

Karen says

Friedan takes on a worthy project: dispelling the myth that aging means decline, detachment and decay. She's right to challenge the ageism pervasive in our society. We too often objectify older adults, even when we seek to take good care of them. We end up infantilizing them, robbing them of their personhood.

The aim of her book is a 5/5 star rating. The execution is 3/5.

She is plagued by three problems: 1) She's long-winded (636 pages!). She gives an avalanche of evidence for each major claim, to the point where she often repeats herself. 2) She's immersed in class privilege. Many of her stories talk about attorneys, film directors, business executives, doctors, lawyers and artists tackling aging challenges with travel, building fancy homes, starting not-for-profits, etc. 3) Hyperbole. She forces some of her data into her major claim.

But I can almost forgive this because so much of the mainstream press uses hyperbole to describe the losses of age. (And there are some real losses, but we can gain spiritual insight in response and find new opportunities in the wake of loss.)

It's a powerful book. I just wish she had made it 300 pages instead.

Here are her chapter titles:

1. Denial and the "Problem" of Age

2. The Two Faces of Age
3. The Youth Short Circuit
4. Why Do Women Age Longer and Better than Men?
5. Beyond the Masculinity of Youth
6. The Retirement Paradox
7. Chosen Human Work
8. Intimacy Beyond the Dreams of Youth
9. Going Beyond
10. Coming into a New Place
11. To Move or to Stay
12. At Home in a New Place
13. A Paradigm Shift from "Cure"
14. Beyond Symptoms and Disease
15. The New Menopause Brouhaha
16. The Nursing Home Specter
17. Dying with Life
18. Age as Adventure
19. Generativity

Drew says

Feminist Betty Friedan debunks many myths about old age as she shifts then rejuvenates our perspective about what "the third age of life" might mean if we approached it with curiosity, engagement and a sense of utility. Contrary to the constant rhetoric and the general consensus, most of us will not get Alzheimer's or end up in nursing homes so what are we to do with our final years? Though published in 1993, this tome (600+ pages) has much wisdom to impart that doesn't show the wear and tear of time.

Ellen says

I like this path of thought. Just say no to medicare drugs. You are only as old as you feel and don't let anyone tell you what you are suppose to feel. It's your life, make the most of it. Age is nothing but mind over matter, if you don't mind, it doesn't matter.

Karen Kortsch says

Very interesting look at the evolving mind of Betty Friedan. Very long book. Took forever to finish. Lots of interesting ideas on aging to contemplate.
