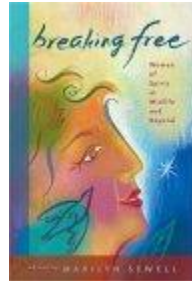


Book Reviews

Breaking Free: Women of Spirit at Midlife and Beyond **edited by Marilyn Sewell**



reviewed by Pat Hoertdoerfer

Sewell, Marilyn, editor. *Breaking Free: Women of Spirit at Midlife and Beyond*. Beacon Press, Boston, 2004. ISBN 0807028258. Reviewed by Pat Hoertdoerfer.

This anthology for women searching for spiritual guideposts to the second half of life includes essays by Isabel Allende, Maya Angelou, Vivian Gornick, Erica Jong, Audre Lorde, Grace Paley, Gloria Steinem, Terry Tempest Williams, Susan Griffin, Barbara Hurd, and Marilyn Sewell. In these twenty-seven essays the authors examine what age and life have taught them, meditate on their experiences, and reflect on where they have arrived. In her introduction Marilyn Sewell, senior minister at First Unitarian Church in Portland, OR, notes that "around the age of fifty or so many women begin to loosen from cultural constraints, to become their own persons, in ways they perhaps have not dared to do previously. They begin to become less defined by others and more by their own choices. It is a time rich with possibility for personal and spiritual growth." In Part I: Necessary Losses, authors note that time takes from them youth and vigorous health, relationships falter and shift, and illness can destroy careless assumptions. The questions they ask are: "How did we come to be here? What's next?" In Part II: Breaking Free, authors share their surprising sense of freedom and their breaking into new territory. They describe how "our lives and spirits deepen...and how we bless the world with what we have become."

Sewell concludes her introduction with an invitation to us to contemplate these writers' intimate reflections for "they have lived long enough and written extensively enough to come to an expression that is their very own and no other. Visiting with them...is like looking at a handful of gemstones, all cut in different forms, all in various sizes and colors, some more complex than others, but all standing on their own particular

loveliness and authenticity." From Susan Griffin telling us how her lifelong activism has shifted to become more compassionate in nature to Audre Lorde sharing her raw courage as she meets the challenge of breast cancer to Erica Jong concluding "I am old enough to know that laughter, not anger, is the true revelation."

Breaking Free: A Leader's Guide by Frances Caldwell is available here:

www.beacon.org/uuguides/Sewell_BreakingFree.html.

This five-session online program brings women together to discuss aging as the development of character, a breaking free of old restraints, and an opportunity to deepen their spiritual lives.

Contents:

- Session 1: Getting to Know One Another, the Book, and the Schedule; Activity—Creating Lifelines
- Session 2: Essay Discussion, Part I; Activity—Loss Tempered with Appreciation
- Session 3: Essay Discussion, Part 2; Activity—Aging Gracefully
- Session 4: Essay Discussion, Part 3; Activity—Learning From Experience and Finding Role Models
- Session 5: Essay Discussion, Part 4; Activity—Reading the Signs