



College Life of a Retired Senior: A Memoir of Perseverance, Faith and Finding the Way

Yvonne Blackwood

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The pithy memoir College Life of a Retired Senior is filled with stories from the life of a nontraditional student.

Amusing and inspiring, Yvonne Blackwood's memoir *College Life of a Retired Senior* is about pursuing higher education late in life.

After retiring from a successful career in banking, Blackwood (a strong believer in Einstein's dictum that "once you stop learning you start dying") decided to go back to school to complete an English degree. It was at once a way for her to satisfy old dreams, to ward off Alzheimer's, and to improve her writing skills. She faced mockery and incredulity when she told friends and family members that she was going to school, but she remained steadfast in her pursuit of her goal.

The book covers Blackwood's initial school struggles in a light manner. She worried about fashion ("What did students wear?"), the labyrinthine college bookstore, the school's immense library, and about finding a good place to eat. Here, at least, her bewilderment put her in the company of her eighteen-year-old classmates. But she also had the benefits of hindsight, and her book addresses changes in college education in the recent past. Blackwood had to adjust her expectations of what learning would look like in an era when people could take pictures of lecture notes with a smart phone instead of copying them down by hand. Culture clashes abound in her book, which is astute in observing how technology and society affect people's behavior inside the classroom.

Classes across campus are covered in the course of Blackwood's text, including food science, biblical studies, and Canadian literature. The book mines these for interesting facts, for example relaying discussions of Euripides and Hunter S. Thompson and the role that drugs played in their work. But its most distinguishing pages are those that explore the difficulties of being an older, motivated adult in college and of having to work with younger, sometimes irresponsible students with their own sets of goals. An anecdote about being ghosted during a group project is sympathetic, as is an account of being one of the few students not chosen for group work in another class.

While the book's lightheartedness makes it involving, it also indulges in some off-putting pettiness. There are mockeries of professors' physical appearances, including one professor's birthmark and another's clothing, that clash with compliments of their intelligence and commitment to teaching. Still, most of its treatments of other people are memorable and engaging, and its bemused treatments of younger generations (a contemporary of Blackwood's asks "What is it with this texting? Is it an addiction?") make it fun.

With pithy tales of generational clashes, the memoir *College Life of a Retired Senior* covers a late entry into higher education, sharing stories from the life of a nontraditional student.

MATT BENZING (March 27, 2023)

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