

A letter from the author.

Look into a mirror, who do you see? The woman you are, or the woman you remember? Does your image change when you pop on your glasses?

Remember opening an old photo album—no, not the one in Windows>C Drive>this PC> Library> Pictures—the physical album with Polaroids wrinkling at the corners, to find a woman you barely recognize with arms around *your* children? A woman without wrinkles or a droopy neck with cordlike lines? And hair, with color, not the absence of it?

How about a C-Section scar? If you have one, remember a time when you didn't? Or when the surgeon said, "... the positive biopsy necessitates a hysterectomy." The good news? He promised a bikini style scar. You know the one, horizontal, above your groin, guaranteed not to leave that ugly, vertical, skin-drooping scar down your abs. Good news? Yes, if you think a permanent tummy pouch is a plus.

Many physical and emotional scars are a challenge to overcome or hard to forget. There are joys too, but as age creeps over us, we tend to examine the scars, the misses, and the losses.

Me? I keep looking back at decades, wondering how I could have wasted so much time worrying about nonsense, nonsense over which I had no control. It just stole time from accomplishments. Oh, don't get me wrong. I've done a lot...but what if I had let the *real* me escape the PC politeness, the need to perform stereotypical behavior of so many roles. Roles I embraced to keep the peace, hide my feelings, and avoid embarrassing myself, my family, or friends. What if I had said exactly what I felt or thought? What would I be today? A CEO, a president? Would I be remarried? Would I be in jail? Would I be a woman I don't recognize?

The more I examine my past, the less ashamed I am, the less regret I have. Oh, I still have regrets, but the list is much shorter. The more I recall, the more I treasure the lessons learned, the rules I followed. And I've come to like the woman I've become—*no, love the woman I've become*, wrinkles, sags, and all.

What if all of us had a "safe space" in college to escape the slights and the arrows of a different opinion? Would we be able to listen to the other side and agree to disagree, or would we label and

condemn them because *we are right* and *they are wrong*— like many collegians seeking “safe space” on campus today—and getting it!

And what if we had helicopter moms who taught us that *everyone is a winner, and we all get a trophy?* Would we have competed against others to go after the jobs and the salaries we wanted—and earned?

I remember my mom saying, “If you didn’t win the trophy, honey, it means that someone worked a little harder than you did today. Try harder tomorrow; maybe it will be your turn.”

My mother was alive with aphorisms— her very own and those she adopted.

Ah, but if I had those *luxuries*, and I use that word choice with a decided smirk, I don’t think I could look back and be proud of what I’ve done, what I thought, and what I’ve personally experienced and accomplished, or what women before me have.

And as for doing wrong, my mom’s punishments usually made an impact. She designed them to match the crime. Hurling insults at others meant spending an evening writing 100 different positive observations, while uncalled for criticisms meant offering a new and different complement each day for two weeks to the one criticized—in a public place where others were present, no less. Today, we often free many of the guilty, while many victims suffer in perpetuity.

Looking back and remembering, both good and bad, makes one reassess one’s life. One’s country. One’s political views. Especially now, when birthdays arrive faster and faster with more and more wrinkles, grey hair, and a few extra pounds to remind us, the time ahead is getting shorter. The regrets for not having said something or not having done something rise to the top of those memories.

Be you 60, 70, 80, even 90, I hope many of these pages prompt you to erase some of your regrets, replacing them with renewed goals, laughter, and images of friends who shared your secrets, your tears, your confessions, and your dreams. Mostly, I hope you take on a Rhet Butler attitude and mouth his words, loud and clear: “My dear, I don’t give a damn.” (*For those under 40, Rhet Butler was a character played by Clark Gable in the movie version of Margaret Mitchell’s 1936 bestseller, Gone with the Wind.*)

Unfortunately, GWTW is being removed from many movie line-ups for being offensive. The historical significance of the book and movie is evidently irrelevant.

Join me and reunite with those who have escaped your circle: *married* friends who followed the path of a husband or wife, *family* lost for the sake of ego, *friends* sent away because of disagreement and pride, *lovers* you lost to another, and *crushes* you failed to admit loving. Say hello, say I miss you, say I wanted to know how you were doing, say I always cared, say please forgive me, I forgive you, say I still love you.

Erase your regrets. Fill your memories with those warm feelings, silly images, youthful mistakes, words, and thoughts that bring a smile to your heart. Re-live every moment and love it. And don't regret your honest reactions to the world we are living in today.

The following pages do not represent a traditional memoir. They are this author's compilation of the words, daring deeds, beliefs, reflections, and actions of six women. Friends. Six very close friends. Their memories and the stories they lived before turning 50 and the years beyond. Heartfelt feelings. Frustrations. Honest reactions and emotions about yesterday and today.

The women's' *names* are fictional, but their actions are accurate, their expressions are real, their beliefs are embedded in their souls, and their conversations are genuine.

Come. Meet six friends in their senior years who are irreverent and unapologetic women—real women, most definitely *too young to be this old*.

L.C. Blackwell