

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Mary Pipher graduated in Cultural Anthropology from the University of California at Berkeley in 1969 and received her Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska in Clinical Psychology in 1977. She was a Rockefeller Scholar in Residence at Bellagio and has received two American Psychological Association Presidential Citations, one of which she returned to protest psychologists' involvement in enhanced interrogations at Guantánamo and other black sites.

Mary was born in the Ozarks and grew up in rural Nebraska. As a girl she liked reading, writing, swimming, being outdoors and talking to her friends and family. She still enjoys these activities. She is also a community organizer and activist for many causes. She lives in Nebraska with her husband Jim.

Pipher is the author of 10 books including her number one New York Times bestseller *Reviving Ophelia*; and her most recent, *Women Rowing North: Navigating Life's Currents and Flourishing As We Age*.

- [Author's website](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The book's title, *Women Rowing North*, evokes the common metaphor of life as a stream and also the visual of navigating the current, both as a single kayaker and in community as a larger crew of supportive women. Before beginning this book, how would you have described your life? What does your vessel look like, your stream's current, and your crewmates? A lone dinghy on the open sea? A river cruise in full swing? Has that view changed by the conclusion of this book?
2. Each chapter starts with a small collection of quotes. Which, if any, provoked strong emotions of agreement or disagreement, and why?
3. In the introduction, Dr. Pipher discusses the extended life expectancy in various countries, the difference between being young-old and old-old, and how the shift from one to another is based on life experiences rather than chronological time. How would you classify yourself and why?

4. In the introduction, Dr. Pipher shares what she considers to be the core foundation for happiness, such as emotional resilience, positive attitudes, gratitude, and intentionality. Do you agree? What else would you add?
5. The author describes an experience where she finds a cholla cactus with branches dying even as new growth flourished and compares it to the experience of growing older. In looking at your own life, what new offshoots are flourishing?
6. Dr. Pipher quotes a seventy-year-old friend as saying, "I'm invisible now. I could take off all my clothes and walk through the courthouse and I'm not sure anyone would notice." Do you feel this is true? Why or why not? In thinking back through your own life, who were the visible older women in your life, and what did they do to make themselves seen and heard?
7. In early chapters, Dr. Pipher talks of crucible moments and of the transformations that can come from defining events. What crucible moments have defined your life, and how have they changed you?
8. In Chapter Eight, the author tells her niece, "You can't navigate from there to here if you don't know where you are." She then ties that advice to knowing ourselves before we chart our course. Each woman's path is unique, but which of the women in the stories most resembled you? Independent Kestrel? Accommodating Emma? Career-driven Willow? Overburdened Sylvia?
9. The same chapter also discusses the difficulty in saying no and the freedom in using that word judiciously. Do you find it difficult to say no? How can you set reasonable limits for yourself?
10. Chapter Nine discusses intentionality, especially intentionality in wealth, whether that be financial wealth or an abundance in other resources. One definition of wealth Dr. Pipher offers is "the number of people I am in loving relationships with." How do you define wealth?
11. In discussing how to build a good day, Dr. Pipher explains the difference between a minimizer and a maximizer. A minimizer is happy with "good enough" while a maximizer, always wants a little more. Which category do you fall into? What are the advantages and disadvantages of both categories?
12. On page 149, Dr. Pipher writes "We can slowly train ourselves to think in stories that allow us to flourish. We hone our skills in perspective taking, emotional processing, and reframing. Stories of joy, kindness, and courage empower us in ways that the culturally stereotyped narrative never does." Think back to a difficult time in your life. What narrative did you craft in the moment? How did it affect how you reacted? And, in looking back, has that narrative changed over time?
13. Dr. Pipher looks at the different kind of happiness, from joy to contentment to excitement to deep-rooted meaningfulness. When evaluating your own happiness, which of these (or another kind you define) are you most focused on? Has your definition changed over your lifetime, and if so, what's changed it?
14. Part of who we become is rooted in our experiences from childhood onward, in the people we have met, and in the choices we've made. Few of us have become who we set out to be. Think of who you were in a crucial

time of life—as a young child, as an uncertain adolescent, as an independent young adult, or as a middle-aged woman. What would that version of you think of who you’ve become today? What would she like? Be surprised by? What are your proudest areas of growth?

15. Near the end of the book, the author’s friend Sally exclaims, “Getting old is a freaking privilege!” Do you agree or disagree, and has that view changed at all while reading *Women Rowing North*?

- <https://readinggroupchoices.com/books/women-rowing-north/>

BOOK REVIEWS

Publisher’s Weekly

/ Starred Review */* Pipher (The Green Boat), best known for challenging the cultural perspective on teenage girls in 1994’s bestselling *Reviving Ophelia*, brings her professional skill as a cultural anthropologist and her personal experience as a woman transitioning from middle age to old age to a work chock-full of wisdom and consoling messages. Attentive to varying experiences of class, race, gender, health, and marital status, even as she considers the deep “challenges of aging, including ageism and lookism, caregiving, loss, and loneliness,” Pipher offers practical, specific advice. This includes walking readers through “deep breathing and centering exercises,” grandparenting “intentionally,” and dealing with end-of-life care. She pays particular attention to the importance of finding community, warning against the trap of becoming isolated, and rattling off a multitude of suggestions—readers could join a book group, “learn to kayak” (per the title), or “volunteer to teach English to refugees.” While a must-read for its target audience of women moving into old age, Pipher’s engaging book is an ought-to-read for their daughters and sons as well, as it sets forth the universal message that “happiness is a choice and a set of skills.” Agent: Susan Lee Cohen, Riverside Literary Agency. (Jan.) --Staff (Reviewed 07/16/2018) (Publishers Weekly, vol 265, issue 29, p).

Library Journal

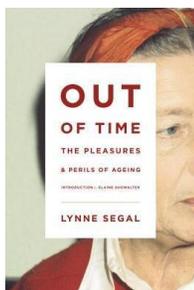
/ Starred Review */* Pipher entered the national psychological/literary stage with 1994’s *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, which addressed how teen girls, deluged with images of beauty and sexuality and societal demands, fall into depression, eating disorders, and low self-esteem. Now, after several other books, the renowned psychologist turns to the subject of older women to help navigate the muddy and turbulent waters of aging. Her message is uplifting and calming: now is the time of authenticity, gratitude, and adapting—to anything. Pipher’s skill of listening to clients and parsing meaning is evident in this volume filled with stories of women in the throes of change. She advises altering ways of thinking and behaving as we age, as we are no longer just older versions of our younger selves. But hers is not a one-solution-fits-all, as she urges readers to make a difference and take it easy, to know boundaries and offer wisdom, to understand what to accept and what demands our flexibility. VERDICT Pipher’s tribute to older women everywhere—those skilled, knowledgeable, and very wise—is simple: get involved, sit back, enjoy your life, be grateful, cherish every day. You’ve earned your happiness. [See “Editors’ Fall Picks,” LJ 8/18.] --Linda Beck (Reviewed 10/15/2018) (Library Journal, vol 143, issue 17, p68).

Kirkus Reviews

A distinguished clinical psychologist and bestselling author examines the personal and social issues that aging women face in modern American society. For women in transition between late-middle and old age, life becomes more difficult. Loss, especially through death, becomes the new norm as women see their bodies and minds

devalued by society. To help women navigate these late-life "turns in the river," Pipher (*The Green Boat: Reviving Ourselves in our Capsized Culture*, 2013, etc.) offers practical wisdom based on interviews, research, and her own experiences as a therapist and aging woman. In the first section, the author highlights "the challenges of the journey," which she illustrates with real-life anecdotes. As Pipher writes, TV, "movies, fashion, and advertising rarely reflect the needs and circumstances of older women." Women who formerly felt attractive experience a "crisis of confidence," and many women find their bodies becoming more limited due to illness or age. In the second section, Pipher focuses on "travel skills" women need to manage this part of the journey. The ability to accommodate change is key, as is creating a community of individuals with whom to communicate and deflect the isolation that too often comes with age. Reframing "situations in positive ways, being thankful, and giving to others" are also skills that can help ease the journey forward. In the third section, the author emphasizes the importance of relationships. Female friendships, in particular, can bring comfort and pleasure, and for those whose marriages have survived into old age, partners and families can become safe havens. But the most important relationship an aging woman has will always be with herself. As Pipher notes in the final section, one of the greatest gifts of old age is the loss of "false selves" carried earlier in the journey and the emergence of a whole and authentic self. Eloquently compassionate and sure to appeal to late-life women, Pipher's book draws from a deep well of insight that is both refreshing and spiritually aware. Thoughtful, wise, and humane. (Kirkus Reviews, October 15, 2018).

READALIKES



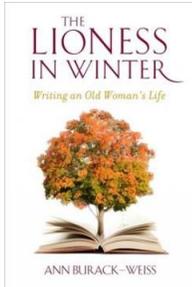
***Out of Time* by Lynn Segal**

A polemical argument on the paradoxes, struggles and advantages of aging evaluates the struggles of baby boomers who are facing new challenges and questions about politics and identity, exploring such topics as later-in-life desire, the diminished circumstances of older women and the problems of managing loss and mortality.



***I Feel Great About My Hands* by Shari Graydon**

Presents essays and poems that celebrate the positive side of aging for women rather than mourning over the loss of youthfulness.



***The Lioness in Winter* by Ann Burack-Weiss**

Ann Burack-Weiss, a gerontologist with more than forty years of experience, analyzes and engages with the writings of a dozen well-known authors for insights into old age. Featured are Maya Angelou, Colette, Simone de Beauvoir, Joan Didion, M.F.K Fisher, Doris Grumbach, Carolyn Heilburn, Doris Lessing, Florida Scott-Maxwell, May Sarton, Anne Roiphe, and Alexis Kate Shulman, among others, all of whom wrote about essential issues in old age including physical changes and disability, living alone, reflecting on and revaluing the past, generativity, public life, and the changing roles of family and friends.