



Beyond Nostalgia (Age Studies)

Ruth E. Ray

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For three years, Ruth E. Ray visited and participated in eight writing groups at six senior centers in inner-city and suburban Detroit, looking for ways in which the elderly fashion their memories through personal narrative. Her innovative book involves the reader in the construction of life stories as a richly rewarding and highly social process that often reveals the types of relationships that dominate the lives of group members, the majority of whom are women.

Because Ray wrote and responded herself and shares her anxiety and triumph in presenting her writing to women old enough to be her mother, some of a different race and class, *Beyond Nostalgia* is an excellent primer for professionals working with diverse groups in a variety of settings. It is also an important contribution to the emerging field of feminist gerontology. Ray's book demonstrates its own thesis that the presentation and negotiation of life stories in writing groups initiates change and personal growth among older people.

Drawing on personal observations, the give-and-take of meeting conversations, lengthy interviews, and the life stories themselves, Ray tells a story of adult development through personal narrative. She recreates the group process through which age peers begin to articulate what life means, both individually and collectively. The writing groups of older adults that Ray studied challenged their members to consider not just cultural influences, but generational effects on the evolving content and structure of their life stories.

Age, Ray argues, has been largely ignored by feminists and she makes a strong case for the need to learn how women make meaning of their lives across the life span. As an important document and analysis of that process, *Beyond Nostalgia* should appeal to academics and practitioners in women's studies, composition studies, gerontology, developmental psychology, sociology, social work, and linguistics, and to anyone who works with older people.

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