

One!

this in years to come. Slowly, I realised I needed to change. I started writing a diary for my own sanity and signed up to an MA Travel and Nature writing course at Bath Spa University, near my Gloucestershire home. I also joined Love Her Wild – a women's adventure community. It was through those avenues that I found like-minded – and wonderful – people. Women that had also raised families, had careers, cared for parents, suffered break-ups and bereavements. They were willing to share their experiences with me and it was comforting knowing that many had felt like I had but had found their way. I felt less alone, less isolated. And it got me thinking about writing a book. I'd never dreamt it would be something I'd do, but I wanted to help the next generation reclaim later life without the damaging labels. I approached a few people to see if they'd share their stories. Their own tales were heartfelt, inspiring and moving. Like Alex who had taken part in various ultramarathons despite undergoing bowel cancer treatment and Ginny who took over holiday

company Walking Women with her sister after her partner died. These women had also questioned their place in society – much like I had – and were equally exasperated by 'at your age' and 'past it' labels that were thrust upon us. During lockdown, I'd spoken to 50 women over Zoom, phone calls and distanced meetings when allowed. They shared the ups and downs of their journeys with me, and it made me more determined to get it down on paper. I wanted to write a book that I wanted to read and to break down some barriers. 'Are you sure, Mum?' my daughters asked. But I knew it was something I had to do. It gave me purpose, focus and started to redefine this new chapter. I still walked, went camping and socialised when I could, plus spent as much time with my granddaughters as possible. One day, I was reading a piece by an American writer – Jean Shinoda Bolen and she'd written about derogatory term for older women. She'd described not being dried up, that her brain hadn't turned to mush, and she wasn't ready to wear beige. It really struck a chord with me and I knew that's what I wanted to name the book. So, I emailed her, explained what I was doing and asked if I could use her brilliant phrase.

I NEEDED TO FIND WAYS TO SHAKE THE OFF 'GREIGE'

I'd be delighted she wrote back, wishing me luck with my venture. In January this year, we launched the book just after my 65th birthday. Friends and family came to support me, and I meant every word in my dedication. I hoped it would break down barriers and pave the way for the next generation, so they didn't find themselves lost after they retired. There are over 12 million post-menopausal women in the UK and over a billion worldwide that are full of wisdom and adventure. I'm happy to be at this stage of my life. I want younger women to know that ageing is a wonderful part of their future and I'm amazed to have published my first book at 65 – who knows what the next adventure might bring...



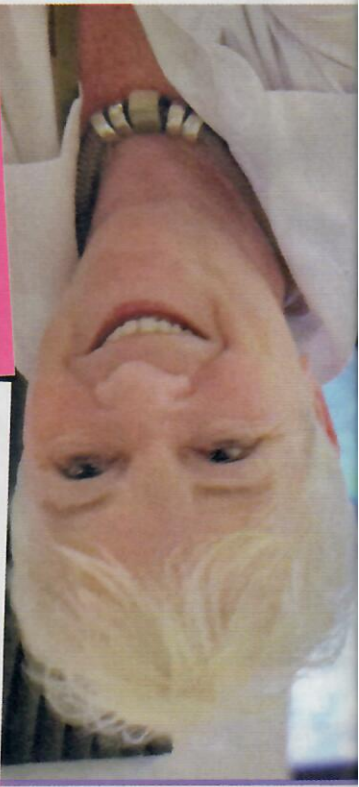
● **Juicy Crones: Free for the Strangest Adventures by Jay Courtney** is published by Bradt Guides, £9.99



...and still enjoys hikes



...made her friends



Jay's now free for 'The Strangest Adventures', as her book explains