

# TURN BACK TIME

Local author takes on aging

Anybody out there in this youth-obsessed USA who wants to read yet another word about aging? Or, if we really are youth-obsessed, maybe we want to learn everything we can to slow the march away from youngness?

That was Lauren Kessler's gamble when she wrote *Counterclockwise: One Midlife Woman's Quest to Turn Back the Hands of Time* (Rodale, 256 pages, \$24.99). At the same time her seventh book of narrative nonfiction hit the market in the spring, *Parade* magazine, that popular panderer, featured a "Special Report on the Youth Hormone." Yet another!

Disclaimer: This reviewer is at least 30 years older than Lauren Kessler (she playfully never reveals her precise age beyond "midlife" in the book). She is a friend, one of my favorite faculty members at the UO and is currently directing the graduate program in multimedia narrative journalism.

It took me less than a chapter to discover that her yearlong search into the \$88-billion-a-year anti-aging industry was both great fun and highly informative — a good read.

Kessler manages to be both a participant and observer at the same time. Sometimes she seems slightly embarrassed by the vanity exposed in her search for longevity, but she always writes with wry wit and humor, evoking a reality most of us share. We want to live well as we live longer, with or without vanity.

Sometimes she reveals more than I want to know: her low blood pressure, cholesterol level, stamina, "way too much" body fat, etc. But she puts herself through the leading popular anti-aging programs "so the reader doesn't need to do them," as she writes. All the measurements were necessary markers.

Kessler tries non-invasive plastic surgery, metabolic detoxes, a telomere blood test, raw foods, vitamins, hypnosis ... and that's only the beginning. Throughout the year on writing and researching her book, she studied the science, real or quackery, which accompanies all these options and in her own clear, hardheaded style puts the facts out there. This is rare in anti-aging literature. Her book merited a review in the June 4 science section of *The New York Times*.

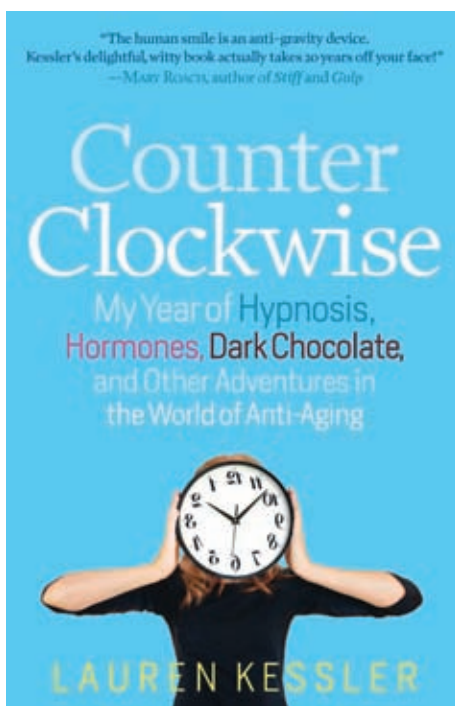
She also weaves her family warmly through her journey, from her teenage daughter baking too many cookies in the Kessler's Eugene kitchen to her great-great-grandmother, "Old Oldie," baking breakfast biscuits in Lauren's childhood home well into Oldie's tenth decade.

Here are two of my favorite takeaways from *Counter Clockwise*, a stimulating and challenging book even for an octogenarian:

"Because — although you may not want to hear this, although you may still be waiting for me to tell you that there's some easy, hitherto-unknown secret to staying youthful — it looks as if the hard, sweaty truth is: Exercise is IT."

And, some pages later:

"And optimism, according to what I'd been reading, is one of the keys, one of the 'secrets' to living young." ■



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