

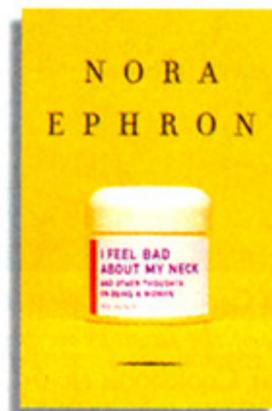
## [SIGNATURE]

Reviewed by TONI BENTLEY

## I Feel Bad About My Neck: And Other Thoughts on Being a Woman

NORA EPHRON. Knopf, \$19.95 (160p) ISBN 0-307-26455-6

The honest truth is that it's sad to be over sixty," concludes Nora Ephron in her sparkling new book about aging. With 15 essays in 160 pages, this collection is short, a thoughtful concession to pre- and post-menopausal women (who else is there?), like herself, who "can't read a word on the pill bottle," follow a thought to a conclusion, or remember the thought after not being able to read the pill bottle. Ephron drives the truth home like a nail in your soon-to-be-bought coffin: "Plus, you can't wear a bikini." But just as despair sets in, she admits to using "quite a lot of bath oil... I'm as smooth as silk." Yes, she is. This is aging lite—but that might be the answer. Besides, there's always Philip Roth for aging heavy.



Ephron, in fact, offers a brief anecdote about Roth, in a chapter on cooking, concerning her friend Jane, who had a one-night stand, long ago, with the then "up-and-coming" writer. He gave Jane a copy of his latest book. "Take one on your way out," he said. Conveniently, there was a box of them by the front door. Ephron refuses to analyze—one of her most refreshing qualities—and quickly moves on to Jane's *céleri remoulade*.

Aging, according to Ephron, is one big descent—and who would argue? (Well, okay—but they'd lose the argument if they all got naked.) There it is, the steady spiraling down of everything: body and mind, breasts and balls, dragging one's self-respect behind them. Ephron's witty riffs on these distractions are a delightful antidote to the prevailing belief that everything can be held up with surgical scaffolding and the drugs of denial. Nothing, in the end, prevents the descent.

While signs of mortality proliferate, Ephron offers a rebuttal of consequence: an intelligent, alert, entertaining perspective that does not take itself too seriously. (If you can't laugh, after all, you are already, technically speaking, dead.) She does, however, concede that hair maintenance—styling, dyeing, highlighting, blow-drying—is a serious matter, not to mention the expense. "Once I picked up a copy of *Vogue* while having my hair done, and it cost me twenty thousand dollars. But you should see my teeth."

Digging deeper, she discovers that your filthy, bulging purse containing numerous things you don't need—and couldn't find if you did—is, "in some absolutely horrible way, you." Ephron doesn't shy away from the truth about sex either, and confesses, though with an appropriate amount of shame, that despite having been a White House intern in 1961, she did not have an affair with JFK. May Ephron, and her purse, endure so she can continue to tell us how it goes. Or, at least, where it went.

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need a dog as much as I had needed him," Healy acknowledges, but he makes no apologies that "for whatever reason, my best pal possessed four legs instead of two." In Healy's heartfelt prose, this eccentric friendship becomes the core of a moving meditation on the mysterious nature of redemption. (Oct.)

## Out of Thin Air: Dinosaurs, Birds, and Earth's Ancient Atmosphere

PETER WARD. Joseph Henry, \$27.95 (276p) ISBN 0-309-10137-9

University of Washington paleontologist Ward (*Rare Earth*) clearly sets forth the premise of his provocative book: "changing atmospheric oxygen levels over the last 600 million years have caused significant evolutionary change in animals." He argues that, for extended periods, there was less than half the amount of oxygen present today in the atmosphere, and a need to develop respiratory systems to deal effectively with ambient oxygen levels has been the dominant factor in creating species diversity, extinctions and basic animal body plans. Ward takes readers on a tour from the Cambrian through the Permian to the Jurassic, examining the dominant life forms in each period and arguing that oxygen availability, or lack thereof, is responsible for the evolution of endothermy, egg shells, live births and most of the major extinctions in Earth's history. He also claims that dinosaurs were successful for so long because they were able to make use of primitive air sacs (that became fine-tuned in modern birds), thus enabling them to outcompete all others in their oxygen-depleted environment. Ward's ideas deserve careful scrutiny and are likely to be discussed broadly, although his often awkward writing gets in the way of his message. Illus. (Oct. 11)

## Jamestown: The Buried Truth

WILLIAM M. KELSO. Univ. of Virginia, \$29.95 (248p) ISBN 978-0-8139-2563-9

In what is certainly one of the more substantial of the many commemorative tomes that will be published as Jamestown, Va., turns 400, Kelso, head