A Menopausal Woman’s Grace and Frankie Review

by AFRA WILLMORE

Grace and Frankie and the Representation of Menopause

Don’t you just love it when you discover a new TV series? Getting to know new characters, learning who you love and who you love to hate? Sometimes you even find a storyline or character resonates with your own life.

I recently discovered Netflix’s *Grace and Frankie*. I know — late to the party right?

When I watched the first episode of season one, during the opening credits I thought the program might be a bit predictable. But I hadn’t anticipated the talent of the writers and the star-studded cast who had me feeling every emotion as the story unfolded.

If You Haven’t Seen It…

I don’t want to give too much away, but we have Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin as Grace and Frankie, two vastly different women who are brought together when their husbands — who are business partners (played by Sam Waterstone and Martin Sheen) — announce they are in love and plan to get married.

Other members of the family complement the four main characters and it’s not long before the relatively simple central concept of the show becomes gloriously complex.

Outstanding characters and plot aside, what appeals to me the most is the way it portrays post-menopausal women.

Grace and Frankie are very different. Grace is uber-sophisticated and desperate to keep up appearances. She keeps her hair artificially blonde, uses hairpieces to bulk up her thinning locks, and seems to dismiss her menopause symptoms as an inevitable phase of life to be hidden and not talked about.

Meanwhile, Frankie is the original Earth Mother, tackling postmenopausal vaginal atrophy and dryness with homemade organic yam lube.

Both women, faced with the new unexpected status as older singletons, join forces and share wisdom to tackle ageism with a mix of despair, outrage and a determination to prove that being post-menopause does not mean life is over.

They’re so tired of people, including their own children, seeing them as old and irrelevant, so they decide to start a new business together — making vibrators for arthritic people.

Issues *Grace and Frankie* Tackles

The show goes all out to prove older people as just as vibrant, intelligent and worthwhile as younger people. In

fact, in many ways it shows that older people have the benefit of experience, which can trump a set of paper qualifications in many scenarios.

Issues of being older in a fast-moving, increasingly online world are tackled bravely by Grace and Frankie.

Frankie finds herself baffled by modern technology, but decides to bite the bullet and start using a computer and social media. She decides to tackle Twitter so she has people to talk to, although she soon decides that online chat is rarely a good substitute for face-to-face friendships.

I didn't know whether to be impressed or upset when the first helpline assistant passed her on to a special helper for older people when Frankie told her she was 70. Patronizing or practical? The jury is still out in my house.

Dating, Sex, and Forgetfulness

I love that the show tackles the subject of dating and sex at all stages of life. The infamous yam lube proves to be suitable for all ages (and genders) and the minefield of dating is as loaded for younger people as it is for our newly single older ladies.

The show tackles masturbation and body image (as we know, the effects of menopause on self-esteem can be quite great), refusing to shy away from examining every facet of life past menopause.

Forgetfulness proves to be a problem for Frankie's love life. It's not clear if her absent-mindedness has always been an issue for the hippyish artist or if, like for many women, it came on in later life as a result of fluctuating hormones during menopause.

At one point she loses her cell phone, decides to call it to find it, then can't remember her own number. Sound like a familiar scenario?

Meanwhile, Grace is coming to terms with ageing gracefully, while their children all fight their own demons whilst coping with their newly "out" dads.

Why I Love It

My life is in no way as dramatic as Grace or Frankie's — as far as I know my husband is not about to leave me for a male friend.

But I am heartened to realize that even in another 20 years when I am the same age as Grace and Frankie, I will still be the same me basically. Maybe with more grey hair, less vaginal lubrication (where can I buy organic yams?) and more likely to forget where I left my cellphone, but still me.

Even if you are a long way off menopause, or are not female, you should still watch *Grace and Frankie*. It teaches a great lesson about not judging people by the years they have been on this earth, whilst giving a load of laughs too. What's not to love?